PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 376

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–02

COMPRISING PERIOD
3 December—13 December 2001

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HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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3 December 2001

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 376**

SEVENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2001–2002

House of Commons

Monday 3 December 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Holidays (Disabled People)

1. **Mr. Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool, South): What discussions she has had with *(a)* the English Tourism Council and *(b)* other bodies on marketing and expanding opportunities for domestic holidays for people with disabilities. [16983]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): Widening access to tourism for people with disabilities is a key commitment for the Government and the English Tourism Council. My Department has regular discussions with the ETC and other relevant bodies on that topic. The ETC currently has no marketing role, but that is under review. There is much more that we can do to co-ordinate private and public sector funds that are currently spent on marketing tourism in England.

Mr. Marsden: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Given that today is the International Day for Disabled People, does he agree that we have an appropriate opportunity to review what marketing bodies, under whatever heading, can do specifically to market holidays for disabled people? ETC research has shown that 2.7 million people in this country would take such holidays, the majority of them domestic. Will he consider with other Departments the possibility of ring-fenced budgets specifically for such marketing, as well as other initiatives targeted on the community of people with disabilities?

Dr. Howells: The burden of marketing in this country lies with the private sector—with those who own attractions and with the resorts themselves. I hope that it will remain so, as I do not want politicians to try to second-guess how best to market resorts and so on. However, I agree with my hon. Friend that much more needs to be done to encourage those who are registered as disabled to take holidays in this country. I understand that 9.5 million people are registered as disabled; far too few have the opportunity to take holidays in Great Britain.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): When considering those important matters in relation to disabled people, will the Minister bear in mind the excellence in that respect of Birmingham's bid to host the national stadium? Does he agree that Wembley has blown it through its own actions and that it is now right, not least because of the facilities for disabled people, that Birmingham should be the location of the national stadium?

Dr. Howells: That was a good try, but that is a matter for the Football Association.

Lottery Funding (South Yorkshire)

2. **Caroline Flint** (Don Valley): What progress has been made in ensuring an increased share of successful bids for national lottery money in south Yorkshire. [16984]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): Our data show that since the National Lottery Act 1998 and the revised policy directions issued to distributors that same year, the proportion of all lottery awards going to south Yorkshire has increased by 19 per cent.

Caroline Flint: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply, but I have a question about common sense in the assessment of applications for lottery funds. I do not know whether he has had a chance to investigate an application to the better play programme from St. Alban's school in Denaby Main in my constituency to have an underground spring diverted from the sports field to be used for a range of play and sports activities. The application was turned down

> "because it would not extend the choice and control children have over their play or maximise the range of play opportunities".

What choice or control can children have when their playing field is waterlogged?

Mr. Caborn: As my hon. Friend knows, we received a letter from her constituency office on 22 or 23 November and officials are looking into the case. We want to reduce bureaucracy wherever we can. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 27 June to the lotteries monitoring panel that we were refocusing lottery funding on some of the poorer areas of the United Kingdom. I shall look into the case that my hon. Friend raises. The issue is one that we want to resolve quickly.

BBC (Political Impartiality)

3. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): When she last met the chairman of the governors of the BBC to discuss political impartiality in the corporation's broadcasts. [16985]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): I have met with the chairman of the governors of the BBC, but not to discuss political impartiality in the corporation's broadcasts—nor would it be appropriate for me to do so. That is a matter for the BBC governors.

Mr. Robathan: Notwithstanding the chairman's many attributes, including his success in making squillions while working for Goldman Sachs, does the Secretary of State agree that someone who was an adviser to Harold Wilson and James Callaghan and who is famously alleged to have wept when Neil Kinnock was defeated in the 1992 general election is bound to see the world and politics with an inherent bias—through, dare one say, rose or red-tinted spectacles? Would she be happy if the Director-General of the BBC, the chairman, the political editor and the editor of the "Today" programme were all paid-up members, or well-known donors, or active supporters of the Conservative party?

Tessa Jowell: The new chairman of the BBC was selected for the first time by the open Nolan principle. An advertisement was placed, applications were invited and the candidates were interviewed; a recommendation was made to me, then the Prime Minister, and was submitted to the Queen. That is how openness in public appointments and public confidence are maintained under a Labour Government. That is in stark contrast to the way in which Marmaduke Hussey, a recent chairman of the BBC, was appointed. He recorded that the telephone conversation went as follows:

> "Oh, Dukey, it's Douglas Hurd here, with a very odd question to ask you. Would you like to be chairman of the BBC? . . . The only problem is that I must have the answer by . . . Saturday."

We believe in openness; Gavyn Davies is an excellent candidate.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I remind my right hon. Friend of the time long, long ago when there were wiser Tories in the leadership? When Reggie Bevins was Postmaster-General responsible for the BBC, he was goaded into saying, "I'll do something about 'That was the week that was'". The next morning, he arrived in his office and there was a little note saying, "Oh no you won't. Harold"—Macmillan.

Tessa Jowell: It is important to ensure that history does not repeat itself. Secretaries of State and Ministers do well to keep out of aspects of the governance of the BBC that are well protected by the BBC charter and the BBC governors.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Will the Secretary of State explain why, of all broadcasters, the BBC should be exempt from the supervision of Ofcom? Why should it remain the judge and jury on its own impartiality and coverage of politics in this country?

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for broadcasting will deal with that matter later during Question Time. However, there is a common misunderstanding of the matter. When, subject to parliamentary approval, Ofcom is established, a common set of principles will apply to all broadcasters, including the BBC, other public service broadcasters and broadcasters in the commercial sector. We have made it clear that there will be a level playing field for regulatory expectations of the BBC and other broadcasters. The BBC wants that and, in fairness, so should the rest of the broadcasting market.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): Bearing in mind the earlier question about the national stadium, could I ask the Minister for Sport whether, like millions of Londoners, he has been following the correspondence in the *Evening Standard* on the possibility of having a national stadium at Northolt—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot go back to the national stadium.

Sports Clubs (North-East)

4. **Mr. Kevan Jones** (North Durham): What assistance is being given to local sports clubs in the north-east. [16986]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): Sport England's north-east regional office is working closely with sports clubs and a wide range of other partners in the region to deliver Sport England's national programmes. Additionally, to date voluntary sports clubs in the region have benefited from 83 awards from the lottery sports fund worth £9.3 million, and 277 grants worth £833,000 have been made under the awards for all programme.

Mr. Jones: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply which, I know, will be welcomed in the north-east. However, I wish to raise the plight of the Hermitage school in Chester-le-Street in my constituency. A month ago, its community sports facilities were ravaged by fire, and it is in the process of making a sports lottery bid. However, it has been told by Sport England that it cannot use £0.5 million of insurance money as match funding for the project. Will my right hon. Friend look at the project to see what can be done to help re-establish community sports facilities again at that school?

Mr. Caborn: I understand the problem that my hon. Friend has set before the House. As for lottery funds and insurance, insurance is paid to rebuild facilities; if there is an enhancement of the facilities, that would qualify for lottery money. The school would therefore have to revisit its application and, in doing so, I hope that it will get some sort of support.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): How much longer will sports clubs in the north-east have to wait to get help with their rates bills, which are growing year after year? The promise of help was made by the Chancellor back in March. Friday's long-awaited further announcement promises yet more consultation, dither and delay. When will those clubs have a reduction in their tax bills and will local authorities be reimbursed for the cost?

Mr. Caborn: We move from rates to tax. A consultation document on tax is out for consultation at present. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions will make a statement to the House about the rate rebate structure, which I know has been a matter of concern to many sports clubs. I hope that in the not-too-distant future, we will be able to deal with the taxation problem in the light of the consultation document and the pre-Budget statement, and that the restructuring of local government finance will enable us to address the issue of mandatory rate relief for sports clubs.

Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow): Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of the fastest-growing community sports in the north-east is mini-football? Will he join me in thanking all the volunteers and parents who, every week, organise thousands of youngsters from seven to 12 years old in organised leagues? Will my right hon. Friend give his support to the two local sports clubs in my constituency, at Perth green and Monkton stadium, which are bidding for centre of excellence status?

Mr. Caborn: Certainly. There are many good things going on in the north-east, and mini-football is one which I personally support. There is a good development at Durham university led by Peter Warburton, the director of sports. It is probably the best example of the development of multi-sports clubs around an academic institution. Hon. Members and anyone outside the House who wants to see the development of sport from the grass roots to excellence should look at Durham university, with which our director of Sport England in the north-east is working closely. That example should be followed in many other areas.

Tourism

6. **Mr. Chris Pond** (Gravesham): What action she has taken to help the tourism industry in the United Kingdom since 11 September. [16988]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): I have asked the British Tourist Authority to redeploy funds to help the recovery of inbound tourism. In response, the BTA has announced a new £5 million international marketing campaign for 2002, which will focus on Britain's key strengths. I have also agreed that the London Tourist Board can switch £500,000 from overseas marketing and promotion to domestic or near-European marketing.

Mr. Pond: I thank my right hon. Friend for that encouraging reply. She will know that, as the place where Dickens lived and Pocahontas died, Gravesend is something of a tourism hot-spot nowadays. Is she aware that in the past few days we have heard news that the historic ferry service in Gravesend is to be saved? Does she agree that tourism has a vital role to play in economic regeneration and the creation of employment? Can she give an assurance that she will continue to focus her Department's attention on giving every support possible to that vital part of our economy, to ensure that we can continue to build prosperity in areas such as mine?

Tessa Jowell: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the efforts that he has made on behalf of his constituency. Gravesend recently won an award for town centre regeneration. He is right about the role of tourism in promoting economic growth. One of the areas in which new jobs are increasing fastest is the hospitality sector; about one in 14 people work in tourism. The Government must ensure that all possible help is provided to ensure raised standards and therefore better value for tourists across the sector, and investment in skills to improve the quality of service and recruitment to a vital industry.

Nick Harvey (North Devon): I welcome the money to which the Secretary of State referred. Does she agree that in today's advertising market £5 million does not go very far, in the light of the trouble that the tourism industry has had this year? If the review to which the Minister with responsibility for tourism referred decides that the English Tourism Council should have a marketing budget restored to it, will the Secretary of State take steps to ensure that it has similar sums at its disposal to those available in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland? The English Tourism Council is getting 22p a head, compared with £5.08 in Scotland, £5.31 in Wales and £8.18 in Northern Ireland. Given the problems that the tourism industry has had this year, does the right hon. Lady recognise the urgent need to get money through to the ETC now?

Tessa Jowell: First, on the question of the money spent on marketing in England, as opposed to Scotland and Wales, the yield in terms of overseas visitor income is by far the greatest in England. The hon. Gentleman made a crucial point about the importance of a sustained marketing campaign. The British Tourist Authority has had £14 million extra to spend on tourism and the results of that money post foot and mouth were beginning to show in August, when the number of in-bound tourists from the United States was about the same as it was last August. Obviously, the transatlantic tourism industry has suffered a devastating blow since 11 September, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary are working closely with the tourism bodies and the industry generally in order to take all necessary steps to assist its speedy recovery.

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the key attractions for tourism is the British film industry, especially with the current success of "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone", which was filmed in various locations around the country, including my constituency? Will she take this opportunity to give her support to the British film industry and do all that she can to promote it, to ensure that we reap the benefits not only from that industry, but from the associated tourism?

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the importance and potential of the film industry's role in promoting tourism. Everybody is basking in the success of "Harry Potter". My hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for tourism was last week in America and Canada, where precisely the same point was made about the attraction of the British film industry to visiting American tourists.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): The Secretary of State referred to redeploying money that had already been allocated. Does she agree that the tourism industry is very much in need of help, but her Government have increased the regulatory burden on businesses? Will she endeavour to avoid duplication by the various agencies that are spending the taxpayers' money to which she referred—the regional development boards, the regional tourism boards and local authorities—and when will she establish the marketing role that she envisages for the English Tourism Council?

Tessa Jowell: The answer to the first three questions is yes, yes and yes. We are in discussion with the industry about the ways in which deregulation might be extended. What is absolutely clear is that any further Government investment and any deregulation have to be matched by improved value for the tourist. On the hon. Lady's last point, we are in discussion with the English Tourism Council. We have asked it to take on a short-term responsibility to assist in the marketing of England. Those discussions are under way, but the longer-term role of the ETC is a matter for longer reflection in conjunction with the British Tourist Authority.

Ofcom

7. **Mr. Derek Wyatt** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): What role Ofcom will play in the governance of the BBC. [16989]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): In relation to the BBC, Ofcom will set and monitor standards and quantifiable quotas and targets, much as it will do for all public sector broadcasters. The BBC governors will remain responsible for regulating the impartiality requirements and for the delivery of the corporation's overall remit.

Mr. Wyatt: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. What we do not understand, at least on this side of the House, is that if the BBC takes a position in ITV Digital and continues with the most successful website in the world, those activities will cover the whole of broadcasting in broadband, so why should the governors retain a specific interest on their own? Surely, we want a level playing field and Ofcom should provide it.

Dr. Howells: My hon. Friend makes a good point. As a former distinguished England winger, he is used to taking positions on sides—usually offside, as I remember. I do not disagree with him; indeed, Ofcom will have an important part to play in the commercial activities that the BBC undertakes. Streaming images across the internet is an expensive, highly competitive business. I expect Ofcom, as well as the competition authorities, to play a large part in determining the future shape of such a service.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): That was a charming answer from a charming Minister, but he did not answer the point that the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) made. Either the Government trust the BBC and distrust the commercial sector or Ofcom should have the same powers over the BBC as it has over the commercial sector. What is the reason for the imbalance?

Dr. Howells: The spectrum of public service broadcasters ranges from the BBC to Channel 5, which is mainly a commercial operation but has a small public service responsibility. It is difficult to assume that regulation should be the same for a broadcaster with a small public service remit as for that with an entirely public service remit.

I shall reiterate the earlier comments of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Parts of the BBC's remit will be profoundly affected by Ofcom's regulatory activities in future. However, we must maintain a clear perspective. Throughout the world, the BBC is considered the best single broadcaster, which makes the best programmes. We either want such a public service broadcaster or we turn it over to the market. If the Conservative party supports that, that is fair enough.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): While my hon. Friend is considering Ofcom and the way in which it will affect the BBC, will he also urge it to consider the governance of ITV, given the comments of Jon Snow on the appalling deterioration in the quality and quantity of the current affairs and news coverage on offer in the independent sector?

Dr. Howells: Loth though I am to disagree with my hon. Friend, who has long been a good ally, it would be a sad day when the House attempted to determine the content of television. Most politicians never watch it. They pontificate about it endlessly, but they are lucky if they turn on "Newsnight" last thing at night before they crash out. I do not believe that we are the best judges of what constitutes proper television. Although I regard Jon Snow highly, neither he nor anyone else has a monopoly on wisdom. Broadcasters should determine the content of television. We have a good broadcasting system, we make good news programmes and we have a good news service. Long may that continue.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): It is clear that the Minister is dithering about how far Ofcom should regulate the BBC. His explanation of why it should not totally regulate it is inadequate and based on groundless assertions. The same dithering was apparent last week when the Government published their consultation paper on media ownership and failed to take the opportunity to relax Britain's outdated media ownership rules. Are the Government also dithering about the date for digital switchover?

Dr. Howells: Certainly not; we are consulting about important issues. Parties on both sides of the House should ensure that our conclusions are sound. There will be a long debate on the matter because the communications Bill will be one of the most important that we shall consider. We need to hear the views of industry and everyone involved in broadcasting before we make a decision that we could otherwise regret later.

Mr. Yeo: That was a long way of saying yes, the Government are dithering. Does the Minister understand that, of the thousands of television sets that will be bought this Christmas, more than nine out of 10 will be analogue sets? Does he realise that refusing to give a lead on the crucial issue of digital switchover means that families up and down Britain will be in the dark about whether they are spending their precious money on obsolete equipment?

Dr. Howells: I realise that the Conservatives have been out of power for well over four years, and that they probably do not know what is going on. They do not seem to read the newspapers or follow the news. We have been taking a strong lead on digital switchover. We have declared that it will take place and we are trying, with the co-operation of the industry, to ensure that it is done properly and as swiftly as possible. What we are not going to do is disfranchise large numbers of people. The only party that has ever dithered on this issue is the party that was originally afraid to tackle it: the Conservative party. We will drive forward this project, and we will be the first country in the world to have properly digitised television broadcasting.

Museums and Galleries (Entry Charges)

8. **Mr. Brian Sedgemore** (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): How many national museums have free entry. [16990]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): Seventeen museums and galleries sponsored by my Department now offer free admission to their main sites and to 16 of their branches. This policy took effect on Saturday 1 December. It represents the delivery of a key element of our manifesto commitment, and I would like to take this opportunity to place on record the Government's tribute to my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who devised this policy and steered it through, but moved on—or was moved on—just before it was fully implemented. This policy is his triumph.

Mr. Sedgemore: Does my right hon. Friend accept that if the abolition of museum charges means that new Labour is to shed its artistic philistinism in favour of cultural renaissance, we shall all be very pleased? Will she give us an assurance that this change is not temporary, just for one or two Parliaments, but permanent, and that the funding for it will be in place? Will she also tell us what she is going to do about the museums at the universities?

Tessa Jowell: This commitment is intended to last. It is important for a range of reasons, and one of the most important has been borne out by the fact that across London, where there are many large museums and galleries, there have been enormous increases in the numbers of visitors. Twice the usual number are visiting the Victoria and Albert museum; five times the usual number are going to the museum of London. This is promoting access to anyone who wants to go and enjoy the great cultural treasures of our country. That pleasure belongs to everybody, and this policy makes it possible for it to be enjoyed by everybody.

9. **Mrs. Betty Williams** (Conwy): How many *(a)* children and *(b)* pensioners made free entry visits to national museums and galleries during the last summer school holidays. [16991]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): The free entry for children visiting museums and galleries took effect from April 1999. During the last summer holidays, more than 1.2 million children and 600,000 people aged 60 and over visited those museums and galleries sponsored by my Department.

Mrs. Williams: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those figures demonstrate the interest shown by young and old people in the cultural assets of the nation, and that they are a foretaste of the future in which a large number of museums and galleries will be free for all? Is not that thanks to this Labour Government?

Tessa Jowell: I thank my hon. Friend and wholeheartedly agree with her. Her point is well underlined by the further increase in the number of children visiting museums and galleries this weekend with their families, because their parents are now able to enjoy entry free of charge.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): I am not sure whether I ought to declare an interest. I suspect that a fair number of those 1.2 million visits were made by my four children, many times over, to different galleries.

This is one of the greatest achievements, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the impetus provided by her Department. Will she continue to bear it in mind that Labour is about delivering not just galleries and museums but British culture as a whole to the many, not the few?

Tessa Jowell: I thank my hon. Friend. It should be remembered that, whereas under Labour attendance at museums and galleries by children, older people and, now, families has increased, under the Conservative Government—who reintroduced charges—family attendance fell. We believe in access for all to the excellence that belongs to the nation, not privilege for a few, which was the message and the practice of the Conservative Government.

Music (Licensed Premises)

11. **Mr. Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton, North): When she will introduce legislation to abolish the restrictions on the numbers of musicians permitted to play together in licensed premises. [16995]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): We intend to present a Bill to reform and modernise the alcohol and public entertainment licensing laws as soon as parliamentary time permits. However, there is no current restriction on the number of musicians who may play together in licensed premises if the licensee has first obtained an appropriate public entertainment licence. I am aware that obtaining such licences can be a prohibitively expensive business in some local authority areas, because of the attitude of those authorities.

Mr. Hopkins: Many thousands of part-time and professional musicians who wish to play and entertain in pubs and restaurants, and millions who wish to listen to them, find that that is not possible because of the current restriction—the two-in-a-bar rule. Is it not nonsensical that a quiet jazz piano trio or a string quartet may not play in such premises, while a loud karaoke machine or discotheque may operate in them?

Dr. Howells: I entirely agree. We want to make licensing a much simpler, less bureaucratic and cheaper process, so that there is no deterrent to seeking the appropriate licences. It is obvious that the legislation badly needs to be updated: it dates back to the mid-1960s, when I suppose an acoustic-guitar folk trio made a good deal less noise than one person with a loud amplifier.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): If the legislation needs updating so badly, and given that legislation modernising licensing laws was promised to the electorate in the Labour party manifesto, why did that proposed legislation not appear in the Queen's Speech?

Dr. Howells: Because this Government were elected to improve public services. Those were the Government's priorities, as we made very clear, and they are the priorities that we have stuck to in our legislative programme. We hope very much that there will be space for a Bill allowing us to make these reforms, and that it will be announced in the next Queen's Speech.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): Are we not living in a much nicer world when we can listen to music rather than having to face the music, as we have to here from time to time?

Will my hon. Friend look again at the restrictions on buskers on the underground and at British Rail stations? They add to the enjoyment and gaiety of life, but so often they are moved on. Can we not view the situation in a proper way, so that the buskers can earn their living and we can all enjoy their performances?

Dr. Howells: I do not believe that that would be part of a reform of licensing Bill, but it is an interesting thought. Some extremely dreary public places are enlivened by the activities of buskers.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Is it not ridiculous that, in the unlikely event of Michael Jackson and Madonna teaming up to do a gig down the local pub, they could so, yet three people singing Somerset folk songs would not be able to do so? Does the Minister not recognise that live music in pubs and inns has the potential to make a major contribution to tourism in rural areas, which we have already said we want to promote?

Dr. Howells: We are straying into very dangerous territory. For a simple urban boy such as me, the idea of listening to three Somerset folk singers sounds like hell. Having said that, the hon. Gentleman is right: music does enliven many pubs and restaurants. It should thrive. Silly rules are preventing it from doing so.

Lottery Funding (Coalfield Communities)

12. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): What recent assessment her Department has made of the ability of former coalfield communities to attract lottery grants. [16996]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): My Department published the report entitled "Fair Distribution of Lottery Funding to Coalfields and Other Areas" on 6 November 2001. It shows that, following the National Lottery Act 1998, revised policy directions and recent coalfield initiatives by the Government and distributors, the coalfields share of lottery money has increased from 45 per cent. of the average per capita to 60 per cent. We hope to see further improvements and shall continue to monitor awards in coalfield areas closely.

Mr. Bryant: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, but the fact that the share is only 60 per cent. of the average per capita shows that there is still a significant amount of work to do to ensure that people from former coalfield communities have an equal opportunity to obtain funding for projects that they support. Is not the system still too complicated? It does not feel as though it is geared towards ordinary people. Will he assure the House that everything will be done to ensure that organisations such as Ferndale boys club, Abergorki hall and Parc and Dare theatre in my constituency have an opportunity to obtain the support that they need to have a chance of success? Will he take the opportunity to congratulate the Cory junior band on receiving a grant recently to buy new musical instruments?

Mr. Caborn: I am advised by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport that that is an extremely good band. Our congratulations go to it on achieving that award. I hope that what my hon. Friend has said will start to happen, and that the procedures are being modified, refined and made simpler. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport will make an announcement before the recess about fair distribution and targeting funds to more deprived communities. Again, I hope that that is another move in the right direction to ensure that the lottery is distributed fairly and simply.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Would more lottery funds be available to former coalfield communities if the Government had not insisted on raiding those funds to finance health service and other activities that should be paid for out of central Government funds?

Mr. Caborn: I do not accept that. There has always been a strong voluntary sector in many areas of our public services. Indeed, they bring a quality that would not be provided just by the state. I think that that has been universally accepted throughout the country.

European City of Culture

13. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): What progress she has made towards appointing the advisory group on choosing the European City of Culture 2008; and if she will make a statement. [16997]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): We are giving careful consideration to nominations and applications received for membership of the advisory panel, together with names identified from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Cabinet Office public appointments databases. We expect to make an announcement about the membership of the panel early next year.

Kevin Brennan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Will she acknowledge the growing recognition of Cardiff in Europe and beyond as a capital city capable of hosting major sporting events such as the rugby world cup, the Network Q UK rally, even the English FA cup final, and political events such as the European intergovernmental conference and the next Labour party spring conference? Will she acknowledge that Cardiff is capable of holding those major events and now could be the right time to give it a chance to host a major cultural event and be the European City of Culture?

Tessa Jowell: I certainly recognise my hon. Friend's passionate advocacy of Cardiff.

Obesity

14. **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford): What contribution her Department makes to promoting a reduction in levels of obesity. [16998]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): My Department accepts that physical activity has an important role to play in combating the prevalence of obesity. We are committed to increasing the number and quantity of opportunities for participation in sport and physical activity by all sectors of the community and to working closely with other Departments to help achieve those objectives.

Mr. Kidney: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he accept that, perhaps with the exception of hon. Members, the country is getting fatter and that that is unhealthy? On a serious note, does he accept the Department's responsibility for promoting the health benefits of physical activity, and does he agree that that should include providing an attractive range of activities for young people and older people at convenient places and prices?

Mr. Caborn: I do. As someone who ran a local 10 km run yesterday—I did not quite beat the 60-minute target, but I made it in 60 minutes and 10 seconds—I fully agree with my hon. Friend's comments. My Department has established a monthly ministerial meeting of Ministers from the Department of Health, the Department for Education and Skills and the Home Office to consider sports issues and how to deliver other Departments' agendas. I believe that we can make an impact on the issue, and my hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that sport has a very important role to play in addressing it. The education White Paper's commitment to two hours per week of PE and sport for every child in primary school and right through secondary school is another major step in that direction.

Bob Russell (Colchester): Will the Minister confirm, however, that 75 per cent. of our young people do not have two hours of physical eduction per week within the school curriculum, and that the White Paper does not properly address that issue? If those two hours are not brought within the curriculum, obesity levels will increase, not decline.

Mr. Caborn: As the hon. Gentleman will know, and as the Prime Minister has said, the Government are mindful of the need to try to ensure two hours a week of physical education in primary and secondary school. Indeed, a couple of weeks ago, at a meeting with various people in education, the Prime Minister specifically made the point that it is a matter not only of incorporating that time in the curriculum, which could be done in many ways, but of ensuring that we rebuild out-of-school activities and the linkages to clubs. It is a very important objective that I as the Minister for Sport plan to accomplish with my colleagues in education and health.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): Does the Minister agree that cricket is a particularly good way of tackling obesity, particularly now that it is a much more physical game than it was? Is he aware that Staley cricket club in my constituency, which provides exceptional out-of-school activities for dozens of young people, is under threat because of local property redevelopment? Will he join me in urging the council, the Cricket Foundation and local businesses to do everything that they can to preserve the future of Staley cricket club, so that it can continue to tackle obesity in my constituency?

Mr. Caborn: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend's comments. I cannot become involved in specific planning applications, but I understand his concern and hope that the matter will be viewed in a very positive light. Indeed, in 1997, we changed the planning rules to ensure that the number of closures of public sector sports facilities decreased considerably from the appalling number that we inherited from the previous Administration. If we are to address some of the issues of obesity raised in the White Paper, it is very important that we increase the number of sports facilities. Consequently, £600 million is to be invested in new sports facilities across the country under the new opportunities fund for PE and sport.

Sports Tourism

15. **Mr. Brian Jenkins** (Tamworth): What assessment she has made of the state of sports tourism in this country; and what proposals she has to increase it. [16999]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): Sports tourism is estimated to be worth around £2.5 billion annually. This year, for the first time, the Office for National Statistics is researching sports tourism to provide a clearer picture of its value. The British Tourist Authority's sports tourism team works hard to promote sports tourism. Sport, and particularly the Commonwealth games, forms a cornerstone of the BTA's 2002 marketing campaign.

Mr. Jenkins: I welcome that answer, but will my right hon. Friend explain why so many people in sport do not believe that the Government have taken it seriously enough to expand the industry? It seems that the Government think of sport as a game of football or cricket and do not recognise its wealth creation and revenue generation impact as an industry for this country. What proposals does he have to ensure that people understand that the Government recognise sport as an industry?

Mr. Caborn: I could not agree more. For the six months for which I have held this job I have consistently said that sport is not just an end in itself but a means to many ends. It is about social inclusion, wealth creation and regeneration, which I will be speaking about tomorrow. It is a tremendous medium through which we can affect many parts of our country's life and, indeed, deliver many of our Departments' programmes. We discussed a health initiative on an earlier question.

The people involved in the BTA advertising campaign include David Beckham, Michael Owen, Judi Dench, Steven Redgrave, Tim Henman, Nasser Hussain and Jamie Oliver. That shows that there is support across the board for such development.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Church Estate (London)

33. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): What recent valuation the Church Commissioners have made of the value of their property portfolio in London. [17017]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The latest published valuations as at 31 December 2000 are in the commissioners last annual report, a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Bryant: Does No. 1 Millbank still belong to the Church Commissioners? If so, would not it make more sense, considering the fact that many Members of Parliament still do not have a full office, to sell the building to the Parliamentary Estate?

Mr. Bell: It is an excellent building and would certainly command a great deal of money on the open market. Let me help my hon. Friend by saying that part of No. 1 Millbank has already been let to Members of the other place.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Will the hon. Gentleman give a more specific answer on the value of the assets in London? We do not all have the annual report to hand. *[Interruption.]* I challenge anyone to produce a copy. How does the Church, with all its wealth, justify its decision that means that there will be far fewer affordable homes for tenants to rent and many more market-value properties? How does that square with the relief of poverty and the social obligations of the Church? Can an explanation be placed in the Library for what appears to be a completely unjust and unfair decision?

Mr. Bell: That seemed to be at least four questions in one. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the annual report, he will find a full valuation of our property portfolios—agricultural, residential and commercial—and the percentages for our various values and where we have invested. He will also find a list of the 20 most important values at the back of the report.

The hon. Gentleman referred to Octavia Hill estates. I am sure that he will be interested to learn that the Church Commissioners are forgoing £51 million in income over 15 years by not charging full market rents where they are free to do so.

Employment Rights (Clergy)

34. **Laura Moffatt** (Crawley): If he will make a statement on progress on the financial implications of the Department of Trade and Industry discussion paper on extending employment rights under the Employment Relations Act 1999 to members of the clergy. [17018]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): It is always a pleasure to respond on behalf of other Departments. In the case of the DTI, however, the discussion paper is still awaited.

Laura Moffatt: I understand why my hon. Friend finds it difficult to answer on behalf of the DTI, but many of my hon. Friends are very concerned about the issue. We strive to achieve good employment relations on behalf of many workers and see no reason why the clergy should be left out. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is time to get on with the report and to respond quickly on behalf of those workers?

Mr. Bell: I certainly encourage questions on that subject on the Floor of the House and I am glad to see that many of my hon. Friends have raised the issue before. The Archbishops Council has set up a group that is exploring what can and should be done to give clergy the rights they could and should expect if they were employees, and I will draw my hon. Friend's question to the council's attention.

Poverty

35. **Norman Baker** (Lewes): What provision he makes within Church accounts for the relief of poverty. [17019]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): May I welcome the hon. Gentleman back to Church Commissioners Question Time and congratulate him on his post-election appointment to the Front Bench?

In 2000, the Church Commissioners made £17.5 million available in grants for parish ministry support, of which £14.9 million was targeted on the neediest dioceses.

Norman Baker: I am interested in that answer. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman feels that the Church Commissioners could navigate their way through the eye of a needle, but when we have so many poor and homeless people I wonder whether the Church ought not to divest some of its assets—such as No. 1 Millbank, which is a prime piece of property, bang in the middle of London and worth a great deal of money—sell some of the bishops' palaces, and pay less attention to wine cellars and more to scripture.

Mr. Bell: I am intrigued by the hon. Gentleman's mixed metaphor about navigating through the eye of a needle, but he will be pleased to learn that, in addition to the amount I mentioned, the commissioners are making an additional one-off sum, totalling £10 million, available to the Archbishops Council for distribution to dioceses in 2002-04. The money will be offered to all dioceses, with a bias towards the poorest.

As No. 1 Millbank seems to be the topic of the day, I can tell hon. Members that the renovation of the building has been completed and the commissioners will move back on 7 December.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): One aspect of alleviating poverty is the provision of good child care and family support. What is the Church doing to support child care partnerships, and is it putting money into community activities to develop child care for the lowest-income families?

Mr. Bell: Each diocese has a child protection policy that is based on a national Church policy and expertise to advise parishes and deal with difficult cases. The dioceses have recently received extensive advice about the new Criminal Records Bureau, including how to process disclosures through the dioceses, so that there is a competent risk assessment. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that issue on the Floor of the House.

House of Lords (Reform)

36. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): What responses the Church Commissioners have *(a)* received and *(b)* made in respect of the Government's Command Paper, "The House of Lords—Completing the Reform"; and if he will make a statement. [17020]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): If I may make a statement first, I should say that the Church of England believes that there ought to be a minimum of 20 bishops in a reformed House of Lords in order to offer effective parliamentary service.

In relation to (a) and (b) of the hon. Gentleman's question, the Church has received the Government's Command Paper and is of course giving it careful consideration along the lines of my statement.

Michael Fabricant: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that statement. He will understand that in Lichfield, as in the rest of the country, there is considerable concern about the Command Paper, over and above the fact that its proposals hardly constitute democratic reform of the House of Lords. Does he share my concern about paragraph 83, which suggests that the Church of England's representation should be reduced to 16? He said in his statement that he would like it to be increased to at least 20, but will that definitely include the Lord Bishop of Lichfield?

Mr. Bell: I would hesitate to intrude on the work of the appointment secretary of a future Archbishop, but I am sure that the Bishop of Lichfield will not be far behind. We have 26 bishops in the upper House at the moment. The number may be reduced, but we are also keen to see the representation of other denominations and faiths strengthened in the upper House.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Is not my hon. Friend's last point the most important one? If the Church of England is to have representation in the other House, other Christian churches and other faiths should have equal representation in 2001 and in the years ahead, rather than the situation that has existed for many years.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point. It is especially important, following recent tragic events, that forums are developed in which complex and sensitive matters to do with relations between faith communities and their place in modern society can be aired and debated in a measured and well-informed manner. My hon. Friend's suggestion is in line with that supposition.

Clergy Pay

37. **Mr. Lindsay Hoyle** (Chorley): What recent representations the commissioners have received from trade unions on clergy pay. [17021]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The Church's representatives regularly meet representatives of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance union.

Mr. Hoyle: I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware of the report commissioned by the MSF into the poverty suffered by the clergy. One in 10 of the clergy live in poverty: what are the Church Commissioners going to do about it?

Mr. Bell: I am sure that my hon. Friend will be pleased to know that the clergy stipends review group has made several recommendations, including increasing the clergy stipend from the current amount of £16,910 to £20,000. Those recommendations are out for consultation in the wider Church and my hon. Friend's point will be taken into account.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I ask for your guidance, assistance and, indeed—as a Back Bencher—even your protection.

In the business statement last Thursday, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House announced as business for today:

> "Opposition Day . . . until 7 o'clock on a subject on which we have yet to be notified. Followed by a debate entitled 'The Government's Mismanagement of Wembley Stadium, Pickett's Lock and the Dome', also on an Opposition motion."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 1103.]

That having been announced by the Leader of the House, you may recall, Mr. Speaker, that I wrote to you asking if I could catch your eye during the debate on Wembley stadium, Picketts Lock and the dome. Then, no doubt like a considerable number of hon. Members on both sides of the House, I began to prepare for that debate.

I walked into the House today and picked up the Order Paper so as to ascertain the exact terms of the Opposition motion on that matter only to discover that there was no Opposition motion on it. I therefore made inquiries and found that the Opposition had been in a state of flux over the matter before and since last Thursday, and that they did not in fact decide the issue that they wanted to raise today until six minutes before the House rose on Friday.

I ask for your guidance, Mr. Speaker, because it is my understanding that the business of the House must be as announced by the Leader of the House unless the Leader of the House makes an additional, further, later business statement. Indeed, I held a discussion with my right hon. Friend about the business that he had announced for the following week in which he said that he would have to make a business statement—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman's point of order is a bit long. Perhaps he would like to come to a conclusion.

Mr. Kaufman: I would love to come to a conclusion, Mr. Speaker, but this is a point of order and, that being so, I regard it as my duty to provide the information appropriate for you to be able to give a measured reply. There has—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have a measured reply.

Mr. Kaufman: In that case, sir, you cannot object to a measured point of order.

There was no further business statement today, Mr. Speaker. Now, I do not ask you, sir, to try to bring some order to the rabble on the Opposition Benches—that would be beyond both the United Nations and the SAS—but I ask you to tell us what is the position of Back-Bench Members of the House who come to take part in a debate that has already been announced, when the Opposition are in such a state of ungovernable confusion that the business is changed with no notification.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sure you will agree that it is essential for the proper working of the House that we have a sensible balance between spontaneity and predictability. I am sure you will further agree that, from time to time, that balance comes under pressure; but I hope that in considering this issue—as you ever do, Mr. Speaker—you and other right hon. and hon. Members will realise that, perhaps in the Opposition's genuine effort to make the proceedings of the House as current, contemporaneous and spontaneous as possible, the Government may be taken by surprise every now and then.

I will certainly want to reflect, along with my colleagues, on the point that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) makes because there is some substance in what he says, but I know that you will be generous enough, Mr. Speaker—I hope that House will be, too—to accept that it is not necessarily a bad thing if we err on the side of spontaneity at the cost of predictability every now and then.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will hear the hon. Gentleman and then I will reply to the original point of order—otherwise I might forget it.

Mr. Tyler: You will have noted, Mr. Speaker, that the Conservative party's replacement motion refers to events on Tuesday and Wednesday last week. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) claims spontaneity and topicality, but there is clearly a very curious use of the word "spontaneity" if it took from the middle of the afternoon on Tuesday or Wednesday until six minutes before 3 o'clock on Friday to decide on the motion. If Conservative Members really wanted a topical motion, they should have chosen one on the crisis in the middle east.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I believe that it is for the general convenience of Members and assists in the orderly dispatch of our business if, in normal circumstances, Members who wish to table motions to which amendments may be expected do so, to use a familiar Scottish expression, timeously. I believe that that should be the general practice of the House, applicable to Government and Opposition alike. As hon. Members will know, I have selected a manuscript amendment to the second Opposition motion today.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North) *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: I hope that it is not further to that matter.

Mr. Pound: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have heard enough on that point of order.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Is it is a new point of order?

Michael Fabricant: Not exactly.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald) *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that the right hon. Lady wants to continue the argument.

Miss Widdecombe: Very loosely. Mr. Speaker, will you confirm that it is not without precedent for Government and Opposition occasionally to change the business at the last moment, that you and I can recall an occasion when an amendment was withdrawn just minutes before a debate under the last Government and that, therefore, such things are not unprecedented?

Mr. Speaker: It happens, but no one should make a habit of it.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Notwithstanding your good advice to the House on this matter, will you confirm that no rule of the House has been broken by the official Opposition?

Mr. Speaker: Of course.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not a serious discourtesy to you and other hon. Members, who spend many hours preparing for such debates, for Her Majesty's loyal Opposition to chop and change their minds like a butterfly with a frontal lobotomy?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Michael Fabricant: Would it be of benefit to the House, Mr. Speaker—to older right hon. Members as well as to young whippersnappers—to note that page 918 of the Order Paper shows that the speeches that they have prepared can be used on Tuesday 11 December?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Opposition Day

[6TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Dissemination of Information

3.40 pm

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I beg to move,

That this House condemns the repeated instances of inadequate or incomplete records of meetings and conversations involving Ministers since 1997; deplores the culture of secrecy and inefficiency evident in the Government's failure to answer Parliamentary Questions or correspondence adequately and promptly; deprecates the pursuit of cynical news management strategies in all Departments, but notably in the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions; and urges the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to change his approach to informing this House and the public.

Let me make it clear at the outset that the Opposition have no criticism whatever of a certain absence on the Government Front Bench. I refer, of course, to the Deputy Prime Minister, who is not present today to defend the record of the Cabinet Office or of the Government's policies with regard to the civil service, for the perfectly legitimate reason that the right hon. Gentleman is on an official trip overseas which was arranged several days ago, and he graciously wrote to me about it some time ago. However, we find it simply breathtaking that the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions should have refused point blank to come to the Chamber to debate a motion that is specifically and personally critical of him. In all the annals of arrogance for which the Government and that Secretary of State have become notorious, this utter display of contempt for Parliament bulks large.

We gather that the Secretary of State's more pressing engagement was a minibus tour of a new bridge on Tyneside. We learned on "The World at One" today—

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Gentleman to refer to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions as being in contempt of this Parliament?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is making a case during debate. It is up to any other Member to rebut that case.

Mr. Collins: I am grateful, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall) may have assumed that his intervention would find favour with the Government Whips Office and with No. 10 Downing street. I am sorry to say that he has further shattered what little political career he had.

We learned today on "The World at One" from the BBC's much respected political editor, Andrew Marr, that the Secretary of State's behaviour on this matter has once again produced a lot of irritation in Downing street.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Collins: Before I give way to the hon. Gentleman, who I know has aspirations regarding ministerial office, I warn him not to try to defend the Secretary of State, because were he so to do he might find himself in trouble with No. 10. However, I am happy to give way to allow him to bury his career further if he wishes.

Mr. Pond: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Certain others of us in the House listened to "The World at One". Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to read into the record what was actually said by the BBC's political correspondent, which did not match what he has just told the House?

Mr. Collins: Not only did I hear "The World at One", but, as the hon. Gentleman will have noticed, I appeared on it, so I am probably more in touch with what happened on it than he is.

I simply say to the Secretary of State, who might actually read our proceedings some time this week—as that seems to be the only contribution that he will make to them—that it is here, not in Tyneside, that he should be building bridges. He needs to build a bridge with No. 10 Downing street. I will have a little more to say about his behaviour later.

I have a declaration, not so much of interest but of past form. For two years, ending a decade ago, I was a special adviser in what were then the Department of the Environment and the Department of Employment. At that time, the only civil servant who answered to me was a secretary. For clarification, I should explain that that was a typing secretary, not a permanent secretary.

In the 1992 election, I served as the press secretary to the then Prime Minister, as an employee of the Conservative party, not as a civil servant. *[Interruption.]* The Minister for Transport, the right hon. Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar), says that that was a great success. Yes, it was. In the 1992 election, the then Prime Minister secured not only more votes than any political leader in British history but 35 per cent. more votes than the right hon. Gentleman's leader got in June. So yes, it was rather successful, and I thank the Minister for allowing me to put that on the record.

In those days, John Major invariably had a career civil servant as his press secretary outside general elections, and the utter political neutrality of the holders of those posts is demonstrated by the fact that two of them are now working as very senior and diligent servants of the present Administration. Indeed, one of them—Mr. Gus O'Donnell—is so highly regarded that the Chancellor and the Prime Minister recently became involved in a spat over who was to have his services.

I should also make it clear that I was briefly a member of the Prime Minister's policy unit in Downing street. I do not believe that it was a case of post hoc, ergo propter hoc, but John Major resigned at the time to contest the leadership of the Conservative party. I immediately left my post to serve once more as his press secretary. Again for the benefit of the Minister for Transport, we won that particular campaign, for which I took unpaid leave for two weeks. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Gentlemen should not shout.

Mr. Collins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My reason for pointing that out is to make it clear that there was a time when there were clear dividing lines between what civil servants and political appointees could do. The Conservative party has always had a much clearer understanding than the Labour party of the difference between exercising a proper electoral mandate and riding roughshod over all rules of propriety. That issue is at the heart of the debate.

The motion is in part about the Government's general failure to discharge their duties of accountability towards Parliament and in part about the specific problems that relate to the conduct of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Some of us do not know whether he has refused to come here today because he is too big headed, or because he knows that every time he comes before Parliament these days a serious allegation is made about the accuracy of his remarks. Perhaps he has concluded that he is physically incapable of providing the full facts to the House and that the only way he can avoid being caught out is to go into hiding. We look forward to the success of the media search parties in flushing him out.

The motion starts by reminding us that last week's extraordinary saga of the censored minutes of a meeting featuring the Secretary of State and the chairman of Railtrack was not the first time that records have been inadequate, or perhaps even doctored, under this Administration since 1997. Let me take the House back to the days of the Ecclestone affair, which led the Prime Minister to race on to our televisions to tell us all that he is

> "a pretty straightforward kind of guy".

I refer to that seminal tome "Servants of the People", the true story of new Labour, which I am sure has been on the reading lists of all my hon. Friends. Page 93 of that wonderful volume refers to the time in October 1997 when the tycoon Mr. Ecclestone was ushered into Downing street. Mr. Rawnsley refers to two errors that he believes the Prime Minister committed. He says:

> "Blair's first error was to have granted a privileged audience to a man who had given £1 million to his party and at a time, it would subsequently emerge, when the party was soliciting for more. The second mistake was to keep no formal minute of the meeting."

A pattern begins to emerge.

The Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport reported only a few days ago on the conduct of the former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport as it related to the wonderful triumph of the Government's policy on Wembley stadium and Picketts Lock. I did, of course, alert the office of the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) that I would make a brief reference to this matter. On the £20 million agreement between the then Secretary of State and the Football Association, under which the FA was to return the sum to the Government, the Select Committee concluded:

> "This agreement—which after two years has yet to result in a single signed legal document, let alone a single penny being paid over—represents a scandalously inept treatment of public money."

Indeed, we are told that agreement was reached by a handshake in the absence of any note or minute by an official. Again, a pattern begins to emerge.

The pattern is also evident in the minutes of the meeting between the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the chairman of Railtrack. We have been told that officials were instructed

[Mr. Collins]

at a particularly sensitive part of the meeting to put down their pens and not record what occurred. It is important to state for the record that the other party to that meeting, the chairman of Railtrack, cannot recall requesting that a part of the meeting should not be recorded. He also denies having said what Ministers subsequently alleged was said.

I have spoken about the matter to many Privy Councillors on both sides of the House who have served as Ministers for a cumulative period of decades. They tell me that they cannot recall any instance of officials being instructed not to record a particularly sensitive part of a meeting. It simply beggars belief that the Secretary of State should rely for his defence, his credibility and his reputation for probity on the belief that his officials could be instructed to fail to do their duty in the normal manner.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Collins: Of course; I shall be delighted to learn whether the hon. Lady defends the Secretary of State or comes in on the side of Downing street.

Mrs. Ellman: Has the hon. Gentleman considered the fact that, had Mr. Robinson said what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State says he said—in other words, that Railtrack would be in serious trouble if the Government did not provide a letter of comfort or additional funding—Mr. Robinson would have been in breach of his fiduciary duties under company law? Does that not give him an excellent motive to disclaim what he said during that meeting?

Mr. Collins: I am a little surprised to hear the hon. Lady say that. Like me, she regularly uses the west coast main line, so she will know that far from having improved on that line since the Secretary of State acted, things have become a great deal worse. On her specific point, if it is her contention that she has evidence that leads her to believe that she is justified in making a serious allegation about a board director of a FTSE-100 company deliberately behaving as she describes, I challenge her to repeat her remarks outside the House, where she does not have legal protection for doing so. We look forward to finding out whether she is willing to do that.

I was speaking about the state of the railways under the current Administration. That is at the heart of our concerns. The incompetence, lack of probity and lack of candour of the current Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is not of interest solely to people in the Westminster village: it has serious implications for the state of our railways, their safety and their reliability. We learned last week that since the right hon. Gentleman acted, in his own words, "against Railtrack"—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise in the Chamber. The House should come to order.

David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): Deliberate wrecking.

Mr. Collins: My right hon. Friend says that deliberate wrecking is going on. There has certainly been deliberate wrecking of the railway industry by the Labour party. I shall provide the proof.

In the two months since the Secretary of State acted "against Railtrack"—a significant choice of words by the right hon. Gentleman—and since he destroyed Railtrack and took responsibility for the network away from the company, what has occurred but a 45 per cent. increase in train delays caused by track and signal failures? The Rail Passengers Council describes that rise as particularly "alarming" because it came after a period of several months of improvement in performance. A leap from 3,300 hours per week total train delays attributed to infrastructure faults to 4,800 hours per week was reported last week. That sharp and alarming increase is occasioned by the fact that the morale of those working for Railtrack has been devastated by the Government's actions. It is specifically caused by the fact that many senior employees of Railtrack are considering their future: 70 key employees have already left.

In their 10-year transport plan, the Government said that they would rely heavily on private sector investment to improve rail infrastructure, as people of all parties want. However, they should recognise that they have devastated their reputation and the prospects of investment in the rail industry in the eyes of investors around the world. In a letter to the United States embassy in London, quoted in *The Sunday Times* yesterday, the Minnesota State Board of Investment expresses

> "outrage at recent actions by the UK government."

It adds:

> "This action displays a remarkable lack of judgment and foresight on the part of the UK government."

That is part of a pattern. Again and again the Government claim that they are taking action to improve the railways, but they are in fact making matters far worse. Several of my right hon. and hon. Friends, including the shadow Chief Whip, many Government Members and our constituents depend on the west coast main line.

What has been the result of the Government's action on Railtrack? Phase two of that project has been cancelled and phase one postponed for at least a year. The prospect of getting a quality service—

Mrs. Ellman *rose—*

Mr. Collins: I am not going to give way to the hon. Lady again. Perhaps she should go off and use the west coast main line; she could go up to her constituency, where she might be in a better position.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Those of us who are desperately trying to come to terms with the organisation of the House are rather confused by the way the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) is moving away from the subject. Could you advise the House, Mr. Speaker, whether the subject being debated is the west coast main line or the dissemination of information?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) is in order; if he were out of order, I would have informed him.

Mr. Collins: I am grateful, Mr. Speaker. The motion, for Government Members who seem to need the benefit of the Government's literacy hour, refers to the conduct of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

We have serious concerns about the lack of clarity on rail safety provisions. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) has been extremely successful in setting out a problematic lack of clarity about who is responsible for rail safety matters; again, that is a failure by the Secretary of State.

Norman Baker (Lewes): Whatever the Government's failings in dealing with the rail crisis, is not the root cause the botched privatisation by the Conservative party?

Mr. Collins: It is always a pleasure to hear from people who declare themselves to be the effective Opposition. On this subject, they invariably come to the defence of the Government; the hon. Gentleman has done it again. For the record, there were only two years in the 20th century in which nobody died on Britain's railways. Both occurred when Britain's railways were run by the private sector; one was before the first world war, the other was 1998. Although the railway safety record was certainly not good enough in the Railtrack years, it was a great deal better than it was in the state socialist era to which the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) and his colleagues would like to return us. However, I am delighted that he intervened because—

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Gentleman is misleading the House. There has not been a year without a death on the railways.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale would not mislead the House. The hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) should withdraw his remark.

Mr. Hoyle: The hon. Gentleman made a statement that was not factual, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale might say that he is not deliberately misleading the House. Is that what the hon. Member for Chorley is suggesting?

Mr. Hoyle: I am indeed. I take that advice, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should withdraw his earlier remark.

Mr. Hoyle: I withdraw. The hon. Gentleman may not have deliberately misled the House, but the statement was inaccurate.

Mr. Speaker: Withdraw the remark; that is the best thing.

Mr. Hoyle: It is still not factual.

Mr. Speaker: Facts are something that I have no control over.

The title of the motion is about information, and we should not concentrate our remarks solely on Railtrack, as seems to be happening.

Mr. Collins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The next part of my speech relates precisely to the Government's failure properly to report to the House and provide it with information on its proceedings. Indeed, there have been increasing delays in responses to parliamentary correspondence and parliamentary questions, as was established by the diligent research of my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns).

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is tremendously important for the House to understand that there has been a consistent pattern of behaviour by the Department and the Secretary of State? They say one thing then, a few weeks later, admit that something different is true—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have given as strong a hint as possible to the hon. Gentleman, who should move on from that subject.

Mr. Collins: Not only did my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford make progress in establishing those delays, but there was devastating and, indeed, unprecedented criticism of Ministers by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration following investigations instigated by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), who managed to establish that the Government were withholding information from the House without any justification under the procedures or codes which should apply. My hon. Friend rightly pointed out that there is no precedent for the parliamentary ombudsman to be as critical as he was of the present Foreign Secretary, the former Home Secretary, for the Government's point-blank refusal to release information in the way set out under their own ministerial codes, as well as under the motions passed by the House.

Yet again, Mr. Speaker, as you will have noted over the weekend, there was a further repetition of the constant pattern under the present Administration of serious announcements being made outside the House, rather than in the Chamber. In an interview in *The Observer*, the Home Secretary pretty much published the entire contents of his proposed White Paper on the police, some days before he is due to bring the matter before the House.

The Government's dissemination of information has been hugely criticised by senior and entirely independent figures. I know that Labour Members are unlikely to be interested in the views of the chairman of Railtrack, but they might be interested to know that Jonathan Baume, the general secretary of the First Division Association of civil servants—a trade union; I can already see ears pricking up with excitement on the Government Benches—has called on Jo Moore, the well-known special adviser and side-kick of the Secretary of State to

"stand to one side and let the professionals get on with the job".

It is our contention that problems will continue to occur constantly with the running of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions until Ms Moore and the Secretary of State have stood aside.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow) *rose*—

Mr. Collins: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment. Before that, I shall give him an opportunity to

[Mr. Collins]

reflect on what he intended to say. The strategic communications unit at No. 10, and a chap called Alastair Campbell, whom the hon. Gentleman may know is a little bit influential in his party, reprimanded the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for "contaminating"—that was the word—the pre-Budget statement by the way in which the Department reported the minutes of the famous meeting with the chairman of Railtrack. I look forward to the intervention from the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell). Will he come in on the side of the Secretary of State or of Mr. Campbell?

Mr. Rammell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Did he read the letter in *The Guardian* on 10 October from a former Government press officer who related his experience under the last Conservative Government at the time of the Dunblane tragedy? He was instructed to release any bad news that day, as it would be buried in the following day's news coverage of events. Does not that demonstrate that instead of a serious concern for the conduct of government, we are hearing nothing but a hypocritical rant from the Opposition?

Mr. Collins: The hon. Gentleman may be relieved to know that it was indeed one of the rare occasions when I read *The Guardian* letters page. He will recall that the person involved was an anonymous figure. In the two months that have passed since then, and despite frequent inquiries, we have never established even which Department that person allegedly worked in, let alone the substance behind the serious allegations that he made. We wait to hear what will happen.

We know that the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, whose conduct is rightly the subject of criticism in the motion, is in some difficulty. The headline in *The Independent* today states: "Blair 'growing worried' by Byers' performance". The Prime Minister has nothing to worry about with respect to the Secretary of State's performance in the House today, as he is not delivering a performance in the House today. We learn that Minister after Minister, official after official, Labour Back Bencher after Labour Back Bencher wants Ms Moore to go, wants the Secretary of State to accept that he is responsible for her conduct, and is deeply unhappy about the way his Department has provided information to the House and to the public.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Does my hon. Friend think that the worry of No. 10 is not just the botched news handling, but the fact that the Government announced in the pre-Budget statement £1 billion extra for health, and said nothing about the £2 billion-plus extra that they will have to provide for the railways, because they have made such a mess of it? Did not the Secretary of State overshadow the pre-Budget statement by raiding the till, as well as by his botched news handling?

Mr. Collins: I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend. The escalating costs of the Government's decision on the matter are not the least reason for our grave concerns about them.

The Secretary of State has one group of wholly loyal, absolutely staunch and unequivocal friends in the House. I refer, of course, to the party which is, in every sense, to our left—the Liberal Democrats. Many of us were highly amused—no doubt you were, too, Mr. Speaker—to read at the weekend that the Liberal Democrats were to call for the departure of Ms Jo Moore over the matters set out in the motion. Having read about that, I looked up the parliamentary record. What did the Liberal Democrats do when we last debated in the House a motion calling for the dismissal of Ms Moore, on 23 October? Very heroically, they abstained. What did they do when the House debated on 13 November a motion deploring the Secretary of State's conduct? They rode to his rescue and voted with the Government to save his neck. What did they do when the House of Lords last week inflicted the first defeat of this Parliament on the Government's Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill? They voted differently in the other place—they did not vote in the same way in this place—again in order to try to save the Government's neck, but they failed. What are they doing today? What does their proposed amendment to today's motion seek to do? It would accept the first 60 per cent. of the Conservative motion without alteration, but delete all references to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and all criticism of the Secretary of State.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Collins: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment. I am sure that he is as affectionate towards the Liberal Democrats as I am, but I should like to finish my point.

The Liberal Democrats call themselves the effective Opposition. In our crueller moments, we might wonder when their leader will get 45 minutes with the President of the United States. Perhaps we should not hold our breath in that connection, but we notice that if a party wants to be an effective Opposition it helps if it opposes the Government. I shall give way on that note.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I do not want to intrude on a personal battle between the Opposition parties about which of them is pre-eminent.

The hon. Gentleman has made much of what he sees as some sort of grand conspiracy in the Government, in which people are being told to be less than truthful on occasions. Will he remind me of the circumstances surrounding a previous Government with regard to the Peter Wright "Spycatcher" case? The then Government's representative was, by his own admission, economical with the truth. Was he economical with the truth at the order of No. 10, by his own volition or at the instigation of special advisers who were working in the Government at the time?

Mr. Collins: The person to whom the hon. Gentleman refers was, of course, a career civil servant, so I do not think he is making the point that he thinks he is making.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I am grateful to my hon. Friend, as he has just pointed out to the House very effectively the record of the Liberal party on this matter. Bearing in mind its votes in the past, can he explain why the leader of that party said last week on radio that both the Secretary of State and Ms Jo Moore should resign or be sacked?

Mr. Collins: Like my hon. Friend, I am somewhat puzzled. Perhaps the Liberal Democrats will change their attitude and vote with the official Opposition tonight. Given the nature of the amendment that they have tabled, however, I rather doubt that they will do so.

The final point that I want to make in response to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) is that I do not accuse the Government of running a grand conspiracy, as I think he called it. Our charge is that they are not capable of making the trains run on time, let alone of running a grand conspiracy. They are utterly hopeless at everything.

This is a Secretary of State who has twisted and evaded, and rewritten the truth and hidden the facts time and again. He is someone who has moved at a snail's pace to answer questions, improve transport and raise safety standards on the railways. As long as the Prime Minister ignores all considerations of honesty and honour and keeps this man in office, this Secretary of State will, like a snail, produce a trail of slime leading across Downing street and right up to the door of No. 10.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should withdraw that remark.

Mr. Collins: Naturally, I withdraw it, Mr. Speaker.

In their conduct of parliamentary business, their approach to parliamentary questions, their honesty and candour towards their public and their determination to hang on to Jo Moore, this Administration in general and this Secretary of State in particular have been condemned by the civil service unions, the City, Select Committees and their own Back Benchers; and tonight, they should be condemned by the whole House of Commons, so that at the next election they will be condemned and booted out by the people.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister, and I now call the Minister of State, Cabinet Office to move it.

4.9 pm

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

> "deplores the attempt by HM Opposition to draw attention away from their lack of coherent policies on public service improvement; welcomes the Government's determination to uphold the highest standards of integrity and honesty in public life; acknowledges that the Government has been open about the standards Ministers, Civil Servants and Special Advisers are expected to uphold; welcomes the publication of the new Ministerial code including the requirements on greater transparency never seen before, attaching the highest importance to the prompt and efficient handling of Parliamentary Questions and correspondence; and commends the professionalism and integrity with which the Government continues to conduct departmental business in the best traditions of public service.".

That was a fascinating beginning. I had not expected to hear an edition of "What the Papers Say" so early. However, the Government welcome the opportunity to debate the important issue of accountability. It is sad that the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) disregarded the title of the motion.

When I saw the title, I wondered why the subject had been chosen. Again, the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) gave the game away. He said in an interview in last week's *New Statesman:*

> "Last time round we hadn't learned how to engage in opposition. We were too inclined to spot an opportunity for grabbing a headline and too exposed to having to reverse the decision later."

That sums up Conservative Members' approach this afternoon. They will repeat it time and again. That is why they altered the subject of the debate, which was raised in points of order with you, Mr. Speaker.

The motion deals with accountability, which is vital in our parliamentary democracy. *[Interruption.]* The shadow Leader of the House mocks, but I believe that parliamentary democracy is important. *[Interruption.]* Am I the only one who believes in it? I am surprised at that attitude. I have known the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) for a long time. We were at university together and I remember his record there.

The line of parliamentary accountability runs from Members of Parliament to the Government. Ministers are accountable to Parliament for their decisions and actions; Parliament ensures that we are accountable to the British people. The ministerial code includes a clear statement by the Prime Minister of his strong personal commitment to the bond of trust between the British people and their Government. *[Interruption.]* Again, Conservative Members laugh. The ministerial code is vital and I shall show what we mean by accountability.

The Prime Minister stated in the code that we must be clear about the way in which Ministers should account and be held accountable to Parliament and the public. The code sets out those responsibilities clearly and builds on a resolution on Ministers' responsibilities that the House passed in 1997. I am surprised that Opposition Members have ignored it and believed it to be unimportant.

The Government's record on statements compares favourably with that of our Conservative predecessors. One hundred and five statements were made in 1997–98, compared with 98 in the post-election Session in 1987–88. On average, the Government made a statement almost every other day in the 1998-99 Session. We will take no lessons from the Opposition on Ministers accountability to Parliament.

Mr. Redwood: Why do so many Secretaries of State refuse to answer the simplest factual questions? For example, I asked the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government, and the Regions for the proportion of freight that went by rail and the proportion that travelled by road in May 1993, May 1997 and May 2001. The answer was that the figures were not available. Can we genuinely believe that?

Mrs. Roche: As the Speaker and the Table Office would tell the right hon. Gentleman, he should persist. When I was elected as a Member of Parliament in 1992, I frequently received inadequate replies. The right hon. Gentleman, as an experienced former Minister, knows that if the figures do not appear in the precise form that he requested, they are not available. Perhaps he should reconsider his method of asking the question.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You very wisely advised the House

[Mr. Eric Forth]

last week that if hon. Members did not receive a satisfactory answer from the Government, they should persist and ask the question in a more simple, straightforward and factual way. I would have thought that my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) had just given an example of the most succinct, factual and simple question possible. Does it puzzle you, as it puzzles me, Mr. Speaker, that we have yet to receive an answer from the Government?

Mr. Speaker: I could not express an opinion on those matters.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. Roche: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley).

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): There is a factual answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question. In 1993, the Conservative Government did not collect those figures.

Mrs. Roche: I am grateful—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should not get so excited.

Mrs. Roche: These university reunions always get people going, Mr. Speaker.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. The point that he made shows that it is important for Members of Parliament not only to read the answers that they get, but to understand them as well.

The introduction of Westminster Hall means that Back Benchers and Select Committees set the agenda. This has improved accountability and is part of the modernisation programme. Select Committees' powers to hold the Government to account have been vastly increased. Before, they had three prime-time debates on the estimates, and those remain. Instead of six Wednesday morning debates, the Liaison Committee now sets the business for two Thursdays out of every three in Westminster Hall.

On parliamentary questions, in a normal Session, some 400,000 questions are answered, and that is certainly evidence of our accountability to Parliament.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): Given the Minister's enthusiasm for accountability and for Select Committees, and given the manifest involvement of the Treasury in all aspects of transport policy, does she think that the non-appearance of Treasury Ministers in front of the Select Committee is helping accountability?

Mrs. Roche: Treasury Ministers are accountable to Parliament and to the Select Committees on matters for which they are responsible. If we were to take the hon. Gentleman's question to its logical conclusion, Treasury Ministers would have no time to run the affairs of Her Majesty's Treasury because they would be dealing with every other Department's business.

What is the Tories' attitude to the House and to accountability? Let us look more closely at the views of the shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). We all had the opportunity to read his memorandum of 14 September this year to his Conservative colleagues. From it we discovered how deep his respect for Parliament really ran. He urged his party to frustrate the workings of the House with "trench warfare". What respect is he showing for Parliament and the House by writing in those terms? I am really shocked. *[Interruption.]* I am trying to keep a straight face, but it is very difficult.

Given the right hon. Gentleman's views on private Members' business, it seems that his elevation to the Front Bench has not appeased what I can only describe as his bizarre lust for blocking sensible pieces of legislation on the ground that they ought to be Government Bills. The right hon. Gentleman presents himself as a doughty defender of the legislature over the Executive, and is keen to defend Back Benchers' rights, just so long as they do not do anything as foolish as to propose any legislation. I remember, for example, the great dismay in the Jewish community when he wrecked a very sensible private Member's Bill that would have meant that Jewish women trapped in religious marriages could have escaped from them. His actions caused great offence.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Roche: Of course I shall give way to the Conservative Deputy Chief Whip. How wonderful to have an all-speaking, all-dancing Deputy Chief Whip!

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful for the compliment. Will the Minister now assure us that the Government will not block any private Members' Bills in future?

Mrs. Roche: We will conduct our legislative programme in the normal way. We will also ensure that we give private Members' legislation every consideration. It is very important that we do so.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East) *rose—*

Mrs. Roche: Another old university friend! How could I resist?

Dr. Lewis: Lest the Minister think the relationship too cosy, may I remind her that during the Government's first year in office I came second in the ballot for private Members' Bills, and introduced a Bill to improve conditions for people who suffer catastrophic mental breakdowns and need institutional care? The Government wasted five hours of precious parliamentary time talking the Bill out. Let us keep a sense of reality in regard to the Minister's claims for the Government's attitude.

Mrs. Roche *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we are not discussing private Members' Bills; we are discussing information. Perhaps we should return to the terms of the motion.

Mrs. Roche: Of course the hon. Gentleman's Bill was important, and I am sure that the Government listened to what he had to say, but it is also right for other legislation to be discussed properly.

We should consider other actions that were taken during the Conservative years. In July 1996, following a discussion at a policy unit seminar chaired by the then Deputy Prime Minister—now Lord Heseltine—permanent civil servants were asked to find

> "panels of people associated with the public services who could be vigorous and attractive proponents of our policies".

That is best remembered as "recruitment of cheerleaders". I will take no more lectures from the Conservative party on cynical news management.

Subsequently, the then Cabinet Secretary said that such action was not appropriate for civil servants, and the request was withdrawn.

Mr. Collins: The Minister, quite properly, compares her party's record with that of the Government whom I supported. Will she now tell us on how many occasions during the 18 years of Conservative government the parliamentary ombudsman found that the Government had refused point-blank to publish answers to parliamentary questions, despite being asked to do so by the ombudsman? The Minister knows why I ask the question: I do so because that has happened under the present Government in the last couple of months.

Mrs. Roche: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a reply off the top of my head, but I am sure that he will obtain one if he consults the Library.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): If we are talking about accountability on the part of Governments, including the last Government, we should bear in mind that some of the biggest scandals and cover-ups, some of the greatest secrecy, were perpetrated by the Conservatives. They covered up the BSE scandal, and the export of arms to Iraq. *[Interruption.]*

Mrs. Roche: It is no use the Conservatives trying to drown out my hon. Friend's excellent remarks. She is absolutely right. The Conservatives can try to dish it out, but they certainly cannot take it: that is their great problem.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Roche: Of course, but then I must make progress.

Mrs. Winterton: As the Minister believes in open government, will she encourage this Government to hold a full, independent public inquiry into the foot and mouth epidemic?

Mrs. Roche: As the hon. Lady will know, two inquiries are in progress and public consultations are taking place.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Before my hon. Friend leaves the question of how the last Conservative Government disported themselves, does she recall that I tabled more than 800 questions in a very short period to elicit information from them on who sat on quangos, how much they were paid and how they were appointed? Does she recall that on many occasions the then Ministers refused point-blank to answer? It was down to me to find whatever methods I could to elicit that information. Is that not the standard that epitomised the previous Government?

Mrs. Roche: It is. I take as my text not only what my hon. Friend has said, but what the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) said; from the quotation, I think it was in business questions:

> "May we have a debate next week on the growing practice among Ministers of leaving long delays in answering straightforward and uncomplicated priority written questions?"—[*Official Report*, 7 March 1996; Vol. 273, c. 460.]

He said that about his own Government. Again, we have that difference between what the Conservatives say and what they did in government.

The Government attach the highest importance to the duty of Ministers and civil servants to be as open as possible with Parliament and the public. What I really found unacceptable in the speech by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale was the attack on our civil service: it was an underlying current throughout. I regard our civil service as the best in the world. On the civil service's behalf, I resent attacks on it.

Mr. Collins: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Roche: I want to make some progress. I have been generous with interventions.

There is a recognition within Departments that communication has a vital role to play. The Cabinet Secretary, Sir Richard Wilson, has said:

> "Communication is something we used to tack on at the end of the policy process. In the future it must run alongside it. It is not about spin or . . . control. It is about making sure that the public understands how policies and services will be delivered and how they will affect them."

The Government are committed to maintaining a non-political permanent civil service. They have given a commitment to legislation for the civil service. The legislation will include a limit on the number of special advisers. It is no wonder that that was never contemplated during the Tory years when we consider how many former Conservative specialist advisers are now on the Conservative Front-Bench team.

The Government are putting in hand arrangements for wide consultation in advance of the introduction of the legislation. In the meantime, a clear published framework for civil service activity in the form of the civil service code and other key guidance documents set out for Parliament and the public the framework within which the civil service operates.

Mention is made in the motion of correspondence, although it did not feature greatly in the speech by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale. The Government attach the highest importance to the prompt and efficient handling of hon. Members' correspondence.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. Roche: I shall not give way. I want to make some progress.

All Departments report regularly on their performance on replying to correspondence from hon. Members. The overall volume of correspondence has gone up year on year since 1996. Although the volume has increased, the overall record on replying has improved.

[Mrs. Roche]

All Departments set a target for answering correspondence. The most recently published figures show that during 2000 around 8,000 more letters were replied to within the target times set by Departments than in 1999, an improvement in overall performance of 4 per cent.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Will my long-standing acquaintance and friend give way?

Mrs. Roche: As one can take knowing someone for a long time only so far, the answer is no.

At the beginning of his speech, the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale rightly raised the issue of his past form. As he said, he was the Conservatives' director of communications from 1992 to 1995, after which he became a special adviser. Very fortunately for Labour Members, he is also no stranger to spin. Although he has just quoted *The Guardian*, he has been described by *The Observer* as the

"brains behind Back to Basics",

and by *The Independent* as the

"spin doctor of back to basics".

For those who do not recall it, back to basics was the rather ill-fated attempt of the previous Tory Government to persuade the British people to vote for them. I should like to place on record my gratitude, and that of my right hon. and hon. Friends, for that fine service to our country, if not to the Conservative party.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale will also recall that, in 1993, before he became a Member of Parliament, the Home Affairs Committee decided to hold an inquiry—which hon. Members will recall—into the very important subject of party political funding. He described the decision to look into that matter as "an impertinence". I think that, at that stage, he was at Conservative central office. The point is that someone who now poses as the shadow Minister responsible for the Cabinet Office believes that it is impertinent for a Select Committee to examine an issue of such great importance for parliamentary democracy and accountability. It is amazing that he has had the gall to come here today.

Mr. Turner: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Roche: No, I shall not.

In all fairness to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale, I should say that we do not disagree on everything. During the 1995 Conservative leadership campaign, he briefed that the leadership campaign team of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) looked like escapees from "Ward 9 at Broadmoor".

Mr. Turner: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Roche: No, I cannot.

Mr. Turner: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe that the motion and the Government amendment to it are on public information—*[Interruption.]* The speech that my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) made was interrupted no fewer than three times on points of order. The Minister is referring to matters that were funded privately and had nothing, so far as I know, to do with public information. Is she in order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): If the Minister had not been in order I would have stopped her. The hon. Gentleman's point is a matter more for debate than for the occupant of the Chair.

Mrs. Roche: I am of course tempted to give other examples—[HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] My problem is that, although some of my right hon. and hon. Friends press me to do so, I am kinder than they are—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] It may get me into dreadful trouble, but I cannot give more examples. The record and the previous convictions—or the lack of them—in this sphere of accountability speak for themselves.

In this debate, we are faced yet again with the sight of Conservative Members trying to persuade people that they have changed. Today, they have moved a motion on accountability, correspondence, record keeping, and all sorts of things, but did any of those things feature significantly in the opening speech of the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale? Of course they did not.

The British people know which party tried to destroy the national health service and which party genuinely believes that it should be publicly funded and free at the point of use. Conservative Members do not want to debate those issues. Everybody knows who gave us boom and bust, two massive recessions, record unemployment and bankruptcies, and that after nearly five years of Labour government, we now have the lowest unemployment, interest rates and inflation for a generation.

The people know which party gave us the poll tax and tried to destroy local government, and which party has devolved more and more power from the centre.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale had the cheek to talk about the state of our railways. I am always amazed when Conservative Members talk in that way. They know why the railways are in the state that they are in. They know that the Conservative Government took a national rail system with assets built up over half a century and rushed through a botched privatisation before the 1997 election with poorly drafted and ill-conceived legislation. They were a dreadful Government—that much is obvious—but we also know, after five years, that they are a dreadful Opposition.

Once again, I have some sympathy there. We know, from our own experience in the party of which I have the honour to be a member, that it takes a long time to understand the ways of opposition and become effective at it. I wish the Conservatives very many years in which to become more effective.

The true test of accountability in any democracy is the judgment of the electorate. The British people have made their judgment on the Conservative party in two successive general elections, as well as the recent Ipswich by-election.

The Conservatives could have chosen to debate issues of the utmost concern to the British public and the electorate, but instead they chose to table a motion that is ill conceived and without merit. I invite the House to reject it completely.

4.37 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am delighted that this debate is ranging more widely than some previous debates on the narrow issue of what a particular individual did on a particular day. That will make for much healthier debate. I acknowledge that the Conservatives have both a right and a duty, as we have, to hold the Government to account. If we feel that the mechanisms of government are not helping us in that task, we have a right to draw attention to that.

Indeed, it is right that, for once, we are discussing the wood rather than simply the tree. Far too often over recent weeks too much attention has been paid to the activities of one special adviser—who I would suggest is a rather insignificant tree—and not enough to the wood, which is the arrogance of office of a Government who seem to think that media manipulation, the politicisation of the civil service and disdain for Parliament are more important than our being able to hold them to account. That individual may have been an objectionable symptom of the wider disease, but we should be conscious that there is a disease and it needs to be treated. Ministers, not civil servants, are accountable to the House, and we must hold them to account.

I am sorry that the Deputy Prime Minister is not here, because I want to cite what may seem a trivial example of how senior Ministers treat the House with appropriate respect or otherwise. I hope that the Minister will report back to him. In early October I wanted to ask a question on the co-ordination of rural policy. I went to the Table Office and was advised that the Cabinet Office was responsible for that, so I tabled an oral question to the Deputy Prime Minister.

Lo and behold, within a matter of days, the question was transferred to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which immediately meant that I did not get an opportunity to put a supplementary question to the Deputy Prime Minister. As we all know, he has a great deal of expertise and experience in matters rural. I was surprised when the answer from DEFRA explained that the co-ordination of rural policy was—guess what—undertaken by the Cabinet Office. So, I brought the matter to the attention of the Speaker, who responded:

> "In the circumstances he"—

that is, me—

> "describes, where the line of ministerial responsibility is not clear cut, I deprecate the transfer of a question tabled for oral answer, which has the effect of depriving the Member of the opportunity to . . . put a supplementary question to the Deputy Prime Minister."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 379-80.]

Most of us would take that as a clear statement of the Speaker's view that that should not happen in the future.

Lo and behold, within a matter of days, I received an extraordinary letter from the Deputy Prime Minister. It made me so angry that it went straight in the bin and, indeed, it has tea stains on it. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps it should have been teeth marks. The Deputy Prime Minister stated:

> "I have . . . seen the Speaker's ruling"

and he went on to disagree with that ruling. That is the way in which a most senior member of this Administration treats not just the House collectively but the Speaker, who represents this House.

A moment ago, the Minister was eloquent on the subject of accountability. The Government are accountable to the House and the Speaker is our representative. He is the guardian of the House in relation to all matters on which we hold the Government to account. If the Deputy Prime Minister, no less, does not even take the trouble to come to the House to argue the case with the Speaker—I do not mind if he does not come to argue the case with me—how can the Minister claim that the Government hold themselves accountable to the House of Commons?

That is clearly nonsense, but it is the ethos under which the Government have operated in recent months. That is why the examples that have been brought to the attention of the House and of the public are occurring. It is not because one individual has stepped out of line, but because one individual has stood the line precisely where the Government thought that he—or, in this case, she—should stand. If Ministers want to challenge the House, and the Speaker of the House, they should have the guts to come here in person. Perhaps the letter was drafted by a political adviser.

Reference has already been made this afternoon to the attitude of the Conservative Opposition, and they cannot escape some criticism. *[Interruption.]* The reference to the infamous trench warfare memorandum from the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) did not do it justice. *[Interruption.]* It is true that he suggested trench warfare—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must not have such a level of conversation in the Chamber when an hon. Member is addressing it.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the memo deserves the widest possible audience. I am sorry that its author is not in his usual place, because he suggests that legislation should move on to the other place "imperfectly scrutinised" by this House. That is saying that the House should not do its job properly.

The memo also contained a lovely little passage about what the right hon. Gentleman thought his colleagues were capable of. He said:

> "The responsibilities which involve a lot of travel and time away from Westminster should be allocated to colleagues who are likely to be here very little anyway"—

there are very few of them here this afternoon, even though this is their debate—

> "and ideally not to those who could contribute significantly to Chamber or Committee work."

If that is the attitude of the Conservative party, is it any wonder that the electorate also think that the House is not performing effectively in scrutinising legislation and the actions of the Executive?

My hon. Friends, especially the hon. Members for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), for Bath (Mr. Foster) and for Lewes (Norman Baker), have spent much time since Parliament came back in October trying to obtain the best possible information from Ministers, precisely within the terms of this debate. What is so extraordinary is that, despite the code of practice on access to Government information, we find it more difficult to extract information now than before the code was introduced in 1997. It is a cumbersome suit of armour to protect Ministers from the light of day and from the scrutiny of questions from Members of Parliament.

[Mr. Tyler]

It appears impossible to discover, for example, information about the role, responsibilities and redeployment of Mr. Alun Evans. Questions tabled by several Members—the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) as well as my parliamentary colleagues—have failed to produce evidence of precisely why that gentleman, who held a highly respected and responsible position in the civil service, was moved to a different Department. There was no explanation and no adequate reference to particular papers, minutes of meetings or their content. Who was responsible for deciding whether he should be moved? It is impossible for us to obtain such information through parliamentary questions.

I have in my hand a copy of the code, although I shall not refer to it in great detail because several hon. Members want to speak. However, what is clever and obvious about it is that there are so many steps along the way before one reaches someone outside the Government—in the case of the parliamentary ombudsman—that most people would never get that far when seeking information. Questions as to how or why information is withheld or made available cannot be left to incestuous, introverted and internal Whitehall inquiries.

Mr. Redwood: The Liberals claim to be not the poodles but the scriptwriters of the Government's policy on railways, favouring as they do a not-for-profit company. As the Government are unable or unwilling to tell us how much public money such a company would need to be able to make a successful bid and then to run the railways, would the Liberals care to tell us or are they equally unwilling to give us any information on that crucial matter?

Mr. Tyler: I am flattered by the right hon. Gentleman's obvious respect for our ability to extract information from the Government. What I can tell him is that he voted for the Railways Act 1993 that set out the terms on which the administration of the rail track company was to be undertaken. I can also tell him that the administration is costing him, me and our fellow taxpayers £500,000 a week. The terms for which he voted made it certain that the administrators, Messrs Ernst and Young—he probably thinks that they are more expert in such matters than anybody in the House—have now come up with—

Mr. Redwood *rose—*

Mr. Tyler: The right hon. Gentleman should let me finish the answer to his first question before he intervenes again.

The administrators have come up with the extraordinary answer that their only responsibility is to the members and creditors of Railtrack, not to the travelling public—not to us as taxpayers and not to the House. The terms of the legislation for which the right hon. Gentleman voted are causing the incredible and impossible situation that we all face. In the past, the right hon. Gentleman has expressed great interest in saving taxpayers' money, but we as taxpayers will be suffering as a direct result of his Government's incompetence, not only in the way that they privatised the industry but in enacting unworkable legislation.

Mr. Redwood: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyler: I have already given way and I want to make progress. The right hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to speak later.

Under the code of conduct for special advisers, they are supposed to record all contacts with the media. That was not true only on 11 September—there were cases before and since that date. However, if those contacts are recorded, we want to know who checks that they are accurate and how we can find out whether they took place. Indeed, we want to know whether records have been kept at all. My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester faced blank obstruction from Ministers when he sought information on those matters, which should be open and above board. Why was the code introduced if the information is not available to Members of Parliament?

Last week, there was an extraordinary situation when Mr. Jonathan Baume of the First Division Association was questioned on the "Today" programme. He said that there had been selective leaking of last week's information—as hon. Members will recall the minutes of the meeting were issued just as the Chancellor was getting up to make his autumn statement. However, Mr. Baume—a civil servant of great experience who represents his civil service colleagues in the First Division Association—said that the leaking was done at a political level. How can we find out who is responsible for what and who is accountable to the House when there appears to be a civil war between the professional civil servants on the one hand and the special advisers and their ministerial masters on the other? Surely some degree of codification must be established.

Of course, we have been promised that the Freedom of Information Act 2000 will be fully implemented. The House was assured that, by now, we would be well on the way to full implementation, yet we are told that, as with the trains under Railtrack, it has got stuck up a siding somewhere, and we do not know whether it will come this year, next year, sometime or never. Indeed, the notice board in the station says that it might come in 2005, but—who knows—it might be cancelled altogether.

The right of access, on which the debate rightly concentrates, is stalled somewhere in the system, but, worse than that, the Minister referred to the civil service Bill, which was promised in the 1997 manifesto. Indeed, it was an integral part of the agreement between my party and the then Labour Opposition that should have been introduced in the 1997 Parliament.

Mr. McLoughlin I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for saying that. It is first time that I have heard that that Bill was part of the agreement between the Liberal Democrats and the Government. Will he tell us the timetable for any other undertakings? If he believes in open government, perhaps the British people should know what under-the-table deal was done when the Government had the majority that they then had.

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Gentleman's memory has clearly collapsed because the agreement—it was known as the

Cook-Maclennan agreement—was published in full in March 1997 and was given a great deal of coverage. My hon. Friends are nodding wisely. It is unfortunate that the hon. Gentleman clearly slept through the whole of the last Parliament because many items, including devolution for Scotland and Wales, were undertaken during that time and were very much part of that agreement.

We are now told that the civil service Bill, to which the Minister referred, is not likely to appear for years. Why? We are told that it is very difficult to get legislation through the House. We believe that such legislation should be introduced as quickly as possible, and I am sure that Conservative Members would welcome it equally sincerely.

The Chairman of the Select Committee on Public Administration, the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright) said just a few weeks ago that there is a "creeping politicisation" of Whitehall. The only way to reverse that is by ensuring transparency and honesty and by codifying the proper roles and responsibilities of the professional civil service, and that involves legislation. There is nothing new about politicisation or media manipulation, but perhaps they have been used slightly more successfully in the past.

Mr. Bernard Ingham, as he then was, indulged in some very splendid spinning. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will be interested to hear that, when I referred to that on the "Today" programme, that gentleman, now Sir Bernard Ingham, indulged in some correspondence with me, denying that he had actually undertaken any negative spinning involving members of the Government. Indeed, he said that he was coming to their aid and defending them. He said:

> "I did not, as you assert, attack them. I was trying to defend them from Lobby demands for their sacking after some rather extraordinary behaviour on their part. I sought to do so by referring to their natures. I was successful in my efforts, even though those efforts have been consistently misrepresented."

In fact, as has been said in *British Journalism Review*, Mr. John Biffen, whom, as hon. Members will recall, the then Prime Minister's spokesman called a "semi-detached member of the Government", was hung out to dry,

> "to twist in the wind for another year, before eventually being cut down and deposited on the Back Benches two days after the 1987 General Election".

All I can say is that, if it was not spinning that damaged those gentlemen, I cannot imagine what that spin doctor would have done if he had really wanted to attack the two people involved.

There has been a change, and let us give credit to the Government. The same secrecy does not now surround the spin doctors. We tend to know, in a matter of hours, who is spinning against whom. In those days, the master spinner himself was cloaked in anonymity—well, for a few hours any way. At least now, such information comes out remarkably quickly because it seems that, as soon as a spin doctor indulges in anything of that sort, someone in another part of Whitehall, or in the Labour party, quickly jumps up to say, "It wasn't me, guv," and tells us where the origin lies. That is a step forward in the circumstances.

I congratulate the Government on the fact that the transparent spinning against one another in the Labour party and the Government at least offers us an occasional vignette of the civil war that is going on.

I also congratulate the Conservative party. What other great political party would have decided to pick on the rail industry over recent weeks to indulge in endless debates in the House? It is very public spirited—every time the words "rail" and "Conservative" appear in the public prints, the public remember that it was the Conservatives who did it.

As transport spokesman for my party, I spent hours, as did my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey), pointing out the mess we would get into if the then Government insisted on privatising the railways. We told the Labour party, then in opposition, that if we two parties stood shoulder to shoulder and told the public and the institutions that if British Rail was privatised by the Conservative party, we would try and make sure in the next Parliament that it was brought back under public control, that there would be a bond payment and no profit to anyone who bought shares, the railway industry would not be privatised. It could not have been. No institution would have dared to do that when a Conservative defeat was in prospect.

I am delighted that the Conservative party refers constantly to the incompetent way in which it ruined one of our great national industries. It was confirmed again on "Today". I am not sorry to keep giving a plug to Sue MacGregor, for she is a good friend of mine, and I think that before she goes she should be congratulated on the work that she has done. On "Today" this morning, a spokesman for Stagecoach—one of the companies that has rolled with the cash of privatisation—said that everybody agrees that the way in which privatisation has gone through was a mistake. I hope that the Conservatives will tell us later that they, too, feel that it was a dreadful mistake.

In the mean time, we who are responsible to the public for what is going on, must take notice of the fact that today we are told that Railtrack investors will have to go to law to get the documentation that they require to establish what the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has been doing. We cannot do that. We Members of Parliament—the High Court of Parliament, as it were—are having such difficulty in getting information out of Ministers who say that they are accountable to us that it seems as if the lawyers will be the only people to obtain it.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I am a little confused. The hon. Gentleman seems to be saying that the railways—the way in which the Government have handled the industry and the lack of communication about it—is a legitimate argument for debate, but earlier he said that it was not. Which is it?

Mr. Tyler: I have never said that it was not a legitimate argument for debate. I have simply said that the accountability of the Government to this House, not just of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, is what we are discussing. I have not suggested that the activities—in this field or any other—of the Secretary of State, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions or the right hon. Gentleman's special adviser are improper. What is improper is if the House starts passing motions demanding the sacking of a civil servant or special adviser. We demand the sacking of Ministers. We have done that in the past—they are responsible to us.

[Mr. Tyler]

I have the quotation that the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) was shouting about earlier in his statement, and it does not say what he says it does.

Mr. Collins: Can the hon. Gentleman confirm that the leader of the Liberal Democrats did not call for the dismissal of Ms Jo Moore in his appearance on "Today" a few days ago?

Mr. Tyler: No, he did not, and I have the quotation here. My right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) said that that individual

"should look in the mirror and consider her position".

She should resign.

It is wrong for the House to regard a civil servant or special adviser as in some way employed by us. Indeed, the employment tribunal would be a wonderful spectacle if we were to succeed in sacking somebody. The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale has not been here very long, so perhaps he does not know that it is Ministers who are responsible to the House. That is why my right hon. Friend also said that he felt that the Secretary of State's position had been corroded by what had happened in recent weeks. I am glad to put that on the record, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will correct his statement.

There have also been episodes in recent weeks of briefing against other public servants within the Department. However, we should be concerned not just with that Department and those individuals. Indeed, I submit that we should be grateful to Ms Jo Moore because she has exposed a degree of cynical manipulation of the media and political pressure on career civil servants. In the process there has been a deliberate attempt to avoid parliamentary accountability. That is the arrogance of office, and that is what concerns us.

In any other great national institution in this country, that individual would have resigned in such circumstances. The climate and atmosphere of irresponsibility mean that the Government have to consider changing course and making themselves truly accountable to Parliament, and through Parliament to the people.

5 pm

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Shortly after the last general election the public were told that the Conservative party, which had suffered yet another traumatic loss, was going to have a long, deep look at itself and consider changing its policies to make itself more electable. I can only imagine that one of those changes of policy must be a recanting of its record on producing information to the House and the public. One of the indictments of the last Conservative Government was the way in which they acted in secrecy. They attempted to hide information from the House and tried to stop and limit their accountability to the public for what they did.

It seems that in initiating a debate on public information and accountability, the Conservatives have forgotten the arms to Iraq scandal and the Scott report, when wilful action was taken to deceive the public on matters of grave national security and grave public concern. They have forgotten that as the Government who set up the quango state, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) referred, they deliberately put into the hands of unelected and unaccountable people more responsibility and funding than remain in local government. In setting up numerous agencies and instructing them to deal with things on their own, and by preventing Ministers from being responsible to Parliament for the work of those agencies, the Conservatives again blocked public access to important information on matters that affected them.

Since then, a number of things have changed. I am pleased that this Government have widened access to information for the House and the public by changing the rules on agencies. The Conservative Government's rule, under which Ministers were not accountable to Parliament for the work of agencies, has been rescinded. I remember the great concern when the Conservatives cut welfare benefits. Local authorities made representations to the Government and were told that the Minister of the day did not have to answer those queries in the House because the Benefits Agency was in charge and it did not have to report to Parliament. The Government have changed that and similar practices.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady will remember sitting with me in the Transport Committee when time after time we asked the Secretary of State straightforward questions and time after time he declined to answer them. Surely nothing in history, and no changes by the Government to the way in which information is disseminated by agencies, can justify a Secretary of State sitting in front of Members of Parliament and refusing to answer straightforward questions, or at best giving evasive answers to them.

Mrs. Ellman: The hon. Gentleman gives his interpretation of events in the important Transport Committee meeting. I will refer to some of those matters in relation to public information later in my comments.

One major problem that we face is the privatisation of the rail industry by the Conservatives, which other hon. Members have mentioned. When the Conservatives set upon privatisation as a matter of policy, they deliberately erected a barrier between public representatives and the provision of and accountability for public services.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): The hon. Lady replied to a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) about what a Minister did or did not say in a Select Committee. On the subject of accountability to the House, will she at least give credit where it is due and accept that the Conservative party set up Select Committees in 1979 so that Ministers could be held to account on specialist parts of their brief?

Mrs. Ellman: It was of course the House of Commons that set up those Committees, but I give great credit to the Conservative Members of the day who supported, and indeed suggested, the initiative.

Mr. Soley: It was indeed a Conservative Member, Norman St. John-Stevas, who took the initiative, but he disappeared from Government fairly quickly afterwards, largely because many Conservative Members did not like the way in which Select Committees worked. The Conservatives also set up evidence-taking Committees, which was also St. John-Stevas's idea, but promptly stopped using them because they found them a great embarrassment. Now we use them regularly for Bills, and I hope that we will continue to do so.

Mrs. Ellman: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. As I said, I believe that Select Committees are an extremely important part of our democracy, and I would like to see them strengthened and their remit widened. That is important for accountability and openness.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Lady criticised the Conservative party for privatising the railways. Is she aware that the Government's policy is to re-privatise them by selling them back to a private sector company? Is it also her understanding that the Government want to privatise the tube, splitting track from trains, and air traffic services? Why is she so strongly against privatisation?

Mrs. Ellman: As I understand the situation, a decision about the successor to Railtrack has not been made. The matter is still being considered by the administrators and a final decision will be made by the Secretary of State. One proposal is for a company limited by guarantee, which despite being private would not issue shares or dividends to outside members, thereby preventing conflict between shareholders and the public. Such a structure could well operate in the public interest, and I have experience of such companies doing so very effectively. We do know that the privatised rail system set up by the Conservatives was inadequate; it failed to deliver, and it has cost the taxpayer a great deal of money with no great result.

Under Conservative-inspired privatisation, regulation is one of the few forms of accountability and means of providing information to the House and the public. When we considered what had happened to the utilities, particularly water, while the Conservatives were in power, we saw that the situation was unacceptable. There was increasing public uproar as the fat cats of the privatised water industry gained more and more finance while the public received an inadequate service. I am pleased to say that this Government have improved the situation, and regulation in the water industry appears to be effective, although we need constantly to monitor its progress.

I cannot say, however, that regulation of privatised rail services has been equally effective. I was extremely concerned to receive only today a letter from the Rail Regulator, Mr. Tom Winsor, informing me—as he had informed the press over the weekend—that he was unable to investigate Virgin for increasing rail fares on the west coast main line. My complaints to Mr. Winsor go back 18 months and refer to an increase of 100 per cent. in rail fares from Liverpool to London as a result of Virgin arbitrarily deciding to redefine peak time. Now, people who travel from Liverpool to London have to pay at least £153; they cannot arrive before the afternoon without paying that fare, which is entirely unacceptable.

It is equally unacceptable that it has taken Mr. Winsor 18 months to decide that he is unable to conduct an investigation into Virgin's abuse of its monopoly on the west coast main line. That is indicative either of a weak regulator or of insufficiently strong regulation that needs to be revised in the interests of the travelling public. I intend to pursue that matter both directly with Ministers in the Chamber and in the Select Committee. It is clear that rail privatisation has been unsatisfactory and has not served the public.

Chris Grayling: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way to me a second time, and I look forward to interesting discussions with her and other members of the Transport Committee on our recommendations on regulation. Does she agree that the structure and nature of regulation of the rail industry was reshaped by the Labour Government; and that despite the praise she pours on to the regulation of other industries and the Government's approach to them, when the crunch came in the rail industry, the Secretary of State felt the need to threaten to bypass the regulator to get things done?

Mrs. Ellman: In terms of general regulation, I agree that rail industry regulation is not satisfactory. I intend to press for improvements, because the interests of the travelling public are not well served by the current structure. When looking to the future of Railtrack, Ministers should consider the functions and responsibilities of the Rail Regulator and the Strategic Rail Authority. The system has failed, as well as the management of Railtrack as an individual company.

I shall now speak about some of the issues mentioned by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) and to the reference in the motion to the conduct of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. I refer in particular to the contentious note and minutes of the 25 July meeting between the Secretary of State and his officials and John Robinson, chairman of Railtrack.

It is important to remember that the note and the minutes were made accessible to public view solely because the Transport Committee requested that they be made available. When answering the Committee's queries, the Secretary of State said that it was most unusual, if not unprecedented, for notes and minutes of that sort to be made available, but added that to assist the Committee, and if that was what the Committee wanted, he would make them public. That is another illustration of the Committee's importance and underlines the significance of having Select Committees that are open and determined and that want to act in the public interest.

The note and minutes of that important meeting fall into two parts. It is clear that the uncontested part of the note reinforces the indictment made against Railtrack's management by many sources. According to the note, Mr. Robinson said that

> "He was trying to build a better relationship with the Rail Regulator"—

presumably something was wrong. He said that

> "He was taking personal control of the West Coast Main Line upgrade"—

presumably because Railtrack had failed. In evidence to the Transport Committee, it was made clear that because Railtrack had failed to modernise the west coast main line, Railtrack and Virgin were already discussing compensation of at least £300 million. Moreover, we now learn that Virgin intended to increase its fares by a further

[Mrs. Ellman]

33 per cent. as part of the compensation deal because Railtrack failed to deliver. The undisputed part of the note recorded that the chairman of Railtrack said:

> "In all of this his aim was to follow on the key things Railtrack needed to do to run a safe, reliable railway".

Presumably, Railtrack was not doing so before. The note also stated that the chairman said:

> "Turning things round was not a question of more investment, but rather running the company properly."

That echoes Mr. Winsor's evidence to the Select Committee, in which he spoke about Railtrack's incompetence and its disregard for its customers.

In the now published and undisputed part of the minutes, the indictment of Railtrack's management grows increasingly clear and severe, but what about the important part of the note, now a public document, which is disputed? It concerns what the Secretary of State says John Robinson, the chairman of Railtrack, said and what Mr. Robinson says he did not say. The only responsible conclusion to be drawn from the minutes is that it has not been proved that the Secretary of State is right. He says that the chairman of Railtrack stated that he needed a letter of comfort for his bank before he could obtain bank resources and needed extra funding from the Government; otherwise he would not be able to say that Railtrack was a going concern at the meeting at which he was to give an interim statement on 8 November. Those details were not recorded at the request of the chairman of Railtrack, but, according to the Secretary of State, that is what he said. The fact that the chairman of Railtrack said that he did not say those things cannot be proved or disproved.

The notes do not prove that the Secretary of State was right, nor do they prove that he was wrong. We must look at people's motives either for agreeing or trying to dispute what they said. Ministers and Secretaries of State are accountable to the House of Commons, so we can ask those questions of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and it is right that we should do so, but Mr. Robinson is the chairman of a private company, so we cannot ask him directly what he said. He is responsible to his private board and shareholders, who are supposed to call him to account, but have Railtrack's minutes been disclosed? Do we know what its chairman reported to his board or shareholders following his meeting with the Secretary of State or, perhaps even more critically, following further discussions with the Secretary of State and his officials? We do not know that, so we cannot challenge or question it.

Dr. Pugh *rose—*

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead) *rose—*

Mrs. Ellman: I shall give way in a moment.

We are dealing with two separate things: a Secretary of State is responsible to the public and the House, but a chairman of a privatised company, responsible for a public service, answers not to elected Members of Parliament but to a private board that does not have to disclose its minutes and is not subject to public questioning in a place such as the House of Commons.

Mrs. May: I am sure that the hon. Lady is aware that the chairman of Railtrack has made his notes of the 25 July meeting available to the Financial Services Authority in connection with its investigation into the matter, whereas the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has so far not passed on the papers requested by the FSA. Does she agree that, if the Government are as interested in public information as she claims, those papers should be sent to the FSA forthwith?

Mrs. Ellman: My point concerns disclosure and responsibility on the part of the chairman of a private company that is running a public service. I am not aware of the chairman of Railtrack making publicly available the minutes of his board meeting on 25 July or, even more significantly, about what happened following 25 July.

It is not clear whether the chairman of Railtrack met his fiduciary duties in relation to his shareholders and his board, in terms of his understanding of the possible critical financial situation of Railtrack as a going concern? We do not have that information. I am not certain that the public are entitled to have such information. We are dealing with a private company, and we see the conflict when a private company is running a major public service, yet is not responsible to the public.

I give way to the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh).

Dr. Pugh: The point that I intended to make was made by the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May).

Mrs. Ellman: Railtrack has featured large in the debate, because it represents the failure of privatisation and the problems of public accountability for a public service when it is run by a privatised company. The Government have done much to restore confidence in the public services.

All of us should take note of two things, the first of which is the importance of public services being run by publicly accountable bodies. Until we have that, it will not be possible for the House or the public at large to know that services are being run properly or to have the answers that they require and, indeed, deserve. Secondly, the House must register the importance of Select Committees. The work of the Transport Committee in particular is proving increasingly important in the matter of Railtrack. If it were not for the questions asked by the Committee, the notes would not have been requested and would not have been made available.

It is incumbent on all elected Members to recognise the importance of Select Committees in accessing and making available public information in the public interest. I hope that no Government, including the present Government, will be tempted to curtail the activities of Select Committees. Their powers should be extended, as it is the Select Committees above all that represent the people of this country and allow democratic accountability to be far more stringently applied than is possible on the Floor of the House.

5.22 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I have declared my interest in the register.

The Government treat public information as though it were private property, and are grasping in the way that they hold it to them and will not release it. They are rather like Scrooge with public information, before he underwent his remarkable conversion and discovered that Christmas could be fun and one should be generous. My worry is that the Government, having launched their new code, and having penned an amazing amendment to the motion about how much they believe in openness, are not about to convert as Scrooge did, just before Christmas. However, I shall be delighted to give way to the Minister if he wishes to answer the many questions that I tabled concerning the conduct of his Department, and in particular the conduct of its railway policy.

Trying to get to the bottom of what has happened, what is going on and the Government's estimate of what will happen next, I have discovered a series of roadblocks and railblocks placed in my way, which I shall share with the House as we are debating how impossible it is to get information out of this miserable Government, while they pretend to be very much in favour of openness and full disclosure. In their amendment to the motion, they have the brazen cheek to refer to

"the publication of the new Ministerial code including the requirements on greater transparency never seen before".

That takes the breath away. When will we see and benefit from the greater transparency in which they proudly say they believe?

Let us start with an easy question for the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. I asked the Secretary of State recently

"what proportion of freight went by (a) road and (b) rail in May (i) 1993"—

there has been quite enough time to collect those figures—

"(ii) 1997"—

a good long time to collect those—

"and (iii) 2001"—

a little closer to the present, but several months ago. The question was a very simple and factual one. Why did I ask it? I have a hunch that the proportion of freight travelling by rail rose after privatisation. Indeed, in support of that view, I have the testimony, in general terms, of the Deputy Prime Minister, who expressed that view when he was Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, as well as the testimonies of Ministers in the Department. Thus, we know from statements made by the Deputy Prime Minister and one of the junior Transport Ministers that they have studied the issue and must have the figures. Yet, I was told in reply:

"The figures are not available in the form requested."—[*Official Report*, 4 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 156W.]—

greater openness, "never seen before". I rest my case on that point. The Minister does not jump up to help the House or to explain whether the Deputy Prime Minister knew what he was talking about when he said that the proportion of rail freight had risen sharply under privatisation.

I then started to ask a few more difficult questions about what the Government were doing and why they were digging a huge hole for the railways by forcing them into administration. I asked the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when bids would close for the assets and liabilities of Railtrack plc in administration. I have read in the newspapers that the Government have an estimate—presumably, this information comes from good sources that are close to them—of when Railtrack will come out of administration.

In order to come out of administration, however, the administrator must first invite bids. Of course, the Government must know when the bidding process will take place. They will have to supply an enormous amount of information for the sale memorandum. We have read in the papers and have heard in a statement made in the House that they are interested in proposing a particular model company that they want to bid. Presumably, therefore, they take an interest in when bidding might open and close. However, this was the answer that I received:

"This is a matter for the administrator."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 389W.]

Again, we are reminded of greater openness never seen before.

I then asked the Secretary of State for his estimate of

"the gross assets to be transferred to the new Railtrack company and . . . the debt to be set against those assets."

Again, the Department presumably investigated the issue with great thoroughness and with the aid of all the accountancy and legal advice that it received at our expense before deciding to petition the court for an administration order. The Minister for Transport, who is now sitting on the Front Bench, gave this answer:

"I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 671W."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 134W.]

I referred to that previous answer, which contained some interesting things but nothing about the Government's estimate of the gross assets to be transferred or the debt to be set against them.

If the Government are serious about getting on with the task of getting Railtrack out of administration and back to work properly, they need to tell potential bidders when the bidding will take place and what they are bidding for. Why cannot the Government come clean with the travelling public and the taxpayer and tell us what is on offer, when the bids will open and when they will close? I and my constituents are impatient to see the railway back on the road to recovery. We know that that means getting it out of administration as quickly as possible and getting it back into private hands, which is the Government's policy.

How disappointed Labour Back Benchers will be when they realise the full horror of what the Government have done in collapsing the railway into administration and learn that they are spending a fortune and will be force feeding a large number of advisers large fees for the hard work that they will definitely have to do with the muddle that has been created, after which they will re-privatise the railway. The Minister shakes his head, but he will not spring up and say that that is not his policy, as he knows full well that he has no authority from the Prime Minister or the Chancellor—of course, they have different views on most subjects these days, but they agree on this one—to say that the Government will renationalise the railways.

The Government have no wish to stand behind the safety and track problems and the huge cash drain that the railway would be if it were returned to nationalised control. They should be more honest and open with their Back Benchers, who will be bitterly disappointed when they discover that what is happening is a recipe not for nationalisation but for a very expensive re-privatisation,

[Mr. John Redwood]

with the Government holding out the hope of an extraordinary type of company that will need massive sums if it is to have any chance of getting off the ground.

I went on to ask the Secretary of State

"what advice the Government had sought about the timing of an announcement to the stock exchange of the changed plans for Railtrack plc."

The answer stated:

"In reaching his decision on 5 October . . . the Secretary of State had regard to the responsibilities and duties that Railtrack Group plc has as a stock exchange quoted company."—[*Official Report*, 23 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 494W.]

I asked what advice the Government had sought, not whether the Secretary of State had considered it properly. I did not ask about his decision. I expected the answer to identify the advisers and, even better, the cost of the process. Instead, I received an answer to a completely different question. Another example of greater openness never seen before.

I asked the Secretary of State what action he had taken on the plan to cuts costs at Railtrack plc that the board drew up before the company was put into administration. I had heard a rumour, perhaps in the press, that the Government had been keen to abort the decision of Railtrack's board before it went into receivership to cut costs by reducing staff. I could understand the Labour party wanting to make such a decision. However, the answer stated:

"The running of the company during administration is a matter for the Administrator."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 389W.]

Again, that is not a specific answer to the question.

I should still like to know what happened to the outgoing board's plans to reduce costs. Why did the Government decide that there was no need to reduce cost? The rail industry is experiencing a horrendous loss of cash in the hands of the administrator, and is propped up by a reluctant Government, if we are to believe what we read about the Treasury's attitudes.

I asked the Secretary of State

"what his estimate is of the fees of the administrator for Railtrack plc".

One would think that one of the first questions that the Secretary of State and the Treasury would ask during the many months of deliberation about whether to place Railtrack in administration would be about the costs, specifically those of accountants, lawyers and administrators, of undergoing the gruelling and difficult process. If we believe, as we must, the Government's answer, we have to believe:

"It is not possible at this stage to make an accurate estimate."

We are therefore invited to believe that the Government have bought a pig in a poke. They have bought something undesirable and they have no idea of its cost.

Before a policy was agreed in government in my day, we held bilateral meetings with the Treasury, which always argued about our estimates of the cost. A compromise was struck or, in some cases, the policy was vetoed if the Treasury decided that it was too dear. Yet it seems that it is not possible to tell us how much money the taxpayer will spend on administration—greater openness never seen before.

I asked the Secretary of State

"what the . . . daily rate of (a) loss"—

profit before tax—

"and (b) cash outflow at Railtrack plc in administration has been since 5 October."

Again, one would think that the Treasury and the Department would monitor that question day by day as it is such a large item in the public budget.

In the pre-Budget statement, the Chancellor claimed enormous credit from Labour Back Benchers for announcing £1,000 million extra for the national health service. That is not a large sum, given the size of its budget. He did not mention the more than £2,000 million extra that, according to the Government's figures, will be needed for Railtrack in administration until March 2001, let alone the sum that may be needed in 2001–02. Money will be required to continue paying for losses, start paying for investment, which cannot be delayed for ever, and to get the company out of administration. It will also be needed to pay all the fees, and, if the Government have their way, the huge sum needed to capitalise the not-for-profit company that they believe the private sector will finance in the future. That is breathtaking.

Again, I received an extraordinary answer to my question. It stated:

"This is a matter for the Administrator. The premature release of unaudited financial information may prejudice the Administrator's . . . release of commercially sensitive information".

I could understand that answer if Railtrack was a public limited company that had to report to its shareholders in the normal way. I should not have dreamed of asking the question in that case because such companies are answerable to the markets, their shareholders and their customers and they have to report according to a defined cycle.

However, the House of Commons made its reputation and built its strength on making the Executive answerable for the amount of money that they spend and how such spending is financed. How, then, can a company as huge as Railtrack be in administration, losing hundreds of millions of pounds as the months go by—on the Government's forecast, possibly losing or absorbing £3.5 billion in the year to March 2001—when we believe that the Government budgeted only £900 million for Railtrack if it had stayed a fully fledged, private sector, public limited company? That represents a massive change in the Government's figures. Greater openness, never seen before.

I then asked the Secretary of State what money was available for the successor company to Railtrack in 2001-02, 2002-03 and 2003-04 from Government sources and from Strategic Rail Authority sources. I knew that I had to specify both sources, otherwise the Government would play tricks with the answer. The Minister replied:

"I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given by . . . the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 195W."—[*Official Report*, 21 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 277-78W.]

I re-read the reply given to the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick)—indeed, I had the pleasure of making a speech on the subject of that reply on the day it was hurried out to the media to try to deal with some media management problem that the Government were having. It is a very full answer, untypically for the Government, but, once again, it has nothing to do with the question that

I tabled. There are no figures in the reply to the hon. Member for Preston on how much money is available for the successor company in the years specified.

My question to the Secretary of State was not a scholarship question. It was more a GCSE question, by public expenditure standards. I was simply asking how much money was available for a very big chunk of our rail industry in the next three years. We know that the Government budget in three-year dollops, and we know that the Chancellor has just produced a pre-Budget statement, so presumably he has put all these figures to bed. Why, therefore, is this a state secret? Why cannot we prise these figures from the Government? Why cannot we know how much money is going to be spent?

Labour Members might welcome such information and say that it is great that so much money is to be poured into the railways. Or they might be critical and say that it is not quite enough for the west coast main line, or whatever is their preferred tipple in railway investment terms. My Conservative colleagues might share my view that the figure might be rather too big, and that there might be better ways of running the company and spending the money. To receive absolutely no reply on the matter is a disgrace.

This is also a matter of great public interest. I am not making a party political point here; I am interested in this because if we are going to get the company out of administration quickly, any bona fide bidder is going to want this information. It must have been agreed with the Treasury in the run-up to the pre-Budget statement. Should not it be published now so that people can consider, on the basis of the money available for the next three years, whether they think that they have a chance of putting in a sensible bid for the railway, or whether they think that the money is too little and that there is no point in bidding?

Would not it also help Labour Members—who still favour that extraordinary animal, the company limited by guarantee that neither makes profits nor pays dividends—if they knew how much this company was going to get in the form of public subsidy, when they were deciding whether to go on the board, and going to the City to raise the billions that the company will need? That information could be crucial to getting the company going.

Mrs. Ellman: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that a company limited by guarantee does indeed make profits, but instead of distributing those profits to outside shareholders it reinvests them in the business of the company? Does he accept that that is the strength of a company limited by guarantee?

Mr. Redwood: That might be true or it might not be true. In the original version, I think that the Minister was calling it a not-for-profit company, and I assumed that it would follow the long tradition of such Labour adventures, and that the Government would run it rather like they ran the dome—very successfully not for profit, if I remember rightly. They ran the dome at a thumping loss, and there is a grave danger that they would do the same with a company limited by guarantee in the railway industry.

The Minister subsequently amplified his answer, and said that the intention would be to run the company for profit and to plough the profits back to build a stronger balance sheet out of retained profit. That is still a return to the equity holder. It is just the same as any other private sector company trying to build capital value and asset value. A company in the private sector can always decide whether to distribute some or none of its profits, and makes half-yearly or annual decisions on that issue. Some companies in the private sector choose not to distribute anything, because they take the view that they can reinvest at such a good rate of return that it would be in the interest of their shareholders to do so.

Any company limited by guarantee would be wise to try to budget for a profit and to build up reserves. What the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) does not seem to understand—the Government clearly do not—is that there is a cost to capital involved. That cannot be avoided. The Government are trying to design a body that gets practically all its money by borrowing rather than by raising equity from private shareholders. The short-term effect of that will be dearer capital, not cheaper capital.

The current price of raising bond money for a vehicle like this would be 6, 7 or 8 per cent. The price of raising equity money would probably be 4 per cent. In the early years, adopting the Government's preferred route rather than the more normal route—involving a balance of "for profit" and "for dividend" shareholders, as well as some bondholders—would probably double the cashflow cost.

The hon. Lady must also understand this. If the Government want a grade A credit rating—as they said they did in response to a rare question that received an answer—they must realise that the cost will be enormous. They must now tell us how much money they will put on the balance sheet of the not-for-profit, or not-for-dividend, company to give it a chance of gaining a grade A credit rating.

Such ratings do not grow on trees. People do not suddenly say, "Here is Railtrack, in administration, with junk-bond status. Now it is to be transferred lock, stock and barrel to a company limited by guarantee. Whoopee! It has a triple-A rating! Aren't we lucky!" The bunch of assets and liabilities remains the same, and unless the Government inject an extremely large sum into its "not-for-dividend, not-for-profit, like the Dome" company, no one will touch it with a bargepole. It will still be given a junk-bond rating, and raising the capital will be very dear.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): As you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I found my right hon. Friend's analysis so compelling I had to move to my present place in order to intervene.

The most important consideration is, surely, the time cost. For such a rating to be given by the agencies, at least a three-year—perhaps a five-year—track record will be required. As well as the cost of the money itself, there will be a time element. The Government will have to underpin that by ensuring that there is no potential loss during the period involved.

Mr. Redwood *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) has been keeping well within the rules; I know he will appreciate that this is not a debate about Railtrack.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it so happens that I want to

[Mr. Redwood]

proceed to the subject of information relating to timing, which is relevant to my hon. Friend's query and, indeed, probably what he had in mind.

I asked the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for his estimate of the time that Railtrack would remain in administration. The longer it stays in administration, of course, the worse its track record will be—so far we have seen mounting losses, worse delays and cancelled or delayed investment—which will make it even more difficult for money to be raised on any sensible basis for any company that the Government may wish to create after Railtrack ceases to be in administration.

One would have thought that the Government would have an estimate of the time that Railtrack would remain in administration. I have read estimates in the newspapers, and I have not seen Ministers rushing to deny them. Those estimates looked as if they had come from Government sources, but apparently not: when I asked my question in the House of Commons, which should always be first to hear interesting news, I was told that it was a matter for the administrator. So, no go there. What remarkable openness—never seen before.

Miss McIntosh: My right hon. Friend speaks of estimates. Will he take this opportunity to ask whether it is true that this is one Department that does not expect to reach the total of its estimated expenditure?

Mr. Redwood: I did not know that, and it is very interesting. My hon. Friend's intervention demonstrates the expertise she has gained from her excellent work on the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions, to which I pay tribute.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): While we are on the subject of railway administration, may I mention that I tabled a written question to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions about routine track and signal maintenance? The answer I received was that that was the responsibility not of the Government, but of the administrator. Does my right hon. Friend find it worrying that the Government are not concerned about safety in this context?

Mr. Redwood: I do indeed—and that is another point I was coming to. Having been thwarted after tabling so many written questions to the Secretary of State, I wrote a letter asking him to set out the position on safety. I think the Government have a clear moral and political obligation to accept ultimate responsibility, now that they have taken the law into their own hands and persuaded the court to put the railways into administration.

Labour, in opposition and subsequently in government, was always ready to rush to attack the privatised industry whenever a dreadful tragedy occurred. We all hate dreadful tragedies, and we all want the railways to be as safe as possible. I have never believed that company directors deliberately create unsafe companies—they know that that would be morally wrong and inhuman, as well as being bad for business—but the Labour party has sometimes appeared to allege that privatised companies somehow cannot be safe.

Now the Government have their way temporarily. The body is in administration; effectively it is operating under a lot of guidance, control and influence from the Secretary of State. Surely there is a moral and political obligation, if not a legal one—given the way in which the body is currently drawn up—for the Government to reassure us all that railway safety will be paramount, crucial and that no corners will be cut during administration.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, by that very act, the Government have so undermined the morale of those working in the industry that it could have ramifications in the run-up to Christmas, which is a particularly busy time for the railways?

Mr. Redwood: That is absolutely right. For that reason, we need more information about safety and morale. The terrible figures that are coming out of the railways show how much damage has been done to morale. That is not surprising when the shareholding of small shareholders and employees has been wiped out, and when many of the senior management have left because they have found it insufferable to work under those conditions. I believe that more senior management will leave, for understandable reasons.

Finally—there were many more examples, but I have taken just a selection for the purposes of this debate—I asked the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate was of the cash needs of Railtrack in administration. I was told that any estimate of the cash needs would be "purely speculative". There we have it—the Government do not have a clue; or can it be that they are trying to withhold information from the House because it is deeply embarrassing? Surely not, so it must be that they do not have a clue; yet we have read in the newspapers that the industry has already gobbled up £800 million in administration—guaranteed by the Government, drawn down, presumably completely spent and used up—and that the cash requirement up to the end of March could be £3.5 billion.

Can the Government in this debate give an estimate of how big a financial black hole they have dug for themselves just up to March next year? It is not asking much. Surely they have to tell the administrator how much money will be available; surely he has to tell them what he thinks he may need. Huge sums of public money are involved, far bigger than the Government's increase in health expenditure. Should not the House of Commons be told?

I have asked today and in questions for a timetable setting out when the bidding will take place and when we can expect the railway to return to a life that may get it back to normal. I have asked the Government to set out their policy towards the railways. Again, answers came there none. I have asked them to set out how much money is available; there have been no answers. I have asked them to say who is allowed to bid; they have not told us. I have asked them to give a proper report on the progress of the company limited by guarantee; there has been one written answer with a few sketchy ideas, and since then a stony silence.

If the Government are serious about getting Railtrack out of administration within the next six months, surely the company limited by guarantee should be up and running. Can we hear more about that today? Can we have some information about how the Secretary of State can both be presiding over the whole process and working with one of the bidding companies? Is he going to get that company off the ground? How much money has he got from the taxpayer, promised by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to try to make it work? Can he give us a few more figures on the balance sheet of that incredible company, which the Government think will answer their prayers but which will be very difficult to get up and running?

Some Labour Members seem to think that the railway industry that is now in administration is on a magical mystery tour that will end up in a cost-free nationalisation. The truth is that it is on a misery tour where the reality is declining services, cancelled trains, delayed trains, cancelled investment, delayed investment, hopes shattered, share price bombed out, employees robbed and shareholders about to sue the Government. What do we get from the Government? We do not even get any straight answers to simple factual questions. It is time they owned up and told us the truth.

5.49 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): If the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) had seriously wanted answers to those questions, rather than putting out another spin of his own, he would have put in for a debate on the railways. [HON. MEMBERS: "We have already done that."] Opposition Members have not done that. The motion covers a bit of Railtrack, Government management of news—spinning—the civil service, political advisers, parliamentary and Government standards, reform and modernisation of Parliament and how to use Parliament. It does not offer a serious debate about the future of the railways.

It is not for me to advise Conservative Members on their general election strategy; as a Labour Member, I think that they were remarkably successful in managing their strategy in the previous two general elections and I wish them great success in the future. However, if they think that this argument about Railtrack is going to help them with the public, they are so fundamentally wrong that it is not true. The reality is that two railways issues impact on the British public: that it is an expensive, slow, uncertain and uncomfortable way of reaching a destination; and that it was privatised by Conservative Members. That is what the public know and what they will remember.

If Conservative Members want to make any political progress at all—although when I listen to this type of debate I sometimes think that they do not—they will have to start by recognising that they got it very badly wrong on railways and try to move on to a new agenda.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): My hon. Friend has made my point for me. Nevertheless, does he agree that this constant bluster from Conservative Members is simply a grotesque attempt to shift the blame from them to us for the mess that they created?

Mr. Soley: My hon. Friend has made the point more briefly than I did.

There are, as I indicated, several important issues wrapped up in the Opposition motion—several of which have been identified by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler)—that cross party lines and are relevant to the debate. The first issue is parliamentary reform, which is in some respects what the Opposition seem to be talking about. The right hon. Member for Wokingham and other hon. Members have described what they regard as a lack of opportunity to hold Ministers to account. As the hon. Member for North Cornwall knows, the Modernisation Committee—which the Government established as soon as they won in 1997—has attempted to move the agenda forward to increase the House's effectiveness. However, we have almost always found ourselves fighting Conservative Members to make those changes.

Westminster Hall is the first example of that conflict. I take some pride in Westminster Hall, especially because I was, I think, the first person to present to the Modernisation Committee a paper suggesting that we establish a second Chamber. Conservative Members opposed the proposal. Given that even I was not sure that Westminster Hall would work as well as it has, I suppose that that opposition was fair enough. The point, however, is that that Chamber has increased the number of opportunities to hold Ministers to account. Although I—like the majority of hon. Members on both sides of the House, as I understand it—think that Westminster Hall is a remarkable success, I suspect that the majority of Ministers do not like it that much, because they are expected to go there far more often than they were ever expected to reply to debates and answer questions in this Chamber.

Westminster Hall was a major achievement that was won in the face of early opposition from many Conservative Members who have now come round to seeing it as a good thing. If we tried to abolish Westminster Hall, which I am happy to say that we would not attempt to do, the outcry from Conservative Members who opposed it only a few years ago would be enormous.

In an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman), the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) said that a previous Conservative Government were the first to establish Select Committees. They were not the first Government to do that, as the House had Select Committees in the 19th century and, I think, in the early part of the 20th century. Nevertheless, those Committees lapsed. However, when the current Select Committee system became increasingly successful, Norman St. John-Stevas—who, on the Conservative side, deserves much of the credit for establishing it—fairly quickly found himself outside the Cabinet. I do not know whether Select Committees were the reason for his removal, but I do know that he was the author of the Special Standing Committee concept which enables the House to take evidence before legislating. Consequently, in the early 1980s, several Bills were considered in Special Standing Committees. However, as those Committees were an embarrassment to the then Government, that Government stopped using them. From 1983, I think, to about 1997, only one or two Special Standing Committees were convened; now, however, it is fairly common practice to hold them. They not only take evidence from the public but give the public an opportunity to influence legislation. Conservative Members had the opportunity to do all that from the early 1980s onwards but they did not take it.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) has left the Chamber, although I am sure that he has done so for good reason, because

[Mr. Soley]

I want to take up one of the points that he made in his speech. He said that he was a political adviser to the previous Conservative Prime Minister, John Major, and he went on to complain about the way in which the current Government manipulate the news. As the Opposition motion states, he does not approve of the Government's "news management" strategy. The hon. Gentleman, however, presumably was the political adviser advising John Major when he—rightly, but secretly, without telling the House and denying the fact—opened talks with Sinn Fein.

In their own terms, the then Government's reason for deciding on secrecy were good enough: it was their dependence on the votes of Unionist Members to stay in power. It was a political decision. From the speech of the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale, however, I presume that he told John Major, "We must open up this debate and tell the television channels in time for the 6 and 10 o'clock news that we are having secret talks with Sinn Fein." Of course the hon. Gentleman said no such thing. When I hear Conservative Members talk about news management, I realise why the previous Conservative Government got into so much difficulty on double standards.

Mr. Swire: If the talks to which the hon. Gentleman has referred were secret, how could the then Prime Minister tell the House about them either before or while they were being held?

Mr. Soley: That is my point. The then Prime Minister kept them secret because he needed the political support of Unionist Members. In reality, however, an awful lot of hon. Members and people in the media knew that those talks were being held. Indeed, the vast majority of hon. Members supported those discussions. However, Conservative Members could not go public on the talks because their Government depended on the Unionist votes.

Conservative Members sometimes talk as though spin has just been invented, but that is not so. Occasionally, both the media and politicians spin, as I shall describe later. First, however, I should remind Conservative Members of Bernard Ingham, of whom we were reminded by the hon. Member for North Cornwall. Bernard Ingham was a civil servant, but he was referred to as Margaret Thatcher's "handbag" by the media, many hon. Members and many members of the public because he was occasionally known to go round duffing up the Opposition. On one occasion, I wandered by mistake into one of his press briefings and heard him lambasting the Labour party. He saw such activity as a perfectly normal part of his role.

Mr. Tyler: I think, in all fairness, that we should point out that Bernard Ingham duffed up Conservative Members rather more effectively than he did Opposition Members.

Mr. Soley: There is a lot of truth in that. The hon. Gentleman has also given the example of Bernard Ingham describing one Cabinet Minister, John Biffen, as "semi-detached", not long after which he was out of the Cabinet.

The relationship between Margaret Thatcher and Bernard Ingham was very close, very important to the success of that Conservative Government and very effective. What they did, however, was to manipulate the news in a big way. When they chose to do so, they would also undermine Conservative Members. They also continued the policy which has been operated under various Governments of trying to present the news in the best possible manner for themselves. That is why I should like to have a bit more common sense in the debate.

Today and in previous debates, various hon. Members have mentioned Jo Moore. I think that the hon. Member for North Cornwall was right to say that much more is being made of that matter than need be. I should tell the House—I do not know whether it is a declaration of interest—that Jo Moore worked for me on one occasion, when I was the shadow housing Minister. She is a very capable press and media officer. That does not justify her comments on that occasion, as they were by any standard gross and incredibly insensitive. As many hon. Members know, the incident has probably also ruined her career—*[Interruption.]* It is true.

As Opposition Members have said, one could fire someone who has acted in that manner. However, one would probably run into trouble with an industrial tribunal if one were to fire her on that basis. What Opposition Members are really asking us to do is to lean on such people to resign, but the reality is that the Minister, not the civil servant, is accountable.

We try to maintain a rather artificial distinction between civil servants and political advisers. In the United States, all such people are political appointees. I do not want to go down that road, but it is impossible to maintain an absolute distinction. A couple of years ago, as chairman of the parliamentary Labour party, I went to a meeting in Paris with the French and British Foreign Secretaries and various officials. The French Socialist party members, civil servants and advisers all entertained us at lunch in the French Foreign Office. They all talked about foreign policy issues, regardless of their different roles. I am not saying that the French system is better than ours, but it is more honest. There is a role for political advisers.

I suspect that Jo Moore got into so much trouble because of the constant tug of war between civil servants and political advisers. The Conservative party in government had the same problem. Political advisers feel that they are being kept out of the Government machine but they want to be in there to protect their Minister for a policy or a position that is dependent on a political party. Unless we recognise that, the tensions will continue. We need a slightly more relaxed attitude to get the balance right. Political advisers should not need to have battles with civil servants about their level of involvement or information. There is no simple answer, but the French way seems to have more common sense to it than ours.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman is trying to excuse the Government's spinning by comparison with the Conservative Government, but it is incontrovertible that the Labour Government make numerous announcements to the press before making them to Parliament. For example, today an important announcement on the abolition of the rough sleepers unit was made by the Prime Minister to the press. Does the hon. Gentleman approve of that, or is it bad for Parliament and bad for democracy?

Mr. Soley: It is not as black and white as the hon. Gentleman suggests, but there is certainly a problem that we need to work on. I am saying not that the Government are wholly innocent but that if every single item has to be announced in the House, the Government, of whatever party, will spend all their time on announcements here. One needs to decide what to announce here and what to announce outside.

Mrs. May: The hon. Gentleman says that the issue of announcements being made to the House or to the press is not black and white. Does he think it right that advisers at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions made available to the press the minutes of the meeting on 25 July between the chairman of Railtrack and the Secretary of State nearly two hours before they were made available to the Select Committee?

Mr. Soley: I would normally expect papers to be made available to the Select Committee, but not necessarily first.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Why not?

Mr. Soley: Because it depends on what the papers are and what the decision is. The primary issue is whether we feel that the papers should be made available to the public, after which there is a decision about whether that is done through Parliament or through a public statement. It might be perfectly in order to choose the latter. As I understand it, the Speaker normally expects major statements—not all statements—to be made in the House first. If every announcement had to be made here, the Government would never issue a press release on anything. It is not clear cut. One has to draw a line.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Does my hon. Friend agree that it seems somewhat strange for the Opposition to complain on the one hand that everything is being covered up and kept from them and on the other that the Government are too keen to give information to the press and the public?

Mr. Soley: Indeed. There is a constant tug of war. We are being asked to give more and more information. That is right. We should have open government. I am surprised that we have not made more progress with the Freedom of Information Bill, but the motion does not mention that. The motion is a mess, frankly. There is a case for giving the public more information, but how we do it depends on the nature of the information and the situation at the time. There is a difficult judgment for the Speaker on whether it should have been given to the House first.

I have dealt with the press over many years and recently wrote a book on the subject. We need to step back from the argument about news management and take a long, hard look at it. Spinning has gone on since time immemorial. Let us be honest: no one is going to say, "Here's a bad story about me. I want to issue it now to get maximum publicity." If any politician or party wants to kid anyone that they do anything other than try to manage the news, no one will believe them. It is not an unreasonable thing to do. No private organisations, including businesses, voluntary groups and charities with the holiest of reputations, will give maximum exposure to anything that is embarrassing to them.

We should all recognise—*[Interruption.]* Do not worry. I have sent that pager message back marked "Not known at this address".

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale says that we should stop news management and simply issue the stories as they emerge. Can anyone imagine people in the Tory party eagerly issuing a story that humiliates them in time for the evening television news and the next day's press? Of course not, although at certain points over the past few years, it seemed that they were indeed doing that—but I always put it down to political incompetence rather than moral purity.

Any organisation will try to present itself in the best light. We must be as honest as possible about the news and recognise that it is important not to lie—and there are even exceptions to that, as we all know: at times, in war or on crucial economic issues, politicians find themselves in the difficult position of having to cover something up in order to prevent a worse disaster. The use of troops is perhaps the time-honoured example.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): If the messenger who is spinning the news becomes the issue—as someone very distinguished put it a year ago—is it time for that messenger to go?

Mr. Soley: It can be, although I would not want to say so categorically. Bernard Ingham was the equivalent of Alastair Campbell, and the two were both effective at operating the relationship between the media and politics for their respective political parties. We should be honest and say that we know that it happens.

The second issue concerns the media, members of which often talk as though it is only the politicians who spin. The reality is that the media spin too. All Members of Parliament will know that journalists often say, "Do not use that story first" and then give a reason why it should not be used yet. Or a journalist might suggest developing another part of the argument first. We know that that happens. What matters in the end is that the relationship between the media and politics is robust enough to withstand the rows and disagreements, and for the media to expose what the politicians are trying to hide. However, no one should believe that either side is pure, in some moral sense. Indeed, it was the late Enoch Powell who said that for politicians to complain about the press was like sailors complaining about the sea. That is equally true the other way round, and the media and politicians should recognise the need to co-operate on stories at times, as well trying to conceal them from each other. I could give several examples, but I shall move on.

The motion also mentions the way in which we use Parliament. During both the Falklands war and the Gulf war, I cannot remember how many debates we had, but the number was minimal. During the present situation in Afghanistan, we have had on average a debate a fortnight. We never had that under the previous Government, and it is one of several areas in which we have been much more open.

The Conservatives have also laid themselves wide open in tabling a motion on standards in Government and in Parliament. My advice is that they should acknowledge

[Mr. Soley]

that many members of the Conservative party in Parliament got things badly wrong, in terms of honesty and integrity, in the last 10 years of their time in government. Many people would say that John Major was a good man, but he could not prevent his Back Benchers taking cash for questions. However, the motion suggests that standards have deteriorated. Whatever else the British public believe, they do not believe that standards have deteriorated. There are no stories about cash for questions any more. Instead, we have codes of conduct for Ministers and the party funding regulations, which have dramatically limited how parties can collect and spend money in a way not seen since the first legislation to restrict parties' spending in the 19th century.

The legislation on party funding causes problems for all of us. It is difficult to find people to be the local party secretary, because they discover that it is a criminal offence not to reveal certain information about how much money the party receives. We have never asked voluntary organisations to bear that burden before, but that is what political parties now have to do. That is a huge jump forward for political accountability and integrity, and the public know that. No party will be wholly clean, because people slip up and a few are just dishonest. They are in a minority, however, and we should keep it that way. In any case, for the Conservative party to table a motion that suggests that standards have deteriorated is plain wrong.

The motion is a mess and tries to cover too many issues. We are using Parliament better to hold Ministers to account, but we still have not got it right. The standard of integrity for MPs is better than it was and is still improving. The Conservatives know that they must never again get into the mess they got into in the 1990s. However, we still have not resolved the problem of the relationships between political parties and civil servants. We expect our Ministers to have political advisers—they are necessary in a complex modern Parliament—but at the same time, they must be accommodated in the system, not in a way that makes them civil servants but that recognises the importance of their job.

The Government are broadly on the right track in terms of restoring honesty and integrity to Parliament and to public life generally. We are also reforming Parliament and making Ministers and the Government more accountable. The debate on spin between media and politicians is alive and well, as it will probably still be in 100 years time. We should exercise some common sense about the issues, instead of trying to focus on one aspect. It is a complex area, but the standards being set now are an improvement and the Conservatives would do well to remember that. If they really want to vote on this weird motion, they can do so, but they will not win the vote and even if they did, I doubt that they would know what it meant anyway.

6.16 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): In so far as the motion relates to transport, I wish to declare my interest in Railtrack, First Group, Eurotunnel and the RAC. I am delighted that we are discussing the Government's record on compiling and disseminating information, especially against the background of the claim by the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) that they were re-elected on a platform of open government. However, the freedom of information legislation has been famously delayed.

We cannot even get the Government, or individual Ministers, to answer straight questions with a straight answer on the Floor of the House, by written answer or in Select Committee proceedings, which the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) mentioned. I shall share some gems with the House. I tabled a question on 16 November, which was finally answered on 22 November, about the Strategic Rail Authority's recommendation to grant a 20-year franchise to GNER on the east coast route. The Secretary of State decided on a two-year extension to the current franchise, but by that time the two bidders, GNER and Virgin, had spent £4 million each on the bid for the renewed franchise. I asked the Secretary of State why he had rejected the SRA's advice but answer came there none.

I was referred to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), which claimed that the date of the draft legislation directing the Secretary of State to overrule the Rail Regulator and give powers of direction could not be released. The written answer claimed that it was not in the public interest to disclose internal departmental communications which were, in effect, draft orders due to come before the House. Since when was draft legislation considered an internal communication, especially when it was intended to block the interim review application from being considered and applied for by the rail regulator?

In his evidence to the Select Committee on 7 November, the Rail Regulator referred to his shock. He said:

> "Mr. Byers said that they had thought of that"—

that Railtrack would apply for an interim review—

> "and that if such an application were made, he"—

the Secretary of State—

> "had the necessary authority immediately to introduce emergency legislation to entitle the Secretary of State to give instructions to the Regulator. After pausing to consider whether I had really heard what I had just heard, I asked whether that would be to over-rule me in an interim review or in relation to all my functions. Mr. Byers said that it would cover everything but that its first use would be in relation to an interim review which the Government did not want to proceed . . . I added that taking me under political control would go entirely against the grain of the major theme of the Government's policy position in the General Election campaign, which was about getting private sector capital into the provision of public services. I told them that such a step would do considerable harm to the ability of the Government to get companies to put money into public projects."

The significance of the date of the draft orders should not be overlooked. The date may have been as early as July, August or September this year, so it could be proved that the Secretary of State allowed the market in Railtrack shares to continue long after he first considered putting the company into administration.

In defence of the Secretary of State, however, he is not alone. I have written to Mr. Speaker to seek his guidance about correspondence that I sent to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on behalf of my constituents and to which she has not yet replied. That correspondence dates back to June, July, August and September of this year. Indeed, the failure of the right hon. Lady to reply has become the subject of a

"Dear Colleague" letter of 14 November, in which she gives an explanation, in effect, and almost apologises although she does not actually excuse her Department.

I shall not refer to the letter as right hon. and hon. Members will have already received it. However, another letter has come into my possession—I am not entirely sure whence it came. It is a "Dear John" letter—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—not to my husband John, or even to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) who is in the Chamber this evening; it is a "Dear John" letter from "Dear Tony". Yes, indeed. I have a letter from the Prime Minister to the Deputy Prime Minister in which he writes:

> "The way we as a Government deal with communications from the public reflects our attitude towards those contacting us. I regard the letters, telephone calls and e-mails that we receive as being extremely important. They give a useful insight into the way the public thinks. Too often correspondence is seen as the poor relation and although over the last few years we have made good progress in the way Departments handle all forms of correspondence, I believe there is still more that can be done.
>
> Staff in all Departments continue to do a fantastic job coping with the vast amount of correspondence received each year. Ministers too need to ensure that they are doing their bit by supporting staff, being clear about their requirements and making certain that they sign off letters on time."

What a pity that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs could not heed that advice.

I return to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions—caught in a minibus in Tyneside, thus preventing his attendance in the House—and support the call made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside. In fact, we requested that the minutes of the meeting held between the Secretary of State and the chairman of Railtrack be made public—or at least be passed to members of the Select Committee. What a tortuous exchange that was. We could not even get the Secretary of State to say whether, yes, he would release the minutes or, no, he would not. In fact, he said, in effect, "If it would be helpful, I would wish to be helpful".

As my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead pointed out, the timing of the release of the minutes is not without significance. I was phoned by the Clerk of the Select Committee—the first time I can recall that happening—who told me that the papers were on the Board. That was at 5 o'clock last Tuesday, when the Secretary of State—

Dr. Pugh: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss McIntosh: I hope to finish my remarks soon, in order to give the hon. Gentleman time to make his speech.

The event that I described is not normal practice. I realised only subsequently that the press and media—indeed, only certain chosen members of the press corps—were given an advance copy at 3.35 pm, just as the Chancellor of the Exchequer was rising to his feet to give his pre-Budget report. If that is not an example of cynical news management, I do not know what is.

Like the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside, I attach great importance and value to the work of the Select Committee and to my membership of it, under the august and robust chairmanship of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). It shows gross discourtesy and a lack of respect for the Committee that the press were given the minutes before—about an hour and a half before—they were received by members of the Committee. The minutes did not even give a full account; not for the first time the discrepancy between the minutes and the Railtrack chairman's recollection of the meeting was revealed.

The Select Committee invited the Treasury team to give evidence on aspects of the rail franchise renewals procedure, especially the public sector borrowing requirement, on which only a Treasury Minister is accountable. Even the Leader of the House had to admit that no Treasury Minister had appeared before a Transport Select Committee since 1999. Treasury Ministers still refuse to attend the Committee.

Furthermore, why has the Secretary of State blocked the publication of any figures showing the increasing delays on the rail network since Railtrack went into administration? Could it be because such figures reveal a 45 per cent. increase in delays? Again, the culture of secrecy prevails over the spirit of openness.

We still await details as to what shape the son of Railtrack will take. That is a matter of great urgency. It is of such importance that I have received a letter from the chief executive of GNER, who states:

> "Clearly there is a difficult balance to be struck between wanting to get the right solution for Railtrack and not rushing into a fudge. On the other hand, if it drags on for ages it will be disastrous for the railway industry in terms of falling morale."

The evidence of that falling morale is there for all to see.

I commend and support the motion. I hope that the House will draw its own conclusions: as well as the pursuit of a cynical news management strategy, there is a culture of secrecy and inefficiency, all of which I deplore.

6.27 pm

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): My contribution will be brief and, I hope, constructive, with a positive suggestion at the end.

I approached the discussion of recent events in relation to transport with a relatively open mind. I have no hidden agenda. I am certainly no lover of Railtrack whose demise I regard as inevitable. It was a flawed project: massive public investment can never be coupled with private profit.

Furthermore, I have no difficulty with the Secretary of State's proposal for a not-for-profit company. Like the right hon. Gentleman and all hon. Members, my feelings are with the travelling public—not only because of correspondence from my constituents, but because I was turfed off a train at 6 o'clock this morning due to poor maintenance. It is probably unfair to mention the company and perhaps I should not refer to Arriva, but I was badly served—as much as anything else by the outcome of privatisation.

I believed that the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions provided a substantial counterweight to an overweening, over-dominant Executive; and that the model it offered for holding the Executive to account was so powerful and rigorous that it would be marketed to local authorities in the form of scrutiny committees that they would all be empowered to establish. I came to the debate with those thoughts: I had no prior agenda. However, I have had to change my mind and have come to share some of the concerns that have been voiced by Opposition Members.

[Dr. John Pugh]

I have listened while Ministers, the Strategic Rail Authority and the Rail Regulator gave their accounts of the uproar that surrounded the demise of Railtrack. I have listened to the accusations of bullying, and it is as though people have had to be separated after rowing in a school yard. As a former school teacher, I am sensitive to the fact that there is more than one side to the story in any accusation of bullying.

I do not side with Mr. Winsor or with the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, but there is a flaw in the Secretary of State's approach. Whenever and wherever he has endeavoured to prove his side of the story, he has failed to do so. In the latest episode, the minutes released last Tuesday were supposed to bear out the Government's view, but, at the critical moment, the pens were put down and the evidence is simply not there. In the bits of paper that really count, there are no notes on the items that we wish to investigate.

To persist with the analogy, it is as though the bully had offered to get a note from his mum as verification, but had returned without it. In those circumstances, in a school or elsewhere, we know that something is afoot. Regrettably, that is what I have had to conclude. Often in cases of bullying, where people are not completely open and frank, someone else is behind the story that people need to investigate, and I have come to the conclusion that it is the Treasury in this case. The Treasury has been deeply implicated at operational level in all the major decisions surrounding the railways.

Mrs. Ellman: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify his definition of a bully? Is the Secretary of State, who is acting in the public interest a bully; or is Railtrack, which is gobbling up public funds and facing a deficit of £3.5 billion, the real bully?

Dr. Pugh: I do not want to enter into a discussion on whether bullying has taken place in this case. All I can say is that, if there is a bully, it is probably not the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions; it is probably the Treasury. I have served on the Transport Committee and listened to what people say, and the experience of everyone in the industry—the witnesses who gave evidence to the Select Committee, Bob Kiley and all the seasoned commentators—clearly shows that the Treasury's hand is behind almost the entire plot, but Treasury Ministers will not allow their role to be scrutinised. That strikes me as like turning the Select Committee into a charade.

Every intelligent political observer in the land knows the extent of Treasury policy involvement in all the key Departments, and it is disingenuous of Treasury Ministers not to appear before the Select Committee. If they cannot and will not appear before the Transport Committee, given the manifest evidence of their involvement in railway affairs, the outlook for Select Committees is grim. If their policy involvement is as pervasi[illegible] I believe it to be—not only in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, but in the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Health—Ministers who give evidence to Select Committees are like a kind human shield for the Chancellor, and Select Committees are doomed to interview a selection of monkeys while the organ grinder grinds on.

A Treasury that calls the shots but lets others take the flak represents not only bad news for Ministers' careers, but an appalling abuse of parliamentary government. The Minister turns around to talk to one of his hon. Friends, but one of the things that he could do to reassure the Opposition more than anything else would be to say that the Government have changed their mind, that they have been convinced by the arguments and that Treasury Ministers will soon appear before the Select Committee.

6.33 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I am pleased to respond to this interesting debate. The fact that I am doing so reflects the importance that the official Opposition attach to the issue of access to Government information and, in particular, to the behaviour of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in refusing to provide information to Members, in making disputed statements to the House and, of course, in presiding over chaos and increased delays on the railways. I am here; where is he? [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] All I can say is that it is a very long minibus trip to see a bridge on Tyneside, North. The answer is that he is not here because he is frit. He does not want to come to the House.

> "The first right of a citizen in any mature democracy should be the right to information. It is time to sweep away the cobwebs of secrecy which hang over far too much government activity".

Those are not my words, but those used by the Prime Minister in the John Smith memorial lecture in 1996.

Today we have debated how far this Labour Government have departed from that ideal. Let me make it clear to the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, who opened the debate for the Government, that this is not an attack on civil servants, and her claim that my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) made such an attack in his excellent speech was entirely unjustified. Perhaps she would now like to apologise for making that claim. She is not willing to do so.

We know where responsibility lies; it lies not with civil servants, but with Ministers. Ministers refuse to answer questions, and the Secretary of State who has made disputed statements in the House has refused to come to the House tonight to explain himself. It is little wonder that he is frightened to do so, given that virtually every time he makes a statement on Railtrack in the House it is disputed afterwards.

I am not surprised that he is frightened to come to the House, given the views of his hon. Friends. He cannot rely on Labour Back Benchers any longer. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) talked about the meeting between the Secretary of State and the chairman of Railtrack on 25 July and explained that the official minutes did not tell her whether or not she could believe the Secretary of State.

Mrs. Ellman: Does the hon. Lady recall the fact that I added to that comment by saying that the minutes did not prove whether the chairman of Railtrack was correct? Indeed, I suggested that although the Secretary of State was accountable to the House, the chairman of Railtrack was not and that because of his fiduciary duty he might have had a motive in not telling the truth.

Mrs. May: I have a little tip for the hon. Lady for when she intervenes in future: it is the phrase, "If you are in a hole, stop digging."

The Secretary of State cannot rely on his Cabinet colleagues. I was interested to see that, when he responds to debates on this matter, he does not have a single member of the Cabinet alongside him, whereas a member of the Cabinet is supporting the Minister for Transport in this debate. It is also interesting that, on 22 November, *The Guardian—[Interruption.]* Mention of that newspaper excites Labour Members, but it stated:

> "Relations between the Chancellor . . . and the transport secretary . . . were strained last night when it emerged that the Treasury had embarked on a constitutional conflict with parliament by refusing point blank to answer MPs' questions about rail funding."

Was it not also interesting that when the Chancellor of the Exchequer listed the brilliant spending Ministers in this Government in an article in *The Times* on 22 November one name was missing? Whose? It was that of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

The Secretary of State cannot rely even on the Prime Minister to support him because, as we learned from *The Times* last week:

> "Downing Street has issued an official reprimand to . . . the Transport Department for 'contaminating' the autumn Pre-Budget Statement on Tuesday by sparking a fresh row over spin-doctors."

Little wonder that the rest of the Government are distancing themselves from the Secretary of State, given his treatment of hon. Members, as shown in the examples given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). My right hon. Friend has been doing the House an excellent service in assiduously trying to wheedle the truth out of Ministers and has been blocked at every turn, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), whose telling questions on the Select Committee have revealed the extent of the Secretary of State's weasel words.

We are talking about a Government who in their ministerial code say:

> "Ministers should be as open as possible with Parliament and the public".

On 27 November, I asked the Secretary of State

> "on what date he instructed parliamentary drafters to draft.. the Railway Administration Order Rules 2001 and . . . the legislation to give him power to direct the Rail Regulator"?

I was told:

> "Details of internal communications are exempt from disclosure under section 2 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 746W.]

That part of the code relates to information whose disclosure would harm the frankness and candour of internal discussion. How on earth does giving a date harm the candour and frankness of internal discussion?

Such a refusal to give details on such a question is what made the parliamentary ombudsman take the Home Office to task in his report. As my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale pointed out, that was the first time that a Department had refused to respond to the actions required by the parliamentary ombudsman. The ministerial code means nothing to the Government and their Ministers.

Let us look at the minute of the meeting of 25 July between the Secretary of State and the chairman of Railtrack. It was requested by members of the Select Committee, who were not the first Members of this House to do so. I tabled a question asking for the note and was told that it could not be disclosed. Then—what a surprise!—the Secretary of State indicated that he might be helpful to the Select Committee, although he was helpful to four selected newspapers before he was helpful to the Committee. The selective briefing of a note did not substantiate the Secretary of State's claims in the House.

The Minister for Transport, who will respond to this debate, was present at the meeting of 25 July. The Secretary of State said in this House that the chairman of Railtrack said at the meeting that

> "unless extra financial assistance from the Government was provided, on 8 November, when Railtrack was due to give its interim results, it would be unable to make the critical statement that it was 'a going concern'."—[*Official Report*, 5 November 2001; Vol. 374, c.19.]

Does the Minister agree that that was said by the chairman of Railtrack at that meeting?

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): Yes.

Mrs. May: Will the Minister put it on the record, rather than saying so from a sedentary position?

Mr. Spellar *rose—*

Chris Grayling: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. May: Yes.

Chris Grayling: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Minister accepted at the Select Committee meeting that no such request for financial assistance had been made? I am a little confused by the Minister's response.

Mrs. May: I think that we are all confused by the Minister's response, given that the official minute does not substantiate the Secretary of State's claim, as the Minister has just reiterated. Indeed, the chairman of Railtrack has disputed what the Secretary of State said. He disputed it publicly on "Today" on Radio 4.

This is not simply about what the Secretary of State has said to Members. This is an important matter because of its impact on the railways and the travelling public; and it is important because as a result of what the Secretary of State has done, the Government may face legal action. The Railtrack shareholders action group has today written to the Secretary of State and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions requesting certain documents. The group has said that it has been hampered in its ability to obtain all the relevant facts, most notably by the Secretary of State's inconsistent account of events. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order.

Mrs. May: There was inconsistency regarding the project Renewco and the minutes of the meeting on 25 July. There is inconsistency between the evidence given by the Secretary of State to the Select Committee that Railtrack was in financial meltdown and that given by Railtrack's directors that the company was solvent prior to the Secretary of State's actions.

We have seen inconsistency from the Secretary of State at every turn. It is important because it may land the Government in legal action; it is important because

[Mrs. May]

of how much it will cost the taxpayer, which the Government simply do not know; and it is important because of the impact that the Secretary of State's shoddy handling of this sorry saga is having on the railways and on rail passengers. There has been a 45 per cent. increase in delays since administration. Phase 2 west coast main line upgrade—forget it. Special purpose vehicle for improvements to South Central—abandoned. The travelling public know the misery of the railways under the thin controller that is the Secretary of State.

Since Railtrack was put into administration on 7 October, the Secretary of State has made disputed statements to the House, his memory of events has been found wanting, there have been indications that he may have misled the House, he has blocked questions from Members of Parliament, he has threatened the Rail Regulator, jeopardised future private sector investment in the railway, presided over increased train delays, contaminated the Chancellor's autumn statement and been reprimanded by No. 10 Downing street—and he does not even have the guts to come to the House and explain himself.

It is time for the Secretary of State to come clean. His cunning plan has failed. The railways are in a mess. The public are waiting—they are waiting for answers, they are waiting for their trains and they are waiting for the Secretary of State to go.

6.45 pm

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): It was deja vu all over again tonight. In our last debate, I said that history repeats itself—in the first debate as tragedy and in the second as farce. Today was unmitigated tedium. I have had to sit here suffering it—Conservative Members did not even bother to stay. Even when the winding-up speeches started, they managed only a dozen on the Back Benches. At one stage, only two Conservative Members were here, but we will come back to that in a minute. They could not keep the crowd, even when their own were speaking. Old Trafford on a Saturday does not compare with the numbers streaming away from the debate.

We must look at what this is about. It is about the sort of game playing that was revealed by the memorandum of the shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). It bears further consideration. He gave some thoughts of the Conservative party's possible approaches to the new Parliament, saying:

> "I believe that we should Consider dividing the Parliamentary party into four or five groups each with a mixture of experienced and new Members."—

Tonight we have had the experienced, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), and the new, the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois). That was the lot, but at least the Conservatives achieved their objective of getting the right balance.

Mr. Redwood: Instead of giving us this childish drivel, will the Minister answer the questions that we have asked in the debate? Will he tell the travelling public how much money is available, when Railtrack will come out of administration and who can bid?

Mr. Spellar: I know that it is childish drivel, but the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst wrote it. He continues:

> "The group would undertake to cover all the business from 2.30 to after 10.00pm including as many divisions as necessary. Colleagues could arrange to 'trade' days"—

the trading mechanism obviously broke down today—

> "and a full turnout would be mounted once a month".

Mrs. May: The Minister is very keen to talk about matters for which he does not have responsibility. As Minister for Transport, he has responsibility for the running of the railways now that Railtrack is in administration. Will he answer the question? How long will Railtrack be in administration, and how much will it cost the taxpayer?

Mr. Spellar: Had the Conservative party wanted a debate on the railways and Railtrack, it would have tabled a motion to that effect, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) said in response to the right hon. Member for Wokingham. How the right hon. Gentleman must suffer, seeing the mess that Conservative Front Benchers are making—how he must grieve. That was the issue that he tried to raise, but that is not what we have had from the Opposition. Instead, we have had endless trivia and dross. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Mr. Spellar: The key point about this evening's debate—

Miss McIntosh: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Does the statement made by Mr. Speaker last week extend to the right of the Opposition to have an answer to the questions put in the course of a debate? This goes to the heart of Mr. Speaker's statement.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Minister must relate his remarks to the motion on the Order Paper.

Mr. Spellar: I am also responding to the debate—or rather the lack of it. I have to confess that I am not responsible for the fact that we are being subjected to such a load of political trivia and nitpicking from the Opposition. It is interesting that Opposition Members are getting up to defend the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst—who, heaven help us, is the MP for the area where my London house is—when he does not want to explain things himself. His memorandum and the motion demonstrate a degree of disregard and contempt for the Commons.

Chris Grayling: While the right hon. Gentleman is on the subject of contempt for the Commons, will he explain why last week, as a member of a Select Committee, I received the papers on the minute of the meeting of 25 July, to which hon. Members have referred, after it had been distributed to members of the national media?

Mr. Spellar: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman attacks the civil service for distributing material that had to go out on that day. Given the likelihood of it being leaked, it also had to be distributed appropriately to the press. If Opposition Members want to claim that they never leak Select Committee documents to the press, I will be interested to hear them make that argument stand up.

The memorandum from the shadow Leader of the House went on to mention other actions that the Conservatives would have to take. It stated:

> "The responsibilities which involve . . . travel and time away from Westminster should be allocated to colleagues who are likely to be here very little anyway, and ideally not to those who could contribute significantly to Chamber or Committee work."

Obviously quite a few Conservative Members must be part of that category because very few bothered to turn up for the debate. The shadow Leader of the House, the shadow Chief Whip and the shadow deputy Chief Whip had to bomb around and intervene because they could not find Back Benchers to do the job. That is the state to which the modern Conservative party has sunk, and I will return to that when I comment on the role of the Liberal Democrats.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) began with some confessions, and he asked for several other offences to be taken into consideration. He was not entirely forthcoming about his complete role. He was press secretary to John Major in 1992, director of communications for the Conservative party from 1992 to 1995, a member of the Prime Minister's policy unit at Downing street in 1995 and media consultant to the Conservative party chairman from 1995 to 1997. Those were, of course, periods of immense success for the Conservative party. I gather that they will be published under "Tim Collins: The Golden Years".

Mr. Collins: Does the right hon. Gentleman expect his leader, the Prime Minister, ever to secure as many votes as John Major did when I was his press secretary, because in two elections so far he has not come within 35 per cent. of doing so?

Mr. Spellar: As I have said before, and may even say in my rousing peroration, in two general elections—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Will all hon. Members who contribute to the debate relate their remarks to the motion? That includes interventions.

Mr. Spellar: I am of course dealing with the issues that the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale thought pertinent to raise in his introductory remarks, one of which was his history.

During the Wirral, South by-election, the then chairman of the Tory party said:

> "Mr. Collins's job is to harry and harass Labour"—

the Tories do not want to hear this—

> "at every turn to ensure that it does not inflict such a humiliating defeat that voters go to the polls in the general election with a stirring victory for Labour still fresh in their"—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the Minister and all hon. Members to concentrate their remarks on the subject of the debate.

Mr. Spellar: I take your point, Madam Deputy Speaker. I merely point out that there was a 17.2 per cent. swing to Labour in that election.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) made a fairly lengthy contribution in which he talked about openness and accuracy. We presume that he was not referring to Liberal "Focus" leaflets.

Another person who made an appearance during the debate was Mr. Bernard Ingham, now Sir Bernard Ingham, whose actions Conservative Members defended. In a previous debate on the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) drew attention to the fact that

> "Bernard Ingham ordered Colette Bowe, chief of information at the Department of Trade and Industry, to leak the letter to the detriment of Michael Heseltine. She was a conscientious civil servant and she refused to do that. Ingham said to her:
>
> 'You'll . . . well do what you're . . . well told.'
>
> The letter was leaked and when Ingham was asked about his conduct, he said in a speech to the Independent Broadcasting Association:
>
> 'I must tell you that I—and I am sure my colleagues—have never regarded the Official Secrets Act as a constraint on my operations. Indeed, I regard myself as licensed to break that law as and when I judge necessary; and I suppose it is necessary to break it every other minute of every working day, though I confess the issue is so academic that I have not bothered to seek counsel's advice.'"—[*Official Report*, 23 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 175.]

That was how Bernard Ingham saw his role.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham attempted to move the debate on to the railways but, surprisingly enough, that was not the subject of the motion. However, it is interesting, in the Holmesian sense of the dogs that did not bark, that no Conservative Member supported Railtrack. No one said what a good company it was or that privatisation was a tremendous and enormously successful wheeze, and that they could not understand how everything had gone wrong because John Major made such an impressive job of it. Equally, no one got up to say that Railtrack's management were doing such a good job that they could not understand why anyone thought it necessary to take action. No one mentioned that.

Chris Grayling: May I take the liberty of bringing the Minister closer to the subject of the debate? Will he explain why the evidence given to the Select Committee by the Secretary of State was directly contradicted by the permanent secretary in a letter to Sir Alastair Morton on 8 October?

Mr. Spellar: This is extraordinary. I talk about the political and constitutional issues, and the Conservatives say, "Why aren't you talking about the railway?", so I talk about the railway, and now they do not want to talk about it. It is clear that none of them wanted to talk about compensation, although in previous debates they were up and down asking about it. Now that I have asked what we are compensating for, who are we supposed to be compensating and for how much, they have gone remarkably quiet. They are all shtoom on the issue of compensation. It is clear that they have not got a clue about what they should do or what their policy should be.

[Mr. Spellar]

It is in the public domain that I do not have much time for the Liberal Democrats, but their claim to be the Opposition party has, by default—

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We still have not had a ruling on Mr. Speaker's ruling on whether a Minister ought to reply to a question that is in order rather than evade it.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my earlier comments.

Mr. Spellar: Once again, the Tories have shown themselves to be bankrupt of ideas and bankrupt of argument. If ever—heaven forbid—they were let loose on the public finances, they would also once again bankrupt the country. It is clear how they managed to double the national debt in five short years. They are seriously fiscally incontinent and have no clue about how to run the country. That, more than any other reason, is why they will stay on the Opposition Benches for a long time to come and why we will get on with government. As I said in previous debates, the electorate have decided that the Tories are unfit for government. Tonight. the Tories have once again shown that they are not even fit for Opposition.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 157, Noes 279.

Division No. 95] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Randall and
Mr. Laurence Robertson.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon
(Dunfermline E)
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*

Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ian Pearson and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 160.

Division No. 96] **[7.12 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon
(Dunfermline E)
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin

Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Pearson and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul

Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Randall and
Mr. Laurence Robertson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House deplores the attempt by HM Opposition to draw attention away from their lack of coherent policies on public service improvement; welcomes the Government's determination to uphold the highest standards of integrity and honesty in public life; acknowledges that the Government has been open about the standards Ministers, Civil Servants and Special Advisers are expected to uphold; welcomes the publication of the new Ministerial code including the requirements on greater transparency never seen before, attaching the highest importance to the prompt and efficient handling of Parliamentary Questions and correspondence; and commends the professionalism and integrity with which the Government continues to conduct departmental business in the best traditions of public service.

Public Services

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): We now come to the funding of public services. I must announce that the Speaker has selected the manuscript amendment, which is available to Members in the Vote Office.

7.23 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I beg to move,

That this House notes that the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement to the House of 27th November has been contradicted in whole or in part by the Secretary of State for Health, the Chairman of the Labour Party and Mr. Derek Wanless; further notes that the Chancellor of the Exchequer refused to endorse the statement made to the House by the Prime Minister on 28th November; and condemns the total confusion over funding the public services which these contradictions have caused among users and providers of these services.

Last Tuesday was a black day for Britain's public services and was especially black for health care in Britain. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, in one breath, called for a debate on health care funding, then announced the result of that debate. It is no wonder that on Friday *The Guardian* reported one Minister as saying:

"Gordon's idea of a debate is Gordon and a mirror".

The conclusion of that one-man debate is that

"a publicly funded national health service is best for Britain".

The Chancellor arrived at that conclusion not because of any evidence but in the teeth of all the evidence, and did so despite the fact that the Prime Minister said less than two months ago that the barriers between public and private are coming down all over the world. The Chancellor arrived at his conclusion despite the fact that all the countries that provide their people with better health care than we do do not have such a system and despite the fact that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development said only last week in its economic survey of the United Kingdom:

"Overall, the current plans to provide services privately in sectors such as health and education are limited. Such services are provided on a much larger scale privately in many OECD countries and greater ambition in this respect would raise competition and performance in these sectors."

The way in which the Chancellor reached his conclusions speaks volumes; it was the most bare-faced exercise in deception since he was deceived by the Prime Minister over sun-dried tomatoes in Granita all those years ago.

The Chancellor relied on the Wanless report. He said:

"So having examined whether a publicly funded national health service is sustainable . . . Mr. Wanless's view is that the principle of an NHS publicly funded through taxation . . . remains both the fairest and most efficient system for this country."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 838-39.]

At all times last Tuesday the Chancellor gave the impression that Mr. Wanless had carried out an objective and authoritative inquiry into the best way to fund health care in this country. Of course, that was a million miles from the truth. First, the Chancellor fixed the terms of reference that he set Mr. Wanless so that Mr. Wanless could consider only a publicly funded health care model.

The terms of reference asked Mr. Wanless to

"identify the key factors which will determine the financial and other resources required to ensure that the NHS can provide a publicly funded service."

[Mr. Michael Howard]

Far from asking Mr. Wanless to look at different methods, the Chancellor told him not to do that; he asked a Labour question and he got a Labour answer.

Phil Hope (Corby): I have a simple question for the right hon. and learned Gentleman. Will the Opposition match Labour's commitment to spending on the NHS and do they support an NHS based on clinical need, not on the ability to pay—his policy, which was leaked to the press?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman has asked an interesting question—*[Interruption.]* Yes, I will answer it. The hon. Gentleman asked whether I would match Labour's spending commitment on the NHS. We do not know what that commitment is—*[Interruption.]* I am coming directly to the hon. Gentleman's question, which I shall answer in detail; he just needs to be patient for a moment and he will have a comprehensive answer.

The references in the Wanless report to different systems of financing health care are all expressed in terms of their effect on the economy, itself a reflection on those terms of reference. They state that the report should allow the Chancellor

"to consider the possible implications of this analysis for the Government's wider fiscal and economic strategies in the medium term and to inform decisions in the next public spending review in 2002."

Most telling of all, the Chancellor's cover was blown within hours by Mr. Wanless himself. On Thursday, Mr. Wanless said:

> "I've not sought to bury anything for good. It would be quite presumptuous and premature for anybody to think they could do that. When the figures are available about what resources are likely to be required that's the time at which people will be looking at the financial options . . . Issues about precisely how they should be financed are . . . not for decision now."

The Chancellor's own carefully picked appointee has given him the lie and directly contradicted him. When Mr. Wanless says that it would be premature and presumptuous of anybody to think that they could bury anything for good, who does the Chancellor think he had in mind? Who could he possibly be referring to but the Chancellor himself? The Chancellor's elaborate attempt to fix that exercise has collapsed about his ears.

It was not just the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who "contaminated" the pre-Budget report last week; the Chancellor did so himself. His attempt to hoodwink everyone—the House, the nation, even the Prime Minister—has spectacularly imploded. It is not surprising that the Downing street spin machine swung into action.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: In a moment.

The spin machine claimed that "everything's up for grabs"; that the Government were prepared to "think the unthinkable"; that Downing street is "less protective" than the Treasury; and that there are "no holds barred", but it was too late. On Tuesday the Chancellor had indeed barred the holds. He had boxed everyone in and slammed the door on the debate for which he himself had called. He has robbed our country of the opportunity for the better health care that we so desperately need.

I give way to the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Treasury.

Mr. McFall: The right hon. and learned Gentleman uses the word "hoodwink" freely. So that we can get it straight and so that he does not hoodwink anyone, will he reflect on his party's manifesto, which stated that the Conservatives would provide a fully comprehensive NHS, free at the point of use? Does he intend to hoodwink people and deny that now?

Mr. Howard: We certainly will provide an NHS that is fully comprehensive, and we will spell out our detailed proposals long before the next general election.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): Is it still the policy of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's party to charge for some GP services? If so, which services does he intend to charge for?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Lady will have to wait some time before she gets an answer to that question, but she will get it long before the next general election, when the British people will see exactly what we propose.

Mr. McFall: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I asked the shadow Chancellor a question, and I am dismayed that he did not answer the second part, about whether the health service would be free at the point of use. Can you come to my aid and ensure that he answers it?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is a point of debate, rather than a point of order.

Mr. Howard: I want the Chancellor to answer some questions when he replies to the debate. I want him to confirm whether, as has been widely reported, the Health Secretary was told of the Chancellor's intentions only on Monday last week, 24 hours before his statement. The Health Secretary is reported to be "furious". [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] Surely my hon. Friends would not expect the Health Secretary to come and support the Chancellor. We are told, for good measure, that the Prime Minister is also angry, on behalf of the Health Secretary.

One of the most astonishing things about last week was that the Chancellor was disappointed by the coverage that his announcement received in the press on Wednesday. So what did he do? He cleared his diary and rushed down to Wapping to see *The Sun*. He told *The Sun:*

> "I am going to insist any additional resources must be matched by reforms so that we get the best value for money. There is not to be one penny more until we get the changes".

That must have caused the Secretary of State for Health some alarm. After all, only 48 hours earlier he had been promised an extra £1 billion next year. No mention was made of any conditions. On Tuesday the Chancellor promises £1 billion, and on Thursday he says that the NHS must reform first. This is my first challenge to the Chancellor tonight: what exactly does he have in mind? When does he expect those reforms to be in place? What criteria will he use to decide whether to release the money? When will he make that decision, and when will he announce it?

I can tell the Secretary of State for Health that he need not worry too much. The Chancellor has told *The Sun* exactly the same thing before. He wrote an article for *The Sun* on 15 July 1998, in which he stated:

> "We are determined you get value for every penny we spend to give you the public services you want. . . Unless standards and targets are met, they will lose money. It's payment by results."

Nothing happened, however. Nothing happened in 1998, in 1999, last year or this year. The money has continued to pour in and, as the Government admit, much of it has been wasted.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): As he is speaking of interviews, does the right hon. and learned Gentleman stand by his remarks in the *Financial Times* last week, that the NHS is a Stalinist creation?

Mr. Howard: The NHS is indeed a Stalinist creation. *[Interruption.]* Yes, it is. That is the age in which it was born, and it does much more to hinder and hamper the efforts of those who work in it—who work heroically despite it—than it does to help them.

Let us see how the evolving saga develops. After 18 years in opposition to consider these matters and after four years in government, what do the Government do? They set up a new committee. Once the Prime Minister got to know the terms of reference of the Wanless committee—he clearly did not know about them until they were produced in the House last Tuesday—he thought that he had better remind people of his own committee, the Adair Turner committee. So important was the Turner committee that the Prime Minister appeared to have forgotten all about it. The Chancellor certainly made no mention of it in his statement last Tuesday, yet on Friday night he was hurriedly dispatched to give an interview to "News at 10", giving the impression that it was an entirely new committee.

It is worth reminding people of the Turner committee. It was set up in October. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members should be listening to what their Prime Minister's committee—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): Mr. McNulty!

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The word "Order" applies to both sides of the House.

Mr. Howard: I am interested that the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), from his usual sedentary position, says that it is not worth reminding people of the Turner committee, but it is his Prime Minister's committee, not mine. The Prime Minister set it up. It was set up in October and asked to do what was described as "blue sky" thinking, looking

> "not less than five years and probably 10 to 15 years out".

However, we were told that its conclusions would never be made public. The outcome, Downing street said, would be "private, for private thinking".

My second challenge to the Chancellor is this: is that still the position, or have the Government changed their mind on that as well? Will we ever be told the conclusions of the Turner committee? If so, when? The Wanless committee is supposed to study the amount of money needed for health care. The Turner committee is supposed to examine the way in which health care is managed. It does not seem to have occurred to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor that there may be some connection between the two—between the way in which health care is financed and the way in which it is provided.

What health care in this country needs is not more committees; it needs radical reform so that the dedicated doctors and nurses working in it can be helped, and not hampered by the structure in which they work. It needs action to ensure that the money wasted on the NHS—between £7 billion and £10 billion, according to reports this weekend—is no longer wasted. It needs to be able to put an end to the state of affairs in which people die in our country from illnesses that they would survive in other countries. It needs extra resources, in addition to those that can be provided out of general taxation.

That is what happens in every other country with health care better than ours. It is what the OECD recommends, and what would offer the best prospect of bringing better health care to Britain. That is why today my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Health Secretary are in Stockholm, as part of a series of visits to learn from other health care systems in Europe and beyond. Our party has put health care reform at the very top of our agenda.

Let no one be in any doubt about how badly we need better health care. Even the Prime Minister was unable last week to dispute the claims of his party chairman that far from improving, the national health service has gone backwards since 1997. Even Mr. Wanless says in his report:

> "Across a range of health outcome indicators, the picture which emerges is one of generally poor outcomes in the UK relative to comparator countries, with significant gaps between the UK and the best performers for key outcome measures."

Even Sir Stephen Robson, a recent permanent secretary in the Treasury and someone who has worked very closely with the Chancellor, says:

> "Don't have breast cancer or lung cancer, don't want to go to accident and emergency, don't want to have a non-urgent operation in the UK—you'd be better off in continental Europe."

This Government have made promise after promise on the health service. They have broken their promises, they are beginning to be rumbled, they have no idea what to do about it and the result is blind panic.

So, is it any wonder that the Chancellor and the Prime Minister are at sixes and sevens? Last Wednesday, the Prime Minister could not have been clearer. When asked whether it was still Government policy to raise health spending to the EU average by 2005, he replied, "Of course it is." The following day, the Leader of the House announced that he wanted to clarify that statement. We were told that when the Prime Minister had said 2005, he meant to say 2006. Conveniently, that means that he will have to be held to account after, rather than before, the likely date of the next general election.

Then the Chancellor got in on the act. In his interview with *The Sun*, he refused to explain what the Prime Minister actually meant. He refused to say whether the promise applied to EU spending at the time mentioned in

[Mr. Howard]

the Prime Minister's original promise or in 2005, so the Prime Minister's official spokesman was brought in. When he was asked to shed light on this appalling mess, he said:

> "the Prime Minister's words at PMQs this afternoon spoke for themselves".

Unfortunately for him, the Prime Minister took a different view. Yesterday, he decided to downgrade what had been a firm commitment to the status of a mere aspiration "in broad terms"—the Chancellor smiles about that, as he has had his way—and the Secretary of State for Health yesterday described it as an aim.

My third challenge for the Chancellor is this: will he now clarify matters? *[Interruption.]* Is it a firm commitment or a vague aspiration? Does it relate to European health spending in 2000, 2001, 2005 or 2006? Does it relate to averages including or excluding Britain? Are those averages weighted for population differences, or is Germany being given the same weight as Luxembourg? *[Interruption.]* And when will it be achieved: 2005, 2006, some time or never? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is clear that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is not prepared to give way at this point.

Mr. Howard: This is not some arcane, theoretical dispute, but a matter that is vital for the lives of every person in this country. The Chancellor must make the Government's position clear once and for all.

The confusion does not end there. The Secretary of State for Health and the chairman of the Labour party are reported to have called for a hypothecated health tax. They are said to have the support of the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) has asked the Government to consider compulsory social insurance or a ring-fenced health tax. He said:

> "These systems must all be properly examined."

So, my fourth challenge to the Chancellor is this: does he agree with his Cabinet colleagues and the right hon. Member for Hartlepool, or with the Treasury aide who described the idea of a hypothecated health tax as foolish? The Chancellor has called for a consensus, but he cannot achieve it even in his own Cabinet.

If the Government, blinded by their prejudices against the private sector, refuse to put patients first, the Opposition will do so. We genuinely recognise that, in the words of the Prime Minister,

> "round the world, the barriers between public and private are coming down".

Our overriding objective is to improve the quality of health care in Britain. We are not so arrogant as to believe that we can achieve better health care for the British people without learning from countries that have already achieved better health care for their people. We are not so dogmatic as to arrive at our opinions before embarking on our review and we are not so blinkered as to set the terms of reference, as the Chancellor did, so as to make the conclusions inevitable.

The Government have demonstrated in the past few days that we will never get the health care that we need so long as they remain in power. We must show that we will do better, and that is exactly what we intend to do.

7.45 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): I beg to move, as a manuscript amendment, in line 1, leave out from "House" to end and add

> "welcomes the Pre-Budget Report with its emphasis on delivering high quality public services accessible to all in society as part of the Government's wider agenda to match resources with modernisation to progress reform; particularly welcomes Mr Derek Wanless's interim report "Securing our Future Health: Taking a Long-Term View", the first comprehensive look at the long term funding needs of the Health Service; notes Mr Wanless's conclusion that there is no evidence that any alternative financing method to the UK's would deliver a given quality of healthcare more equitably and at a lower cost to the economy; and reaffirms its support as stated by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor for future increases in public funding and NHS reform to ensure a comprehensive high quality service available on the basis of clinical need and not ability to pay."

I shall answer all the detailed points that have been made and take interventions from the Opposition during my speech.

Mr. Howard *rose—*

Hon. Members: Give way!

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Mr. Brown: Before giving way, I want to set down our argument as a Government.

Mr. Howard: Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Brown: I have said that I shall give way during my speech, but I want to set down my argument.

First, we believe in a health service that is free at the point of need; the question that we must ask ourselves this evening is this: do the Opposition? Secondly, we believe in a health service that is principally funded from tax revenue—*[Interruption.]* Oh, indeed. The question is, do the Opposition? Thirdly, we believe in more investment in the health service, but the question is, do the Opposition? Fourthly, we believe in a continuing programme of reform in the health service, but do the Opposition still believe in the health service at all?

My hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Treasury, asked the shadow Chancellor a very interesting question at the beginning of the debate. He asked whether the Opposition still believed in a comprehensive health service that was free at the point of use. At the general election, all Opposition Members had no doubt about the answer to that question. Individually, like us and the Liberals, they stood for election on a manifesto—I quote the Conservative one—that referred to

> "a comprehensive health service free to all its users."

Why could not the shadow Chancellor repeat that commitment this evening?

I shall tell the House why the right hon. and learned Gentleman could not do so, as I have in front of me the memorandum written by the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) to the shadow Chancellor on 12 November. It is marked "Private and Confidential". I am sure that the Opposition now wish that it had been kept private and confidential. Let me refer to what the Flight memorandum, as we will now call it, said. *[Interruption.]* It answers the very big question about why the shadow Chancellor could not say that he supported a free health service at the point of need. I think that Opposition Members should listen, because this will feature in every constituency in the country.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall be very happy to give way after making this point. The memorandum said:

> "we remain vulnerable to the irritating attack that we are the Party who will be cutting back on healthcare expenditure to reduce taxation.
>
> We need to resolve and agree how we are going to break out of this, well ahead of the next General Election, or we will have the same problems of emasculation in this territory, that we had this summer. I believe most of our colleagues are looking to the Treasury Team to address this territory, but clearly the key is the fleshing out of the broad policy guidelines which IDS has set out in relation to healthcare."

What is that broad policy guideline? The memorandum continues:

> "Quite logically, we will, therefore, be looking to lower the taxes on people at the same time, enabling them to have more of their own money to spend on better and more efficient healthcare . . . Put more simply, what Iain has already said in principle, with regard to healthcare, should have the corollary of reducing taxation to leave people with more of the income . . . to spend on the provision of improved healthcare."

[Interruption.] Conservative Members should listen. We have reached the main point because the memorandum also states:

> "The reforms, which we will be proposing, will end the NHS monopoly and will entail those who can afford it making some payment for healthcare services."

That is not simply a suggestion or idea. The deputy Treasury spokesman wrote that. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members will have to face up to that in every constituency. I repeat:

> "The reforms which we will be proposing . . . will entail . . . some payment for healthcare services."

The memorandum also states that solving problems will require

> "a degree of charging for healthcare service."

[Interruption.] The shadow Chancellor already regrets the debate. Should not we be told whether the charges are for visits to general practitioners or to hospitals? Are they for operations? Are they for medical drugs that are currently free? What proportion of people would be expected to pay the charges? What services would the rest obtain? Who would be exempted? What would happen to the terminally ill, cancer patients and old age pensioners?

If Conservative Members call for a debate in the House about the future funding of public services, they have a duty to tell us—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Oh yes they do. Every Conservative Member stood on a manifesto—*[Interruption.]* They cannot get away from it. They stood on a manifesto that stated that there would be a comprehensive health service that was free to all at the point of need. Yet the deputy Treasury spokesman says not that there might be charges, but that there will be charges.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) if he tells me how he will justify a policy of charging to his constituents.

Mr. Goodman: Will the Chancellor confirm or deny that the Secretary of State for Health received only 24 hours notice of his plans last week? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Brown: Madam Deputy Speaker—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must come to order. An intervention has been made and the Chancellor is responding to it.

Mr. Brown: The Secretary of State for Health received full notice of our decisions, but the hon. Member for Wycombe refused to say whether he supports charges.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I shall give way in a minute. First, let us consider another piece of evidence. Nicky Campbell asked the Leader of the Opposition in an interview on Radio 5 on 22 June whether his health plans would involve people paying for treatment. The right hon. Gentleman replied: "Absolutely." Conservative Members cannot answer questions about their manifesto because they are planning charges for the health service.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Will the Chancellor confirm or deny plans to raise the upper earnings limit on national insurance contributions to pay for health care?

Mr. Brown: We gave our promises on taxation at the general election.

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): Will the Chancellor clarify early in the debate whether the Prime Minister was right to say that the point of the Chancellor's statement last week was to ensure the fulfilment of the Prime Minister's commitment 18 months ago to raise spending on the health service to the EU average by 2005? Was the Prime Minister right?

Mr. Brown: Of course that is our policy. That is exactly what the Prime Minister said on Wednesday. The day before, I said that we wanted a substantially increased proportion of the national income to be used for health expenditure.

I shall explain what has happened in the past few years. As a proportion of national income, health expenditure increased from 6.9 per cent. That would not have happened under the Tories when the average was 6.2 per cent. Under us, it increased to 7.2 per cent. The Tories would not have done that. It will go up to 7.4 per cent., 7.6 per cent. and 7.8 per cent. Again, the Tories would not have done that. The Government are keeping their promises.

[Mr. Brown]

I want to explain to Conservative Members why charging is wrong. The debate must focus on that central point.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I shall give way in a minute. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. If hon. Members want to make a contribution, that is no way to go about it.

Mr. Brown: The shadow Chancellor refuses to tell us whether he supports charges. However, I have a copy of his election literature. He issued a leaflet, in which one item is entitled "The Future of the NHS". What did he say in it? I shall give way so that he can tell us.

Mr. Howard: The Chancellor is right; we had no such proposals at the last election. However, he has overlooked the fact that his party won the election. The Labour party is responsible for funding the NHS for the next four years. When will he grow up, accept his responsibilities, do what he promised at the outset of his speech and answer the questions that I asked him?

Mr. Brown: I know why the shadow Chancellor is rattled. He cannot tell us whether he will support charges for the NHS in this Parliament. What did he say at the general election? The leaflet states:

> "But there will be no charges".

It goes on:

> "Do not believe the lies which are being spread by our opponents. Conservatives will retain a free and comprehensive national health service".

He was right then and he is wrong now because a free NHS is the right policy for this country on the ground of equity. It means that everybody, irrespective of income, gets the health care that they need. It is right because comprehensive care means that people are not discouraged from using health care services through lack of income. It is right because it is an efficient system, which avoids the form filling and bureaucracy that a charging system would entail.

Mr. Gale *rose—*

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I shall give way in a minute. Conservative Members are making a historic decision this evening. They tell us that they are no longer prepared to commit themselves to the principle on which the NHS was built 50 years ago. At the general election, they said that they supported a comprehensive service that was free at the point of need. They no longer support it and they will have to answer to their constituents for that.

Mr. Gale: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: In a minute.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Once again, I call the House to order. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is on his feet.

Mr. Gale: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You quite rightly admonished me earlier for making an intervention from a sedentary position. You said that I had to ask the Chancellor whether he would give way. Since then, I have tried to persuade the right hon. Gentleman to give way. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order for the Chair. It is up to a Minister whether he or she decides to give way.

Mr. Brown: I want to make some progress.

Mr. Howard: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I will give way in a minute, but I want to develop my argument because the issue is not simply that the Conservatives are prepared to contemplate charges for the first time in their history. It is also that they are prepared to abandon a tax revenue-based national health service. The reason that the Flight memorandum says all that is because of the commitments that the shadow Chancellor has made in another direction. He will have to think before he gets to his feet again, because of the speeches that he has been making from 1997 onwards. Those speeches explain why the Conservatives have to cut public expenditure.

Mr. Jack: Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Brown: I will give way in a minute.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): This is a very long minute.

Mr. Brown: The Conservative party does not like— *[Interruption.]* I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Jack: The Chancellor has made some comments about charging. Will he explain why he condones and supports the charging of elderly people for many aspects of their social care?

Mr. Brown: The right hon. Gentleman knows that we are operating rules that have been operated by both political parties over the last few years. He also knows that we are now talking about charges for a visit to a GP. *[Interruption.]* The Conservatives do not like hearing about this, but it is about time they faced up to it.

Mr. Howard: Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Brown: I will give way in a minute. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Can we please let this debate proceed with some degree of decorum?

Mr. Brown: The health spokesman of the Conservative party has said:

> "I think my commitment to the NHS is clear. We have said we will maintain a fully comprehensive NHS, free at the point of use, in our manifesto. I have said it since I can ever remember being in politics, and that's something that will go on."

How can the shadow Chancellor say that once the election is over, the promises will go?

Mr. Howard: The Chancellor was waxing eloquent a few moments ago about how effective, efficient and equitable the national health service is. Is he proud of a service that tells one of my constituents, who is 83 years old and suffering from Parkinson's disease, that he has to wait 83 weeks to see a consultant neurologist? Is that the national health service of which the Chancellor is proud?

Mr. Brown: I am proud of the fact that the national health service does not charge people for treatment in the way that the right hon. Gentleman wants to do. Under his proposals, the constituent whom he mentioned would have to pay. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This debate will proceed, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer and other right hon. and hon. Members will be heard, but not all together.

Mr. Brown: Let us be clear why the Conservatives cannot commit themselves to a health service that is free at the point of use, and why they have abandoned that principle. The reason is that the shadow Chancellor has been going round the country for years making promises about cutting public expenditure.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Brown: I have given way quite enough.

The shadow Chancellor has said that we are spending too much money. His whole point is that we are spending too much money—this year, next year, last year. In other words, he is saying that spending should be cut. That is the shadow Chancellor's position. Why? I shall read out this quote, so that people can understand where the Conservative party is coming from:

> "With trend economic growth of 2 plus per cent. and real spending growth held to 1 per cent., we would have cut the Government's share of spending to below 37 per cent. I believe we might have done even better."

That was the shadow Chancellor's programme for the last Parliament, which would have meant public spending cuts of £10 billion a year. In 1997, in a speech that now influences the whole thinking of the shadow Cabinet, he said:

> "Our aim should be to reduce the proportion of national output taken by the state towards 35 per cent."

[Interruption.] Perhaps the shadow Chancellor denies that he made that speech.

Mr. Howard *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Brown: No, he does not. In the speech, he went on to say:

> "I believe that 35 per cent. is a realistic and attainable goal."

What would 35 per cent. mean? It would mean £50 billion of cuts in public expenditure. It makes the Letwin manifesto at the last election look moderate. It is the most extreme proposal for cuts in public expenditure that could be made. What would it mean for the future of the national health service in this country? Could the income of the national health service rise by 6 per cent. a year in real terms under that policy? The answer is no.

Mr. Howard: Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Brown: I will give way in a minute.

Could the national health service get £5 billion extra a year under the shadow Chancellor's proposals? The answer is no. Why cannot he now commit himself to a free national health service? Because he plans to cut public spending to 35 per cent. of national income—a £50 billion cut—and I say to hon. Members that this is the trouble with having a shadow Chancellor who has a record.

Mr. Howard: Instead of taking us on this trip down memory lane, will the Chancellor now keep the promise that he made at the beginning of his speech and answer in detail all the questions that I put to him in my speech?

Mr. Brown: The problem is that all the questions are now for the Conservatives.

Mr. Goodman: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Chancellor to say at the beginning of his speech that he will answer the points made, then, halfway through the speech, to refuse to do so? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Brown: I must explain that I have had to follow this line of questioning because the Conservatives seem to have concluded that the reason they lost the last election was that they were not extreme enough. They seem to have concluded that, if only they had told the electorate that they would abolish the national health service, people would have rushed towards them. They now seem to be planning a pledge card for the next election, which would offer five pledges: charges for GP visits; charges for hospital visits; charges for operations; cutting national health service expenditure; and ending the national health service entirely. That is what the Flight memorandum says. That is what the shadow Chancellor means when he refuses to rule out charges. It is also what he means by his proposal to cut public expenditure to 35 per cent.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I will give way once more, then I will finish my remarks.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Will the Chancellor clarify the Treasury's position on hypothecation? I understand that the Treasury is concerned that revenues might rise or fall with the cycle. I wonder whether the Chancellor has had the opportunity to see my article, published this morning in the Institute for Public Policy Research journal, which shows how that problem could be dealt with. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have certainly not seen the hon. Gentleman's article—neither can I hear his comments.

Mr. Brown: I have been too busy reading the shadow Chancellor's speeches to read the hon. Gentleman's article, but I assure him that I will do so.

[Mr. Brown]

Opposition Members know perfectly well that we have embarked on a programme of NHS reform. Seventy-five per cent. of the money is going back to primary care trusts; we are renegotiating contracts for doctors, including consultants, and nurses; and there is a programme of reform at the centre, where we are devolving power to the localities.

Mr. Howard: Centralising.

Mr. Brown: Ah! The shadow Chancellor now draws me into a discussion of his view of the national health service as a Stalinist creation. I believe that a Conservative party that holds that it can describe the health service not just as centralist but as a Stalinist creation is making a very big mistake. The shadow Chancellor is saying that when the service was created it was wrong, at that time. That is what he is saying: it is a Stalinist creation, and therefore it was wrong even in 1948. The Conservative party is now abandoning a consensus that was accepted by Sir Winston Churchill, Harold Macmillan and Lady Thatcher, all of whom believed that we should not abandon the national health service.

The debate on hypothecation will continue, but I think all parties—and the shadow Chancellor, representing the last Government, took the same view—would not want to make the funding of the NHS dependent on, or hostage to, the economic cycle. They would not want one tax relating to changes in behaviour to make the service a victim of a situation that it should not have to live through, when what we want is sustainable, long-term funding.

That is what tonight's debate is about. We believe in a national health service that is free at the point of use; it is clear that the Opposition now do not. We believe in a tax-funded national health service; it is clear that the Opposition want a system of private health insurance. We believe in more investment in the NHS; the Opposition want to cut investment.

I say this of the shadow Chancellor: he got every major decision wrong in his past career in politics. *[Interruption.]* Oh, yes. He was the brains behind the poll tax. He defended the Conservative Government when the interest rate was 15 per cent. He is the man who said that a minimum wage would cost a million jobs—and it created a million jobs. He is the Minister who said that we were the worst-placed country to deal with the economic difficulties around the world—and people know that this year we have been the best-placed country to do that.

The shadow Chancellor has also got it wrong on the national health service. He will live to regret a debate in which he has refused to rule out charging in the service. Labour wants to build the national health service; it is clear that the Conservatives want to destroy it. Tonight, Members should vote to build it.

Mr. Keith Simpson: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will we, at some stage during the debate, hear a speech from the Chancellor about the Government's policy?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair.

8.13 pm

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): At this point, we should remember where the debate started back in 1997, when the Conservatives, after years of under-investment, left the NHS in truly dire straits. We now know why: it was because they believe the NHS to be a Stalinist institution.

Do the Conservatives not realise that Stalin killed millions of people, whereas the NHS and its staff strain every sinew to save millions of people? NHS staff—doctors, nurses, ancillaries and the rest—would be appalled to hear first the so-called leader of that party and then the shadow Chancellor argue that theirs is a Stalinist organisation. How far from the truth could that be? How can people now believe that the Conservative party is committed to maintaining a national health service that is free at the point of use, and serving every person in the country?

Back in 1997, Labour argued that it had 24 hours to save the NHS. That may be the case at the next election: it was made plain this evening that a Conservative Government, if elected, would abolish the national health service as we know it. Whatever else Labour may have done, however, it failed to save the NHS in 24 hours, or even in a number of years. Its commitment to stick to Conservative spending plans, without even the annual review that the Conservatives would have delivered, led to a fall in the proportion of national wealth spent on the NHS during its early years in office. As a result, doctors and nurses were not trained—which resulted in the Government's current problem.

The error was repeated at the last general election, which the Government fought on the basis that the NHS had effectively been rescued, and that their spending plans would deliver the goods. They have had to admit that they got that wrong too. The Liberal Democrats argued throughout that it would only be possible to find the investment needed for the NHS if the Government faced head-on the raising of taxes that was necessary to increase the proportion of gross domestic product spent on the service.

Let us not give the Government too much credit for their change of mind. We welcome it, but we should recall the blistering attacks launched by both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor on any Members—including those on their own side—who argued that, in the long run, the NHS could secure the investment it needed only if the Government were prepared to invest a higher proportion of GDP, and that that meant facing the tax issue, if the economy was to be managed properly.

In July 1997, just after the general election, the former leader of the Liberal Democrats asked:

> "If I were to say to the Prime Minister that one of his Health Ministers has now announced that his Government will spend £350 million less next winter on the health service than the outgoing Conservative Government would have done, would he be surprised?"

All that the Prime Minister could say was:

> "As I have already said, we have inherited the spending plans of the previous Administration."—[*Official Report*, 30 July 1997; Vol.299, c. 334.]

Any Government inherit the spending plans of their predecessors, but not many choose to implement them. That mistake has haunted the present Government to this day.

Chris Grayling: Is it the policy of the hon. Gentleman's party to support the principle of raising health care spending by the state to the European average? If so, does his party support the substantial tax increases that would, it appears, be required?

Matthew Taylor: The hon. Gentleman may have been diverted from this during the election campaign, but our manifesto made both those promises.

More recently, the Government proved still to be making the same mistakes. *[Interruption.]* I gave the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) as clear an answer as anyone could give: my answers were yes and yes. I know that Conservative Members find it difficult to give any answers themselves, but they should at least understand when someone else is giving an answer—although I suppose that lack of use of the "yes" bit of the brain, or come to that the "no" bit, and limiting oneself to the "don't know" bit, makes it hard to give or indeed receive a straight answer.

Chris Grayling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way again, very briefly?

Matthew Taylor: I will in due course.

The error to which I referred, however, did not occur just in 1997; it rolled forward. In April 2000 the present leader of the Liberal Democrats, at a time when the Chancellor was delivering a cut in income tax, challenged the Prime Minister thus:

> "Does it remain the Prime Minister's intention over five years to get health spending in the country up to European levels? If so, does he believe that a tax cut in April will assist that process?"—[*Official Report*, 1 March 2000; Vol. 345, c. 418.]

We now know what the answer was. No, it would not assist the process. The Chancellor, having cut income tax in April 2000, now tells us that we may need to face tax increases.

Things did not change in the election of June 2001 either. Labour consistently denied that more money needed to be raised through tax; indeed, the Chancellor could not have been more explicit. That raises a serious question about the honesty of the Government and their approach to the wider electorate. It seems hard to believe that things have changed so dramatically between the election in June and the pre-Budget statement at the end of November. The Chancellor says that it is not due to the change in economic circumstances, so what exactly is it due to? The wheels have come off new Labour's bandwagon and they are all going in entirely different directions.

On spending, 18 months ago, the Prime Minister jumped the Chancellor on the "Frost" programme. The Prime Minister promised:

> "We will bring it up to the European average",

but immediately the Chancellor worked to obfuscate: it was aims, targets, ambitions, never a commitment. Again, in the pre-Budget report last week, he hinted, flirted but remained no more than a tease.

Again, it took the Prime Minister to let the cat out of the bag. Last Wednesday, at Prime Minister's questions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy), the leader of the Liberal Democrats, asked the key question, which incidentally the leader of the Conservative party failed even to spot. My right hon. Friend said:

> "The Prime Minister committed himself to raising health expenditure in our country to the European Union average by 2005. Is that still the policy of his Government?"

The Prime Minister said:

> "Of course it is. That is precisely the point of the Chancellor's announcement yesterday."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 964.]

Ever since, the policy of the Government has been in total confusion. It seemed for five days that that had been precisely not the point of the Chancellor's speech. He rushed to *The Sun*, which said:

> "the Chancellor refused to say if the promise applied to EU spending at the time of Mr. Blair's promise—or to the levels which will be reached in 2005."

Perhaps the Chancellor can clarify that.

By Sunday, the Prime Minister had buckled under the force of his Chancellor's will. *The Independent on Sunday* reported:

> "'I am not deciding spending levels now'"—

not quite what we thought he said at Prime Minister's questions—

> "Mr. Blair said, making it clear he was talking generally . . . his commitment to match European health spending—originally made 18 months ago and repeated in the Commons on Wednesday—was only a 'broad' aim."

At today's lobby briefing, the Prime Minister's spokesman went out of his way to say that the Prime Minister had said that it was only the Government's aim. I quote from the e-mail briefing that we received:

> "We are not going to slap on a particular figure when we have a CSR review and we have the Wanless report."

He said that those were important processes that had to be completed before the Government could tie themselves to a figure. He added:

> "It is our aim to bring our spending up to the European average by 2005/6."

Now we know how to get a statement from the Chancellor. When it becomes the Prime Minister's aim, when he backtracks, the Chancellor comes charging forward and says, "No, this is our committed policy." If only the Prime Minister 18 months ago had not committed himself to it on the Frost programme; we would probably have heard it previously from the Chancellor.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): The hon. Gentleman criticises, carps and calls for honesty from the Chancellor. The Liberal Democrats call for an increase in spending on education, health, transport, the environment and small businesses. Can we have a little honesty from them? By how much would they put up taxes to achieve their aims?

Matthew Taylor: It was all set out in our manifesto. Incidentally, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the BBC economics department and others all concluded that our figures added up. Clearly, the Chancellor's did not, because he has had to do a complete U-turn in only six or seven months following the general election.

[Matthew Taylor]

That said, the House may now have the vague impression that the Government's position is clear. The Chancellor has said, "Yes, it is our commitment to meet the EU target by 2005", and that is welcome news. I think that it means some increase in spending for the NHS. Unfortunately, the Treasury is redefining the EU target. Perhaps that is why the Chancellor now feels able to make that commitment.

The King's Fund and the Institute for Fiscal Studies both believe that the position is clear: there is a substantial gap, even on the Government's present spending plans. The size of the countries should be taken into account. Luxembourg, one of the smallest, does not spend so much, but then perhaps it is not overly reliant on the immediate health services in Luxembourg itself. If the reasonable view is taken that the larger countries count for more, on an independent basis, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the King's Fund and others all conclude that the Government will fall substantially short of their target.

The Government now use an average that includes the United Kingdom. That helps to bring the figure down as UK spending is low in any case, but the humdinger is that every country across the European Union faces similar pressures to those that have caused so much difficulty in the NHS: the increase in demand, the development of technology, the need to pay doctors and nurses a reasonable wage. Across the world, other workers are benefiting from growth in the economies through the wage packet. Doctors and nurses obviously need the same, but the Chancellor is off the hook in one bound because the target is to meet not the EU average, but the EU average as it used to be. It is not to bring us up to the European Union, but to allow us permanently to fall ever further behind.

Chris Grayling: May I seek the hon. Gentleman's clarification on an important point? He said that his party was committed to raising health care spending in this country to the European average; he gave the answer, "Yes" a moment ago. Did his proposals at the general election raise sufficient money to do that? If not, where will the money come from to fill the gap? What extra taxation does his party want to raise to meet that target?

Matthew Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is drawing me down the line of an alternative Budget presentation with the full details. We published such a Budget at the last general election. I shall not deliver it now but, if he is interested, we will continue to deliver our alternative spending plans at each and every Budget, which is more than his Front-Bench team has ever done. We have a clear commitment from the shadow Chancellor not to do it in March.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): What conclusions does my hon. Friend draw about the Conservative party's commitment to the NHS, given its statements in the debate today and given the fact that barely 10 Conservative Members have bothered to turn up for their own Opposition day debate?

Matthew Taylor: The shadow Chancellor spelt it out: the NHS is a Stalinist institution. We do not need to ask ourselves; he is more than happy to tell us. He believes that those who can afford to should pay towards their health care. That is the difference that he, together with his leader, has brought to the Front-Bench team. Even the old policy that they defend the NHS in theory if not in practice is now abandoned. Theory and practice have come together: they do not believe in the NHS.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Matthew Taylor: Will my hon. Friend give me a moment, because I want to turn to other areas where the Government are unravelling?

Who runs the NHS? Early last year, cracks were already appearing between the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Health. On 27 November 2000, just about a year ago, BBC Online said:

> "Early press reports suggested that Health Secretary Alan Milburn had some sympathy with the proposals"

for a hypothecated health tax.

On 27 November, *The Times* said:

> Alan Milburn, the Health Secretary, last night signalled that he would risk the wrath of the Treasury by backing proposals to ring-fence half of all income tax revenue for the NHS."

On 28 November, *The Guardian* said:

> "Earmarked taxes are seen by some, including Home office minister Charles Clarke, as the best means of improving the popularity of direct taxes with voters. However, the Treasury dismissed suggestions that as much as half of all income tax should be earmarked for an NHS tax."

We do not need to read into those reports a division between the Treasury and the Secretary of State for Health and his friends, we can see the result of that division—the Secretary of State is no longer in charge of the NHS and health decisions.

The Chancellor commissioned the Wanless report, effectively taking over direct control of long-term NHS policy making. Now that that report has been published, we have learned—first in *The Mail on Sunday*, on 12 December, and now essentially directly from the Chancellor's own lips—that:

> "Referring to Cabinet splits, Mr. Clarke launched into a bizarre defence of his close ally Alan Milburn. 'Obviously it's unacceptable to say 'Alan Milburn is a bastard'' he said."

I do not know who is supposed to have said that he is, but presumably that person is not far from us now, on the other side of the House. Meanwhile, another Minister said:

> "Everyone agrees Gordon is a brilliant Chancellor but his treatment of the rest of us is unacceptable".

So who is in charge of the NHS? Today we have received an answer: the Chancellor is in charge of it. In reply to a report in *The Mail on Sunday* that sources close to the Prime Minister said that he was completely taken by surprise when the Chancellor told hon. Members that he had ruled out any major change in the way in which the NHS is run or funded, and that the Secretary of State for Health had been told only at the weekend of the outcome of the Wanless report, all the Chancellor could say was that the Secretary of State had received full notice. Is that all that the Prime Minister has received too?

It is not only the Prime Minister and other Cabinet members who are subject to the will of the Chancellor. There is a peculiarity in what the Chancellor had to say about Mr. Wanless—whose name came up surprisingly often in the Chancellor's statement, when it was, "Mr. Wanless this", and "Mr. Wanless that". I guess that the Chancellor might be thinking of putting Mr. Wanless in charge of the NHS. From his point of view, it would be better to have him in charge than the Secretary of State for Health, and it would certainly be better than having the Prime Minister in charge. However, the Chancellor and Mr. Wanless seem to have had a falling out.

Last week, the Chancellor told us:

> "having examined whether a publicly funded NHS is itself a pressure on costs and thus whether it is sustainable, Mr. Wanless's view is that the principle of an NHS publicly funded through taxation, available on the basis of clinical need and not on ability to pay, remains both the fairest and most efficient system for this country."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 838.]

That may be the Chancellor's view, and it is my view, but Mr. Wanless has suggested that it may not be his view. He said:

> "I have not sought to bury anything for good. It would be quite presumptuous and premature to do that."

So who is in charge? Is it Wanless, the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for Health? No, once again, it is the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Observer had the most bizarre story of all. Presumably briefed by Labour party insiders—it is quite a friend of the Government, although not always a secure one, and tends to have knowledge of what is said in the inner circles—it said:

> "Planning for last week's remarkable announcement on tax—which has set many Cabinet members against one another—has been two years in the making, meticulously pored over, refined and planned during hours and hours of meetings at the Treasury and Downing Street."

They have to be kidding. If the outcome of two years of meticulous planning and co-ordination between No. 10 Downing street and the Treasury is the total mess that we have seen in the past five days, God help us if they ever stop planning.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Does the hon. Gentleman welcome the announcement of a great national debate on the future of public expenditure and public services? If so, will Liberal Democrat Members rise to the challenge of that debate, or will they continue as he has started by talking about the personalities in various Departments? Does he agree that the reason why we are able to have a debate on the future of public expenditure at all, not to mention the public expenditure increases that the Government are delivering, is that the Government have shown competent stewardship of the economy and that, despite a world recession, growth next year is forecast to remain the same as it has been this year?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. That was almost a speech.

Matthew Taylor: Liberal Democrat Members do indeed welcome such a debate; after all, we pioneered it and for several years suffered a lot of abuse from the Chancellor and the Prime Minister for daring to suggest that what the Chancellor now says is right might have been right even then, just a few years ago.

Dr. Tonge: Does my hon. Friend agree that the standard of debate that we have had so far today, and the shadow Chancellor's remarks on the Stalinist creation called the national health service, are an insult to anyone who has ever worked in the health service?

Matthew Taylor: I am amazed by Conservative Members. If there is an issue that will crucify them at the ballot box, it is their decision not to support the NHS; not to support the principles of care free at the point of delivery for all who need it; their description of those who work in the NHS—doctors and nurses—as working for a Stalinist organisation; and the extremism that has been let in. The extremism that has crept in explains why so many able Conservatives refuse to serve in this appalling Front-Bench team that suggests that it might yet form an alternative Government.

The shadow Home Secretary had it right: not only have the Conservatives not yet won people's trust but they have a very long way to go. At present, all they are doing is going down, down, down. That is what they will find when they go to the ballot box. However, the Government cannot hide behind the Opposition's weakness. We will be there, testing and pushing them, and leading the debate, as we have done since 1997. By the Chancellor's own admission, he got it wrong, we got it right.

8.35 pm

Derek Twigg (Halton): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on an excellent speech. It is interesting to examine how what the Conservatives say about health care and privatisation changes. The shadow Health Secretary has said some interesting things. In *The Times* on 6 August, he said that his party had to have the courage to

> "top up state spending with private income of one form or another."

He said that his party's

> "failure of nerve in the last Parliament"

meant they had not come up with a "credible alternative narrative" for health care—whatever that means.

Why did the Tories have a failure of nerve? Was it because they were not prepared to be honest about their plans to privatise the health service?

Chris Ruane: Trojan horse.

Derek Twigg: Indeed.

It is also reported that the shadow Health Secretary

> "believes the party must consider proposals that would allow patients to buy themselves better healthcare".

What does that mean? I have no idea. He said that the funding gap comes from Britain's inability to

> "top up state spending with private income."

He also said that the party should consider

> "employer contribution schemes, tax breaks on private health insurance, or a state-supported savings system."

It would be interesting to know where the Conservatives expect the money to come from.

The shadow Chancellor talks about the Stalinist NHS. Does not that undermine any claim that the Conservatives make that they support the NHS? They did not believe in it in the first place. They did not want it. They would like it to disappear, to be replaced by a privatised health

[Derek Twigg]

service. They are not prepared to have that debate, though, so they hide behind some interesting words.

Does the Conservative party favour the system in the USA, where 44 million people have none or no adequate health care insurance and everyone else finds that their premiums are rocketing? Even in some European countries, France for instance, people are put off going to see their doctor because of the rising charges.

It is interesting to hear what the Conservatives say about expanding demand for private health insurance. Where are the resources to come from to meet that increased private sector demand? Where are the nurses and doctors to come from to meet this so-called expansion of private health care? Presumably, they will come from the NHS, which is currently increasing the number of doctors and nurses—and we certainly need more.

The Conservatives want tax incentives for people to buy private health care. Where will they find the money to fund that? Their proposals make it clear what they want in the long run: a privatised or at the very least part-privatised health service. Where does that leave areas such as Halton, the 18th most deprived borough in England and Wales, with the country's highest lung cancer rate, the most renal problems and one of the highest levels of coronary heart disease?

People in Halton rely on the NHS and not many can afford private health care. They would be on the bottom rung, with a second-hand privatised system. They would be ignored by the Tories and would not be looked after as they have been by the NHS and Labour Governments.

Chris Grayling: Like the hon. Gentleman, I see the frustration of my constituents at the current state of health care. Does he agree that we should look to the rest of Europe, which has much better health care with a much more diverse system of funding? It works better, so should not we learn some lessons from that?

Derek Twigg: I am fascinated by the Conservatives sudden conversion to Europe. The difference between us is simple: I believe in a publicly funded health service. With the investment that we will make, we will see further and bigger improvements over the next few years and we will provide the service that his and my constituents want to see. Privatisation would mean that places such as Halton would be at the bottom of the heap in terms of health care. I am not prepared to let that happen.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): My hon. Friend is rightly coruscating about the overt privatisation plans of the present Opposition. Does he agree that one blemish on our health record so far is our too ready acceptance of the private finance initiative—part of the leaden legacy left to us by the Conservatives—which has been prohibitive in cost, flawed in concept and intolerable in consequence for the taxpayers, patients and NHS staff in the UK?

Derek Twigg: My hon. Friend has strong views on that point, but many new hospitals have been built under that initiative that otherwise would not have been built. It is not perfect and it has flaws, but if the Tories ever got back in it would be a minor issue, because we would then see the wholesale privatisation of the health service.

David Taylor: It has more flaws than Canary wharf.

Derek Twigg: The Tory party certainly has more flaws than Canary wharf.

The Conservative party manifesto said that the party was

"committed to a comprehensive NHS free to all its users."

I did not hear that from the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) tonight. In fact, I heard the opposite. The manifesto continued:

"There is no question of anyone being forced to take out private insurance."

Again, I heard no reassuring noises on that point. The manifesto, in the section entitled "staying healthy", said:

"Common sense means ending political interference in medical judgments and giving choice to patients".

The first bullet point then states:

"Increase funding for NHS".

We heard no figures for that today, because the Tories do not really mean that they would do that. They mean privatisation.

If the Tories ever got back into power, I would really worry about how people in some of the poorest constituencies would be treated by the health service. What would happen to the handicapped, the mentally ill and those with long-term debilitating illnesses? Unfortunately, that applies to many thousands of people in my constituency, but they would not be looked after under the Conservatives' proposals for privatisation. I could not let my constituents—the people I grew up with—be treated so abominably. Under the American system, 44 million people have no or inadequate health insurance. That is the sort of system that the Tories would introduce in this country.

What should be happening because of the improvements in health care? The Tories talk about a Stalinist system and centralisation. However, over the next three years 75 per cent. of NHS funding will be administered through primary care trusts. In areas such as mine that will mean more local accountability for decisions about how money is spent. In Widnes, which forms a large part of my constituency, after 10 years of trying—because primary care services have been poor for more than 50 years—we will get a primary care resource centre, which will mean more doctors, nurses and specialist staff to treat people on their doorstep in their local community. That is about to come to fruition, under a Labour Government. The Tories did nothing about the problem when they were in power.

The motion covers other public services than health. Significant improvements have been made in public services in Halton over the past four years. For example, standards have risen in schools; class sizes have been reduced; and more and more teachers are in post. The number of nursery places has increased. More funding has gone to schools than for many, many years. Two weeks ago, when I visited a school in my constituency, a senior head teacher told me that there had never been so much money going into schools.

That would never have happened under the Tories, because they would have made sure that we went back to the old way, with grammar schools in a two-tier system.

Under the Labour Government, funding has gone into schools—specifically in working-class areas where that investment is needed.

I also want to talk about the transport system in my constituency. We have wanted a second Mersey crossing for many, many years, but we got no help from the previous Government. Last year, my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall) and I explained to the then Transport Minister that, to get that project under way, we needed money for a feasibility study. We received £600,000 from the Minister towards that study. That help from the Government is for an authority which has to maintain the largest single-span structure of any local authority in the country.

Previously, we unfortunately had a Tory county council in Cheshire. Under that council and the Tory Government, hardly any money was put towards maintaining one of the most important road bridges and its approaches from the M56, M62 and M57: barely £600,000 was allocated in 1997. What is the council receiving this year? It is receiving £6 million this year alone. The amount will increase next year to ensure that the bridge can be maintained in proper order so that it is not a danger and so that traffic can flow more freely. That is the sort of commitment that we are seeing in my constituency.

Furthermore, for the first time, there have been real improvements in bus services, in local transport and in providing access. For disabled people and those with long-term debilitating diseases, there will be investment in community transport schemes. That, too, has happened under a Labour Government; it was not funded under a Tory Government. I can point to tangible examples in my constituency that show not only the Labour Government's commitment to funding public services, but that the way that they have funded those services is bringing about real improvements.

When we consider Tory policy, we recall that the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) did a runner during the general election. He disappeared after talking about the cuts and the black hole in Tory funding of public services. We know about that £16 billion black hole.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Have waiting lists in the hon. Gentleman's constituency increased or decreased since 1997?

Derek Twigg: They have gone down in the North Cheshire health authority, which covers my constituency. The authority has met its target. The funding increase to the health authority since 1997 was about 70 per cent. Furthermore, to deal with the health inequalities in my constituency, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health gave the health authority £1.2 million towards health improvement. As part of that, an important health study is taking place in my constituency in order to determine the factors that have led to the poor health that has existed for many generations. That shows the Labour Government making a difference to people's lives. That is happening in my constituency.

The Tories cannot make their figures stand up. Despite the sweet words we have heard this evening and the evasive answers to questions about whether they will privatise the health service—we all know that is what they want to do—they cannot make the figures add up. I repeat that if people vote Tory at the next election, we shall see a privatised health service—as the Liberal Democrats and my hon. Friends have pointed out. That is the dividing line between us.

The debate is about having a publicly funded NHS with a planned stream of funding over the next few years or the alternative of going down the Tories privatised NHS where we will not know what the funding will be from one year to the next.

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman talks helpfully about the importance of planning in health service expenditure, so he will of course recognise the need for specificity. What assessment has he made of the prognosis of the King's Fund for the average European Union level of public expenditure on health by the end of this Parliament? Does he intend that it be equalled by the United Kingdom?

Derek Twigg: Let me put it simply: on the ground, in my constituency, when I talk to GPs, NHS staff and others, they recognise the Government's commitment to ensuring the success of the health service and to extra funding. There may be disagreements as to how the money is spent, but the increased expenditure under the Labour Government will far outweigh what we saw under the Conservatives. The choice is between a privatised health service or a properly publicly funded NHS.

8.49 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg). I hope to reply to some of the thoughtful questions that he posed about how we can improve the service for some of his constituents. However, he made a mistake towards the end of his speech by polarising the issue between a wholly privatised system and carrying on with the current system, and I hope to say a few words about that in a moment.

The debate was opened with a quality speech from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), who posed four questions in his normal consensual way. It was sad that, after speaking for 30 minutes, the Chancellor did not give us any answers. Indeed, he seemed to be growing increasingly agitated as time wore on. I hope that the Chief Secretary will answer those four question when he replies to the debate.

Last Tuesday, the Chancellor announced the beginning of a debate on health, and at Prime Minister's questions the next day the Prime Minister also referred to a debate on health. I welcome that and think it important that the Government do not foreclose all the options before the debate has got under way. I hope that they will not impugn the motives of those who believe that the time has come for some lateral thinking about how we fund the health service. I am not sure that the Chancellor understands how difficult the position is for the NHS in many constituencies.

I want to make two brief points—one about funding and the other about social services, a close partner of the NHS. On the first, the key question that needs to be addressed is how do we adhere to the principles behind the NHS—free at the point of use and available on the basis of need—while enabling the country and the NHS to perform much better than it does at the moment? I want

[Sir George Young]

to develop briefly the analogy with pensions and find out whether the approach that has successfully been adopted can be applied to health.

When the welfare state was founded just after the second world war, broadly the same approach was adopted to pensions and health. On pensions, there was to be a compulsory contributory scheme, leading to a state retirement pension, which was designed to address poverty in old age and reduce dependence on means-tested benefits. It was not to be a funded scheme, but a pay-as-you-go scheme, with today's contributions paying today's pensions. The NHS was born with the same overall philosophy—a state scheme aimed at embracing everyone, designed to address ill health and paid for out of compulsory taxation.

With pensions, the Beveridge vision was never achieved. There was increasing reliance on supplementary benefit, income support and pensioner credits to tackle poverty and no Government were ever able to get the state retirement pension up to the level that would take people out of poverty. Over time, the emphasis began to switch to private provision, based on the workplace. Although the Opposition can claim much of the credit for what I call that mixed economy in pensions, a key player was actually Barbara Castle—as good a socialist as one could come across—whose pension Bill in the mid-1970s contained the architecture for the scheme that we now have.

Over the years, more emphasis has been placed, by Governments of both parties, on good employers having in place a quality pension scheme that complements, reinforces and works alongside the state retirement scheme—an ideal third way. No one has ever asserted that that is socially divisive. The trade unions support good private pension schemes, and this country's pensions are now on a sound financial footing. We lead Europe in funded pensions, given that most other European Union countries have schemes that will need an increase in taxation or contributions.

The question I pose this evening is whether a comparable model might not be looked at for health, against the background of the pressures on funding and delivery that confront the NHS as a monopoly provider. Should not one encourage employment-based insurance schemes to complement the NHS? They could be called, "NHS at work" if it helps Labour Members. It is indeed the case that many firms have private health insurance schemes, but, typically, they cover only senior employees. I believe we should move towards a system whereby not just all the employees within firms are covered, but their families as well. Such an approach would be welcomed by those who represent the work force. It would be in the interests of employers in improving the quality of care that employees and their families receive. I believe that the NHS should welcome it, as the growth of an independent sector of medicine would relieve it of much of the pressure that confronts it at the moment. I think that the Government should welcome it, as it would increase the percentage spend up to European levels. I do not think that anyone could argue that such an approach was socially divisive; rather, it would be an extension of good employment practice, as has already happened with decent pensions.

There are, of course, cost issues for employers, although the bulk purchase of health cover can bring premiums right down to three rather than four figures a year. It could be phased in and the cost could be reduced by cutting employers national insurance contributions. I hope that the debate launched by the Government will permit us to explore that option.

My second point is about joined-up government. The debate launched by the Government is about the NHS, but we should not forget its partner, social services. Right hon. and hon. Members may have seen the letter in *The Times* today by Councillor Sir Jeremy Beecham, chairman of the Local Government Association, in which he says:

> "The Chancellor's announcement of £1 billion extra to be invested in the NHS, on top of the current record levels of increase, will be widely welcomed. By an ironical coincidence £1 billion is the sum which local council social services departments are spending on social care over and above the Government's Standard Spending Assessment for social services.
>
> The work of social services departments with the elderly and with children complements mainline government programmes in health, education and in combating child poverty. It is currently under-funded and many councils face the prospect of cuts in this key area of social provision."

Certainly, many of the problems confronting the NHS in my constituency in Hampshire are due in no small part to the underfunding of social services. There is no point in providing more money for the NHS if it cannot be spent, because the revenue support grant is squeezing local authorities and social services. Let me say in passing, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) pointed out, that social services are extensively charged for.

Nine per cent. of all acute beds in the south-east—1,370 beds, or three district general hospitals—are blocked by delayed transfers of care. Some 23 per cent. of those patients are awaiting public funding. In my constituency, 83 beds are blocked in the Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust.

The Government will say, with some justification, that they have twice in the past 12 months allocated extra sums—cash for change and winter pressure money. Hampshire received £1.9 million last year and £2.4 million in September this year. Of course, that money is welcome, but this simply is not joined-up government. It shows how inadequate the social services standard spending assessments are for local government. This is a one-off sum—local authorities do not how much they will get or when they will get it, but the revenue consequences for social services continue year after year. There is a strategic problem of loss of beds in residential and nursing homes, aggravated by measures introduced by the Government.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): When the right hon. Gentleman was in government, does he recall the representations that were made about changes to the formula that would have meant extra provision for social services and the fact that his Government refused to make those changes?

Sir George Young: I regard that as a spent conviction. Yes, I remember receiving an unending series of deputations. Any Member of this House with any ingenuity can develop a case showing that his local authority has had a raw deal under the revenue support grant system. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman did not lack ingenuity in making his case, and I hope that he was listened to sympathetically.

Let me return to the strategic problems of social services. There is a net loss of beds in residential and nursing homes, which has a direct impact on the performance of the NHS. The net loss of beds in Hampshire in the past three years has been 62, 277 and 279, with 400 likely this year. So the debate that has been launched must embrace both the NHS and social services.

I hope that the Government's response to the two strategic issues that I have outlined is not to turn their back on the development of a complementary scheme alongside the NHS. I am slightly worried that the Government see a frantic programme of administrative reform of the NHS as an adequate substitute for the more thorough debate that I outlined. The problems are not likely to be put right by a further round of turbulent administrative reform.

The problems that confront the NHS are pay awards and other costs rising faster than the inflation uplift; the formula for distributing funds around the country, which is hopelessly flawed; staff recruitment and retention, which leads to the excessive use of agency staff; and delayed transfers of care, which mean that hospitals have to treat more people than they should. The real debate on the NHS should focus on those problems and the broader issues of funding. There is an appetite outside the House for a proper debate on how we fund the NHS and health in this country. I hope that the Government are listening.

9 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): My hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) reminded the House that although many of us want to concentrate on the health service, the debate is on the funding of public services. Like him, I have just finished visiting all the reception classes in my constituency. Their one message is, as he said, that schools have never had so much money to spend in the way in which they wish to spend it. The extent to which we freed up the ability of schools to make decisions is a lesson that we can learn in the health debate, because we have not given that freedom to our local hospitals.

I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if, like other hon. Members, I concentrate on the national health service. I also hope that the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) will forgive me for suggesting later in my short contribution that his comparison between the way in which pensions have developed in this country and the way in which health might develop is, I fear, flawed.

Within the space of a week, we heard two towering performances by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He is one of the great princes of the platform. He is also one of those politicians who rarely uses his skills, and does so only if he wishes to present a message and, as is often the case, to reposition his party. During the past week, we saw the Chancellor use those considerable skills to reposition the governing party with regard to its views on taxation. Although that debate holds great promise, it also holds great dangers, both for the NHS and for Labour as a governing party. Like all hon. Members, I want more to be spent on health and, certainly like all Labour Members, I want more to be spent through the NHS. I shall dwell on the dangers later in my contribution.

I did not share the euphoria with which some of my Labour colleagues greeted the announcement that we were going to increase direct taxation. I remember fighting, and losing, elections in which we wanted to increase direct taxation. We won in 1997 for a number of reasons: for instance, the Tory Government had been in office for far too long and we had a leader in my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister who was, and still is, a winner.

We also won because we made two specific pledges on taxation. We said that in the first stage we would keep to Tory spending plans for the first two years and would not increase direct taxation. Those are the achievements of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Without my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and those two pledges by the Chancellor, I do not believe that we would have won in 1997 or obtained the majority that we did in the last general election.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Field: As the hon. Gentleman has stopped squirming, I will certainly give way.

Dr. Harris: The right hon. Gentleman's contribution is thoughtful, but he is basing his comments on two assumptions: first, that it was necessary to make such pledges to beat the Conservative party in 1997 and 2001, and secondly, that there is an implied commitment to put up direct taxes. Is not the problem that the Government hint that they will put up taxes, but the only ones that they will not raise are fair, direct, income-related taxes? The fear is that they will put up unfair, indirect, stealth taxes instead.

Mr. Field: The Chancellor has made it clear that we will, if need be, increase direct taxation. If the hon. Gentleman has not learned that, he has not been paying much attention to the debate over the past seven days.

It is important for Labour Members to read carefully what our electorate tell pollsters, and what they tell us during election campaigns. Voters in Birkenhead, as elsewhere, love the game that they play with pollsters. When they know that there is no possibility of a party that will increase direct taxation being elected, they tell pollsters that they would love to have a party that will increase direct taxation. The response from voters to a Government who feel it necessary directly to increase the contribution to the NHS will be totally different. My experience during the election was that most people feel that they already pay a very large part of their income in tax; some believe that it is far too much, and many do not believe that they get value for money.

It is against that background that we come to a debate about protecting and enhancing the position of the NHS. There is a real danger of some Members in the House reading too simply the messages about Europe. Opposition Front Benchers read the position wrongly in looking to advances in Europe to support their argument that we can increase choice by increasing the numbers of people in this country using private medical care. There is one significant difference between this country and most countries in Europe: in Europe there is an abundance of doctors and nurses, and in this country there is a shortage.

If one suggests that more people in this country should go private, the resources—apart from the consultants, doctors and nurses who might work extra overtime to

[Mr. Field]

meet that demand—can come only from the NHS itself. One would be moving the demand around. That is different from the situation in most European countries, where people have paid handsomely in the past for a very large number and an easy supply of doctors and nurses, and where such a policy might be pursued.

As the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire seemed to imply, there is no major difference between the role that pensions play in Europe and the role that the health service plays in this country. In Europe, it is impossible for Governments to cut back on state pensions. In post-war settlements, pensions have played a part that they do not play in this country. That is why the finances of those countries in the everyone will experience such difficulties in the decade ahead. Germany, France and Italy are planning levels of expenditure for public pensions which are not sustainable, yet when any of those Governments try to cut provision, people move into the streets and the Government quickly withdraw.

That is totally different from the position in this country, where people do not get het up about whether they are to have a private pension, a company pension or a state pension. In this country, the part of the post-war settlement which voters care about is the national health service, and they will vote for parties that support their views on the NHS. The live rail that kills politicians in Europe is pensions, and the live rail that has in the past killed politicians in this country, and might again, is the NHS. Politicians grapple with the NHS with an ever-present sense of danger. Although there is considerable desire for the NHS to be reformed and services to be made more adequate, there is not yet agreement among the electorate on what the level of expenditure should be, or on what steps need to be taken to ensure that the sort of freedom that is beginning to operate in our classrooms begins to operate in our hospitals.

Although the Opposition were rather foolish to describe the NHS as they have this evening, it is fair to say that it is our last nationalised industry and the only one that this country has ever cared about. We face not only the question of funding, but the question of how to use that funding to change a centralised, centrally directed, ration book-type health scheme into a system that far more effectively reflects consumer preferences, in a way that we experience in almost every other part of our lives. If people find that difficult to envisage at the moment, the electorate will teach us the lesson very soon.

My final point follows on from the theme that I have been presenting. The age in which we can have unhypothecated tax increases and easily win elections is over. That is not to say that I do not welcome the debate, or that I do not have views on ways in which additional funds for the NHS can be raised, but if Labour Members think that voters will agree to increases in direct taxation proposed under the banner of the NHS without those increases being directly linked to increases in the size of the health budget, we have another think coming.

We already have a form of hypothecated tax in this country. I implore the Government, when they are giving serious consideration to the alternatives in an open debate on how to raise the necessary revenue, to think carefully about using the national insurance base as the means by which additional funds are raised. However, Labour Members have been peddling three fallacies about that way of proceeding.

Those who read the Prime Minister's interview in *The Independent on Sunday* will know that he warned of real dangers in using the national insurance base as the means of funding future increases in the NHS. There are employers and employees contributions, and our experience in Europe tells us what increasing employers' national insurance contributions does. However, it is possible to have increases only in employees contributions. Reading the Prime Minister's interview, I was reminded of the statement supposedly made by Sidney Webb when, after the fall of the Labour Government in 1931, the coalition Government led by the Tories immediately came off the gold standard. He said, "Nobody told us we could come off the gold standard." My message to the Government tonight is simple: it is possible to increase only employees national insurance contributions if one decides to adopt the route of having an hypothecated tax for the NHS.

Secondly, it is argued that we should not adopt that course because national insurance contributions would be cyclical. One only has to say it to see the fallacy. Income tax is cyclical and there is no evidence in the figures that are produced that national insurance contributions are more cyclical than revenues from income tax. In fact, if the cyclical argument is to be deployed against using national insurance contributions to raise additional funds for the NHS, the Chancellor's suggestion this evening is also faulty. Direct taxation is not more buoyant than national insurance contributions.

The third reason why I want us to adopt that approach is that although MPs might think that national insurance contributions and income tax are the same thing, our constituents and the electorate do not. One of the reasons why the Conservatives got away for so long with being regarded as a tax-cutting party is that they reduced income tax while more than making up for it by increasing national insurance contributions, and most people in this country did not regard increases in national insurance contributions as increases in direct taxation.

The Labour party has crossed an important threshold. If we are ready to contemplate raising direct taxation, if necessary, to finance the increase in funds needed to secure the future of the NHS, I hope that we will do so carefully and mindfully. I hope that we do not believe our rhetoric about all the things that the Opposition are supposed to be concerned about, or that voters are keen on increasing taxes. We have been in a dreamland where, thanks to a buoyant economy and the skill of the Chancellor, there has been a surplus in the budget. That surplus is about to disappear during this Parliament and, when it does, choices will have to be made and we will have to defend to our constituents the need to increase revenue—I believe that we will have to do so—to finance the NHS and secure its future. Voters may tell pollsters one thing about paying increased taxes when they know that they will never have to do so but, in that difficult terrain, may behave differently when faced with those increases.

On the difficult journey on which we are now embarking, I hope that the Government will not dismiss out of hand a hypothecated approach to our financing. As I said earlier, the age of being able to shove up direct taxes and think that people will vote for us is over. Now, we have to negotiate, increase by increase, with the voters; we could not have a better subject on which to begin those negotiations than the NHS.

9.16 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): It is always an enormous pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), and never more so than tonight; he makes a thoughtful contribution to welfare and social affairs issues. He spoke about the two towering performances that the Chancellor has already given this week; I hope that that did not include the one that he gave tonight. I hope that the whole House agrees that the speeches of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead and my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) elevated a debate which sank following the scintillating performance of my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor.

The right hon. Member for Birkenhead made two points on which I should like to comment. First, he is right that the lack of doctors and nurses is at the root of our problems; we need to recruit far more of them to the health service, and I shall return to that later. Secondly, to paraphrase the right hon. Gentleman, he said that politicians tamper with the NHS, a much-loved British institution, at their peril. I profoundly disagree that the time is not right for a proper elevated debate on the future of the NHS; the system simply is not working at the moment, another point to which I shall return to later.

Mr. Frank Field: I was not saying that we should not have that debate or that big changes were not necessary. All that I was saying was that there might be huge political costs if we get it wrong.

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that clarification. It is vital that we take a serious look at the state of the NHS because it is not delivering for our constituents. I very much hope that that debate will not be characterised by comments such as those by the Chancellor, in which he referred to the Tories wanting £50 billion-worth of cuts, or those from the Liberal Democrat spokesman, who said that the Conservatives do not support the NHS and, indeed, that there are no charges on the health service, when significant taxation goes into it.

We must elevate the debate above such comments, which were epitomised by the hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg), who stated as an article of faith that the Tories want to privatise the health service; quite simply, we do not. The interesting analogy that my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire drew with the pensions regime is worthy of greater comment than the right hon. Member for Birkenhead suggested. I hope that that too will inform public debate on those matters.

Tonight's debate is timely, as the subject is of immense concern to our constituents. I declare an indirect interest, in that my wife is a doctor in general practice, so I take a particular interest in these matters at home, as well as in the House. I have been away in the real world for the past four years, and on returning to the House of Commons to represent my constituents in Sutton Coldfield, I am astonished at the massive increase in complaints about the quality of the health service that make up my postbag. Complaints about and problems with the NHS are by far the most important element of the post that I receive every day, and I am sure that my experience is not unique in the House.

In a wealthy society, which ours undoubtedly is, it is a basic requirement that our constituents should be able to receive health care of the quality that their counterparts in continental Europe receive. That is not the case at present. I was astonished to see in a French newspaper the headline, "Les anglais exportent les malades". It may be acceptable at the margins for sick people from Britain to go overseas for treatment, but it is not acceptable as a policy that our sick should have to go overseas to Europe to be cured. Were we to behave in that way in any other aspect of life, it would be entirely unacceptable.

The Government's response to tonight's debate and over the past week or so has been cynical. At times it has been irrelevant, and at other times, downright misleading. We were told last week that it was important to decentralise the NHS, so that decision making takes place more at local level, yet only a few days before the House debated a Bill that does exactly the opposite. Under the Bill, which was ill thought out, 58 powers for the Secretary of State were added or reinforced. He will determine the funding of every primary care trust in the country. A chief executive quoted in the Government's own report said that he thought that the changes were the most ill-conceived set of changes in a decade, and wondered whether the intention was to torpedo the NHS plan.

If we have learned anything over the past 30 years, it is that administrative reform—tinkering reform—is not the answer to the problems of our health service. Since Sir Keith Joseph started, we have seen all sorts of reforms. I have sat on Committees that considered Bills introducing such reform. It simply does not work, as everyone seems to realise, apart from the Government.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the saddest aspects is the Government's paucity of ambition? In Berlin recently, I was speaking to the Herr Professor Doktor who runs one of the hospitals there. I asked what the waiting list was. He said, "We do have a few troubles. Sometimes we can't get the patients in the same day. They have to wait till tomorrow." I explained to him that our NHS plan has an ambition that in eight years, nobody should have to wait for more than three months. He was horrified. Does not that anecdote reflect the paucity of ambition of the Government?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. He emphasises that in this country we have too few doctors and nurses, as I observed earlier. The problem is getting worse. In Birmingham last year, we had seven vacancies for general practice. This year we have 65—a massive increase.

I said earlier that the Government's approach was cynical. We have heard in the debate about the way in which the Wanless report has been misrepresented, and how its terms of reference made its conclusions inevitable. I should like the Government to publish the terms of reference of the Adair Turner report. We are told that it will not be published. However, the House should hear what Mr. Adair Turner is being asked to do and how that fits into the NHS 10-year plan.

On Tuesday, we heard the Chancellor promising £1 billion more for the NHS, which we welcomed. The following day, after some contrary comment in *The Sun*,

[Mr. Mitchell]

he made a handbrake turn to Wapping to explain that that was not his plan at all, and that there would be no new money until there was structural reform. Only a couple of weeks ago, the Prime Minister said in answer to a question at Prime Minister's questions that when the Tories left office, there were no new hospitals being built. That was completely untrue, as a parliamentary question answered the following week made clear. We also saw the cynicism of saying that there were 24 hours to save the national health service in 1997. No wonder the public are deeply cynical about politicians—a view that will not have been enhanced by Labour's contribution to this debate.

Last week, a clear commitment was made to improve spending on health by bringing it up to the European average, but yesterday, the article in *The Independent on Sunday* that has been mentioned by other hon. Members said that that was only a target in broad terms.

Roger Casale: Does the hon. Gentleman welcome the announcement of a debate about the future of public expenditure, and does he expect that the Conservatives will come out of it in the same way that they are entering it—by pledging cuts to public expenditure and threatening privatisation of the health service?

Mr. Mitchell: Of course I welcome a debate on public expenditure. That is why I am speaking now. However, the reality is that, under this Government, waiting lists have not decreased, but increased. Waiting lists for in-patients have increased by 63 per cent. since 1997. It is no good blaming the last Conservative Government for that. The current Government have had four and a half years to make an impact after having promised to do so, but have failed to achieve that.

I recently tabled a parliamentary question on in-patient and out-patient waiting lists in the local hospital in my constituency, the Good Hope hospital. I discovered that, in March 1997, five of my constituents were waiting more than 12 months for in-patient treatment, while there are now 152 waiting. When the Conservatives left government in 1997, 18 out-patients of the hospital were waiting more than 26 weeks, but there are now 135 such patients. When we left government, there were 287 out-patients waiting more than 13 weeks—a very high figure—but today there are 750. Throughout Birmingham, we have seen the proportion of patients waiting more than 12 months increase since the last election from 0.1 to 2 per cent. That is an enormous increase and we would have expected more contrition from the Government and more about how they would do better than were contained in the crass allegations made over the Dispatch Box by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

To add insult to injury for the hard-working doctors and nurses and other dedicated staff in the Good Hope hospital in my constituency, they were recently marked down in terms of the number of stars that were awarded for service to my constituents. When we investigated the reason for that marking down, we discovered on careful analysis that it was done because of lack of beds and trolley waits. However, the reason for those waits had nothing to do with the excellent and dedicated staff in my constituency, but related to bed blocking in Birmingham and the failure of social services. As I said, the result was to add insult to injury, especially as the hospital had managed through its own endeavours to free up some funds to help with an innovative scheme to address the problem.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) started an important debate when he said that the Conservative Government had delivered on low tax and that it was now up to the Conservative party to deliver on policies for our public services. I strongly agree with what he had to say. It is very encouraging that my party is considering systems in other countries. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition is in Stockholm today and we are considering a range of different systems throughout the world.

The issue that we are addressing is how to deliver to our fellow citizens the quality of health care that they have a right to expect. I do not believe that the Labour party can achieve that, as it is wedded to a model of delivery that does not work. It is right that we should be committed to a service that is provided on the basis of clinical need and regardless of ability to pay. On the current system, it is absolutely clear that although Labour has pumped in money just as we did, outcomes have continued to deteriorate. It will discover that public disillusionment will grow as more taxes are spent and as health care of a standard that our constituents are entitled to expect continues to elude them.

The Government should encourage the private sector. My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire made a most interesting point about workplace insurance schemes being provided for families. I believe that that is part of the solution in terms of getting more capacity and funding into the health service in the medium term.

I should like to end on a different matter: the benefit to the public services of private finance initiatives or public-private partnership projects—a most important policy that has been seamless between the previous Conservative Government and the current Government.

It is a great thing that the PPP provides for developments in infrastructure that otherwise would not happen for many years. I have written to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to support an excellent PPP scheme that will benefit the Arthur Terry school in my constituency by replacing old school buildings.

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has, however, fundamentally undermined the PPP system. I am not especially interested in whether he has to resign because of his stewardship of Railtrack, but I care about the damage that he has inflicted on PPP. He simply does not understand it. I hope that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury understands that the actions of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions will increase the costs of PPP schemes. Capital providers will not put up the money when such uncertainty exists. No amount of equity risk premium will compensate for that. For a few cheap cheers from Labour Back Benchers, he has inflicted massive, definitive damage on a good policy that enhances public service delivery.

Morale is falling throughout the NHS. Too many changes have taken place. In the west midlands, 37 per cent. of junior doctors break the working hours limit, primary care lists are closing and the Government have introduced a Bill that will do nothing to help because it is bureaucratic, centralised, rushed and wasteful.

9.31 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): The debate has been stimulating and revealing in equal measure. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) opened it in characteristically incisive fashion. He made a series of specific and detailed points, which collectively constituted a penetrating critique of the Government's position. He also posed several challenges. I shall revert to the failure to respond to them shortly and with appropriate relish.

Before I do that, I shall refer to some other important contributions. My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) made a typically measured, thoughtful and open-minded speech. He made an important analogy with the pensions industry. We should not skate over that; it cannot readily be dismissed.

The hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor), who is a worthy sparring partner, disappointed me. I hope that he will not lose too much sleep over that. He drily and unimaginatively supported the retention of the status quo. New Liberal, old policy.

The hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) said that he supported the average EU expenditure on health. However, when challenged to specify the amount of money that would be spent on health by the end of the Parliament, he was unable to answer. If I may so describe him, he was a horse that fell at the first hurdle.

The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) made a characteristically effective contribution. He fired a shot across the bows of the Treasury Bench and warned of the dangers of willy-nilly increases in taxation. He is always polite, sometimes speaks in code and is invariably challenging to the Government. His strictures on the ration book state were welcome and timely. It is time that they were heeded.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) rightly denounced the Government for their cynical approach. He highlighted increasing problems with the provision of health care, excoriated the Government's reactionary attitude to the private finance initiative and demanded a proper, constructive and detailed debate on the inadequacies of the national health service.

Roger Casale: The Conservative party's attitude to public expenditure in general and the health service in particular proved to be the Achilles heel of the previous shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo). As the hon. Gentleman is so close to the current shadow Chancellor, will he help him by ruling out once and for all the introduction of medical charges for NHS patients by the Tories?

Mr. Bercow: That contribution was as backward looking as it was ill targeted. I have learned my lesson; giving way to the hon. Gentleman is rarely worth the expenditure of time that it entails. He made a mess of his first effort; he would be unwise to make a second attempt.

In the course of my right hon. and learned Friend's contribution, he posed a series of questions to the Chancellor. Those questions fell into four categories and, if the Chancellor was able to add them up, there were 16 specific questions. In the category of questions on reform, my right hon. and learned Friend asked what the Chancellor had in mind, when the reforms would be implemented, what the criteria for the allocation of funds for expenditure by health authorities would be, and when the decisions would be made on those allocation criteria. Answers to those four questions came there none.

We move on to the second category of questions, which might neatly be encapsulated by the term "Adair", on the subject of the Adair Turner committee and, presumably, the potential report resulting therefrom. My right hon. and learned Friend pointed out that the Government had previously said that the deliberations and any ensuing report would be private. Was that, he inquired, still the case, or had the Government changed their mind? Would we be told what the conclusions of that committee were and, if so, when? Answers to those questions came there none.

We move on to the third category, relating to the absurd position at the heart of the Government of total inconsistency, confusion and argument on the subject of meeting the European average level of public expenditure on the health service. My right hon. and learned Friend asked the Chancellor whether he would clarify the Government's position. Was the objective a firm commitment, he asked, or did it amount merely to a vague aspiration? Would the spending on the average level in the European Union be based on the average level in 2000, 2001, 2005 or 2006? Would that average be based on the inclusion of the United Kingdom in the measurement, or would it exclude us? Would the assessment be based on weighted populations or merely on crude numbers? When would there be a delivery on the pledge? Would it be in 2005, in 2006, at some unspecified date in the future or—more likely—never? The Chancellor turns away now, just as he ducked my right hon. and learned Friend's questions earlier.

I shall remind the House of a trait that now bedevils the Chancellor. It is becoming monotonous, predictable, see-through and progressively more ineffectual every time he unwittingly or wittingly deploys it. In the opening sentence of the right hon. Gentleman's speech, he said—I repeat this for the elucidation of the House—that he would answer every single point that had been raised by my right hon. and learned Friend.

Derek Twigg: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: No, I will not.

I am very worried about the Chancellor of the Exchequer, because the shadow Chancellor put 16 specific detailed questions to him in a 20-minute speech, and in the course of a 25-minute speech, the Chancellor, having said in sentence one that he would answer all of them, conspicuously failed to answer any.

Derek Twigg: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bercow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not think that I need any protection from the hon. Member for Halton, but I am nevertheless grateful for your ministrations.

[Mr. Bercow]

I simply say to the Chancellor that every time he says that he will deal with the points, he fails to do so. In four and a half years of observing and listening to the Chancellor, I have never heard a worse speech from him, either in the House or outside it. We know that the Government are in total disarray on hypothecation, on social insurance, and on specificity about the means by which the health service is to be funded. On the one hand, we have the position of the Chancellor—

Derek Twigg: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) wishes to give way.

Mr. Bercow: I am very happy to deal with the organ grinder, Mr. Speaker, but I am not all that interested in the monkey.

The reality is that the Chancellor is opposed by his right hon. Friend—I use the word "friend" distinctly loosely in this context—the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson). He is also opposed by the Secretary of State for Health. Can he look for friendship to the Leader of the House, who somewhat undermined his position at business questions last Thursday? That seems unlikely, given that the two of them have barely been able to stand the sight of each other for the past 20 years.

Does the Chancellor have the support of his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry? Apparently, she is ditching him too, because she supports some form of hypothecation. Then we come to the Chancellor's colleague, the chairman of the Labour party and Minister without Portfolio, the right hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke). The right hon. Gentleman has already stitched up the Chancellor in Scotland by getting rid of his candidate for the position of First Minister. He has undermined him on other subjects too: he is second-guessing him on the euro, for instance, and he does not agree with him about this.

The Chancellor must really ask how many friends he has, and the answer seems to be not very many. If someone is rude to his friends, intimidates them, belittles them, ignores them, does not answer them and makes announcements on their behalf without even telling them until the last minute, is it any wonder that he will ultimately be disliked, vilified and plotted against? That is what is happening to the Chancellor.

If the Chancellor is the sort of Minister who offers a prescription before giving a diagnosis, it is a very good job that he opted to come into politics rather than becoming a general practitioner in our national health service. He specialises in not answering questions. Is it any wonder that productivity growth in British manufacturing is so bad, when the Chancellor's productivity in answering questions is even worse?

What does the Chancellor make of existing public expenditure on the national health service? He likes to see himself as the all-powerful figure, the dominant creature in the Government, dictating the course of events, in control of the show. I remind the House that, since 1997, the Government have been responsible for the failure to spend more than £5,000 million that the Chancellor and his right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary have allocated to spending Departments, but which they have not had the wit, competence or sagacity to spend. *[Interruption.]*

It is no good the Chancellor chuntering from a sedentary position in evident disapproval of what I am saying, when he has failed to do anything about that consistent underspend. The underspend in the NHS means that 70,000 heart bypass operations that would otherwise have been performed have not been performed. What has the Chancellor to say about the £10 billion a year that is being improperly spent in the health service—wasted on fraud, used in the context of bed-blocking, and devoted to sick pay, hospital-acquired infections and the rest?

Despite all that, the Chancellor has the sheer audacity to come to the House and defend his position on the ground of equity. He talks about an equitable national health service, which I interpret as meaning "fair". Does the Chancellor think it fair that people in this country are sicker than they were before? We Conservatives do not. Does he think it fair that more people are having to wait longer than ever before in Labour Britain? If he does, we do not. Does he think it fair that people are dying earlier in this country than they are, on average, in its European counterparts? We do not consider that fair or acceptable. Survival rates in this country for leukaemia, prostate cancer and breast cancer are all pitifully inadequate in comparison with those in the European Union.

Finally, we turn to the interesting issue of private expenditure. I leave the Government and the House to reflect on it. The Government are condemning the use of private funds, yet it is happening all over the country. A private trust recently raised no less than £14 million to assist in the rebuilding of one orthopaedic hospital trust: £2 million was spent on the orthotic unit, £4 million on the creation of a muscular-skeletal disorders research building, £6 million as a contribution to a £25 million private finance initiative project, and up to £750,000 on a hydrotherapy pool. I suggest that the Chancellor use the pool; it will not improve his expertise in health policy, but it might do something to improve his temper.

Where is that hospital? It is in the Oxford, East constituency. It is the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS trust, in the constituency of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. I am not going to accuse him of hypocrisy because you, Mr. Speaker, would rule me out of order. I say simply that it is two-faced. It is an example of double standards. It reflects the difference between what the right hon. Gentleman wants to saddle the rest of the country with and what he is pleased to accept in respect of his constituents.

The British public are fed up with the clashing egos, the competing ambitions, the corrosive tensions at the heart of the Government. They are not interested in the Chancellor's ambitions. They do not like the unedifying spectacle. What they want is a decent health service, reliable provision, policies that translate care from a word to a deed for the majority of hard-working, long-suffering people in this country. The Chancellor's policy will not deliver. We are determined to produce a coherent, credible, costed and attractive policy that will deliver. [Hon. Members: "When?"] Members will hear of that policy in readiness for the next general election.

9.45 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): I have been here throughout the debate and heard the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) as well as the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). The hon. Member for Buckingham has a thing or two to learn about monkeys and organ grinders. Never could we have heard a better example of someone's eloquence outrunning his judgment than in the hon. Gentleman's speech.

The hon. Gentleman refers to the fund raising for the Nuffield orthopaedic hospital in my constituency. I am proud of that fund-raising effort. I commend the energy and support that Lord Tebbit has put into that out of personal commitment. I would not seek to use that for political purposes, here or anywhere else. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must be able to hear the Minister.

Mr. Smith *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must have some calmness.

Mr. Smith: There are two striking things about this debate. The first is that the shadow Chancellor described our national health service, a proud creation of this country and something of which we are all proud, as a Stalinist creation. The second is that he refused conspicuously when challenged by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) and others to rule out charging. He gave the game away as to what the Tory agenda is. It is an agenda of privatisation and of charging for the health service.

It is clear where the dividing lines are in the debate. Where we will invest in the NHS, reform it and work with staff to raise its performance, the Conservative Front-Bench team will not commit to NHS investment, it has no ideas for NHS reform and, as it toys with half-baked ideas for private insurance, it would destroy the principles of the NHS, just as the Conservatives opposed its foundation.

As my right hon. and hon. Friends have pointed out, a key principle is at stake. We believe in an NHS free at the point of need, so that patients receive care on the basis of clinical need and not ability to pay. I believe that that principle is strongly supported by the British people. After all, it is about fairness. In walking away from it, as my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) pointed out speaking on behalf of his constituents, the Conservative leadership would threaten millions of people with insecurity, with costs that they cannot afford, and with health care being unavailable when they need it most. In promoting their private health agenda for what they describe as the Stalinist NHS, Conservative Members would land a body blow on NHS staff, whose skills and dedication we depend on for better health care. Conservative Members will rue the day that their leaders set off down that road—just as they already regret initiating this debate in which only two Tory Back Benchers spoke after the shadow Chancellor, who could not get out of the Chamber fast enough. They have not one thought-out policy to offer.

I shall reply to some of the speeches. If I followed him correctly, the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) was urging a supplementary social insurance model. I took his comments in the spirit in which they were made, which was certainly not the spirit of the shadow Chancellor. I think that the right hon. Gentleman believes in a national health service that is free at the point of need, as he promised in his manifesto. He is nodding his agreement. He clearly disagrees with the shadow Chancellor and recognises that charges would be a disaster.

The danger of such schemes is not only that employers and employees have to pay more, but that, as has happened in France, they often increasingly require top-up contributions. Moreover, the administrative burden of such schemes frequently grows—as it did in Germany, where the Government were forced to intervene when administrative charges exceeded 4.8 per cent. of health spending, compared with the 3.8 per cent. of health spending to which we keep administrative charges in the cost-effective NHS.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No; if I may, I shall reply to the debate.

In a characteristically thoughtful speech, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) pointed out that, in contrast to most European countries, the key issue for the United Kingdom is that, without a surplus of nurses and doctors, expansion of the private sector would be at the expense of the NHS and those who depend on it. He also pointed out the ever-present danger for politicians of grappling with what he called the "live rail" of the NHS. Today, the shadow Chancellor jumped down on the tracks and grabbed that live rail when he threatened the British people with charges.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead also urged that the NHS be funded only with national insurance contributions levied on employees. I am sure that he will understand it if I say that I shall take that as a Budget representation.

The hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) said that a lot of things are wrong with the NHS, but, although I listened carefully to his speech, he made not one positive suggestion about what to do about them. He said that there are not enough nurses and doctors, but the Government have already recruited an extra 17,000 nurses and an extra 6,700 doctors. Moreover, what was the position before we entered office? Furthermore, with the funding that we are making available, which would not be made available if Conservative Members were in government, we are bringing forward 20,000 extra nurses and 10,000 extra doctors. We shall achieve that because we are increasing the resources and share of GDP provided to the national health service, not introducing charges or cutting public spending to 35 per cent. of GDP as advocated by the shadow Chancellor.

We believe in the NHS and are ambitious for what it can and must achieve. Moreover, as the interim Wanless report points out, United Kingdom health outcomes have not been good enough, public expectations are increasing, and over a long period we have not invested enough to get the health services that the British people want. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer spelled out in the pre-Budget report, we need to spend a higher proportion of national income on health, coupled with reform to improve delivery. If hon. Members accept that, they will accept that the money can come from only three main sources: general taxation, social insurance, or private payments.

[Mr. Smith]

We say that it is right that it should come principally from general taxation. We say that because, as the Wanless report states:

> "The main disadvantage of a predominantly social insurance based model is that the revenue base is more concentrated, falling on employment to a greater extent than in countries with a higher proportion of general taxation funding. As a result, many countries such as France with a tradition of social insurance, have been shifting the balance in their funding towards general taxation."

On private funding, Wanless said:

> "Private funding mechanisms tend to be inequitable, regressive . . . have weak incentives for cost control, high administration costs and can deter appropriate use."

That is the future to which the shadow Chancellor wants to condemn the people of this country with his proposals for charges. I have heard no argument from Conservative Members that calls those conclusions into question.

Mr. Edward Davey: Given that Ministers have been so against charges in the NHS tonight, will the right hon. Gentleman commit the Government to ending charges for eye tests and dental check-ups?

Mr. Smith: It was this Government who ended charges for eye tests for people over 60. If it were not for our commitment to resourcing public services, which would never have been possible with Liberal Democrat policies, that would not have happened. Of course we reject charging for clinical services.

As we have seen in the months since the general election, it is our party and our Government who are reaffirming a commitment to the principles of the national health service, hugely increasing health spending and matching that expenditure with reform, putting 75 per cent. of the funding through the primary care trust, devolving responsibility and empowering front-line staff.

The Conservative party, having promised that no one would be forced to take out private insurance, now wants to introduce charging for health care services but will not say who will be charged how much for what.

Mr. Bercow: The Chief Secretary has already gone one better than the Chancellor: he has so far provided half an answer to one of the 16 questions put by my right hon. and learned Friend. In the remaining three minutes, will he answer some of the other 15 and a half?

Mr. Smith: There is a lot to debate as we decide how to develop the NHS, but that contribution is barely worthy of our attention.

The public want a publicly funded, comprehensive, high-quality service, available on the basis of clinical need, not ability to pay. One thing is clear: the shadow Chancellor did his party, and indeed many decent Conservative voters, a great disservice last week and again tonight, when he derided this as a Labour question. The truth is that it used to be a Conservative question, too, and perhaps still is for those of his more moderate colleagues who are able to resist the ever increasing power of the fundamentalists in their constituency associations.

The shadow Chancellor and the Leader of the Opposition have confirmed that they are more extreme than ever. Their abandonment of a one nation health service is a final nail in the coffin of one nation Conservatism.

We are determined to secure comprehensive, high-quality services available on the basis of clinical need, not ability to pay. That is not just a Labour question: it is the British people's question. It is in applying the best values and instincts of the British people for fairness and mutual support that we, and not the Conservative party, will provide the answer: a properly resourced national health service that delivers for all the people.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 169, Noes 297.

Division No. 97] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James

Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Randall and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin

Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe and
Mr. Nick Ainger.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 292, Noes 167.

Division No. 98] [10.15 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon
(Dunfermline E)
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cassie, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Pollard, Kerry

Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Speller, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe and
Mr. Nick Ainger.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. John Randall.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House deplores the attempt by HM Opposition to draw attention away from their lack of coherent policies on public service improvement; welcomes the Government's determination to uphold the highest standards of integrity and honesty in public life; acknowledges that the Government has been open about the standards Ministers, Civil Servants and Special Advisers are expected to uphold; welcomes the publication of the new Ministerial code including the requirements on greater transparency never seen before, attaching the highest importance to the prompt and efficient handling of Parliamentary Questions and correspondence; and commends the professionalism and integrity with which the Government continues to conduct departmental business in the best traditions of public service.

LAND REGISTRATION BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 90(6) (Second reading committees), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

LAND REGISTRATION BILL [*LORDS*] [*WAYS AND MEANS*]

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52 (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Land Registration Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the charging of fees in respect of dealings with the Land Registry.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question agreed to.

LAND REGISTRATION BILL [*LORDS*] [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52 (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Land Registration Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses of the Chief Land Registrar or the Lord Chancellor attributable to the Act.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

Security of Energy Supply

That this House takes note of European Union documents nos. 5619/01, the Commission Green Paper, Towards a European Strategy for the Security of Energy Supply, and 7218/01, relating to common rules for the internal market in electricity and natural gas; and supports the Government's welcome of both these documents as the Green Paper provides analysis of the energy supply situation and the proposed Directive and Regulation would increase competition in the internal energy market and facilitate cross-border trading in electricity and thereby contribute to security of supply.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Local Government

That the draft The Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 14th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Terrorism

That the draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Enforcement of External Orders) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 14th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made,

That,

(1) At the sittings on Tuesday 11th, Wednesday 12th and Thursday 13th December, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any Lords Messages relating to the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill have been received; and

(2) At the sitting on Thursday 13th December, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until he shall have reported the Royal Assent to any Act agreed upon by both Houses.

Hon. Members: Object.

ADJOURNMENT (CHRISTMAS)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 25 (Periodic adjournments),

That this House, at its rising on Wednesday 19th December, do adjourn till Tuesday 8th January 2002.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Question agreed to.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Ordered,

That Bob Spink be discharged from the Education and Skills Committee and Mr. Mark Simmonds be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. John McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

SECTION 5 OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (AMENDMENT) ACT 1993

Ordered,

That, for the purposes of its approval under section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, the Pre-Budget Report 2001 shall be treated as if it were an instrument subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 118 (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation).—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

Belmont Primary School

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

10.31 pm

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): I am grateful—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Do not stand in front of an hon. Member who is addressing the House.

Dr. Kumar: This debate is about an Ofsted inspection of a primary school in my constituency. It is not about challenging the bulk of the findings of Ofsted's inspection of Belmont school, nor about education policy. I fully support the Government's aim of raising standards through monitoring and inspection of schools and helping those that need improvement. The debate is about what I, the head, the teaching staff and the governors of the school believe is an inherent flaw in Ofsted's inspection structure—a flaw that was inserted by the legislation that gave birth to Ofsted.

Belmont primary school is overseen by Redcar and Cleveland local education authority. It has 362 pupils on its roll and a well-respected head teacher, Colin Linthwaite. At the time of the inspection, a high percentage of the school's pupils came from outside its designated catchment zone; the figure has now reached 47 per cent. It is an improving school with continuing good results at key stages 1 and 2. I cannot stress too much that the school is one that I know personally as a Member of Parliament: I have visited it many times and I know that it possesses the indefinable but unmistakeable air of a happy school.

Belmont primary school was visited by Ofsted in March 2000. It was not a happy inspection. Before it started, there were concerns that the registered inspector had not made contact with the school until prompted to do so by the head. There was also concern about the fact that the contractor and quality manager of West Yorkshire Inspection and Consultancy Services took part in all the pre-inspection meetings. At those meetings, I am told, he was seen to be taking on a greater role than his duties as quality assurance manager warranted. It then became known that the contractor and quality assurance manager was married to the registered inspector; Mr. and Mrs. Charlton were husband and wife.

At first, it was thought that they would overcome the possible conflict of interest by acting professionally but, in the view of many in the school community, that did not happen. Comments by the contractor and quality assurance manager contributed to heightened anxiety among staff and the head. For example, there were comments on the accuracy of financial information submitted about the school—clearly a serious issue. Only later, after the head asked for the figures to be checked by the local education authority auditor, did the contractor accept that there were no problems.

Such incidents led the school community to feel that the team came with a pre-determined agenda. Things did not get much better during the inspection itself. On one occasion, a class was interrupted so that feedback could be given—an incident felt by many staff to be unprofessional and inconsiderate. Only later was the head told that, in fact, it was not an observed lesson. If it was not, why was the detailed feedback based, one must assume, on a short viewing by an inspector? Some classroom visits were very brief indeed, many less than half an hour. A number of members of staff felt intimidated; one was observed in the morning in class, then interviewed during dinner time, to the extent of an inspector waiting for her outside a toilet, then twice after school.

During the inspection, Mr. Linthwaite raised the issue of the quality of school statistical information that was requested. He pointed out that it was skewed by reorganisation and that the Goldstein report, commissioned by Ofsted, stated that inspectors should not look simply at figures in the abstract, but seek to quantify their social and demographic background. Knowledge of the report was denied both by the inspector and the contractor and quality assurance manager. When pressed on that, I am told that the contractor said that his wife's judgment should not be questioned; he spoke about his wife, not the inspector.

After the inspection, the head teacher was told that the school had serious weaknesses. It was also made clear that the school community could not challenge the judgments. The attitude of the contractor and quality assurance manager were perceived as hostile. On one occasion, a feedback meeting involving the governing body was subjected to what can only be described as a unilateral attempt to suspend the meeting by the contractor and the quality assurance manager. Those present felt that he was attempting to avoid detailed questions being put to his wife; the incident was a telling symptom of the problem.

The final report and the oral feedback did not mention strengths in many areas of the school's curriculum, nor did they focus on its capacity to improve. Negative comments were made in the inspection report about staff turnover, which did not acknowledge that some staff had left because they had been promoted elsewhere; others had retired on the ground of ill health; and that the school had a legacy of problems with falling rolls. Finally, sweeping statements were made about unsatisfactory teaching despite the fact that 83 per cent. of the teaching was seen as

"satisfactory, good or very good".

The school community was unhappy about those issues. It accepted that there was room for improvement and that no one is perfect, but was concerned that the report was biased and concentrated on negatives. That view was rooted in the perceived conflict of interest between the contractor and the quality assurance manager and the registered inspector, which centred on the fact that they were husband and wife. At that point, the school community began to consider resolving those issues through the Ofsted complaints procedure. The head teacher, obviously worried and concerned, came to see me at this point, and I urged him to press his complaints through the Ofsted procedure. Accordingly, the head wrote to Ofsted to raise the concerns on which I have elaborated.

The letter of complaint was initially sent on by Ofsted to the contractor, asking him to organise a response from his wife. Given that the nub of the complaint was the relationship between the two, that was seen as perverse

[Dr. Kumar]

by many in the school community. The official reply from Ofsted dismissed those concerns and stated in a letter to Mr. Linthwaite on 9 June 2000 that

> "Mr. and Mrs. Charlton were professional people with extensive inspection experience"

and that in its view, the independence of the inspection was not compromised. As that response came from the people involved, it was hardly surprising. The famous phrase, "They would say that, wouldn't they?" springs to mind.

On the other issues of substance in the complaint about inspection procedure, Ofsted argued that it recognised Mr. Linthwaite's concerns but could not act on them. It stated:

> "Where there are conflicting accounts of events from both parties, OFSTED is unable to determine what actually happened."

It continued:

> "It is because OFSTED attached equal weight to both versions. . . it is unable to come to a definitive view."

If that principle were applied throughout the judiciary, it would make every judge redundant overnight.

The reply led the head to take the matter to the second stage of the complaints procedure. He wrote to the Ofsted complaints adjudicator, making the same points and posing the issue of the long delay in the response to other detailed matters of concern. The adjudicator, Mrs. Elaine Rassaby, was, by contrast, far more thorough and critical of Ofsted.

In an adjudication dated 4 March this year, Mrs. Rassaby agreed with Mr. Linthwaite on a number of issues. She felt that the comments made by Ofsted about the relationship between the registered inspector and the contractor and quality assurance manager was, to say the least, unhelpful. She stated that Mr. Linthwaite had not been given a full substantive response by Ofsted. In her view, by basing its reply to Mr. Linthwaite solely on the registered inspector's response to the complaint, it had prevented objective assessment of the substance of the complaint; and the comment that the inspector and contractor were

> "professional people with extensive inspection experience"

was merely an observation. It was, in the adjudicator's opinion, inappropriate and irrelevant to the substance of the complaint.

The adjudicator recognised Mr. Linthwaite's concerns about the relationship, and his view that the relationship denied him fair consideration of his complaints by the contractor. However, she also thought that the existence of the complaints procedure in itself would serve to prevent collusion between any two parties, by an act of commission or omission. In her final recommendation she stated first, that Ofsted should apologise to Mr. Linthwaite, and secondly, that account should be taken of her concerns that Ofsted's response was based on the views of the inspector. Finally, the adjudicator declared that the comments that Mr. and Mrs. Charlton's professional experience and history should be enough were dismissive and inappropriate.

Ofsted's response came in May 2001. Barry King, from the office of the chief inspector of schools, replied in a detailed and thoughtful nine-page letter to Mr. Linthwaite. Many issues were dealt with and some resolved. On some issues—the conduct of the inspector and the contractor in pre-inspection meetings; the conduct and attitude of the inspection staff; and the contractor's attempt to close a feedback meeting with the governors—Mr. Linthwaite's complaints were upheld.

However, the crucial issue of the relationship and potential conflict of interest between the contractor and the inspector was ignored. Mr. King stated that Ofsted's view was simply that there

> "is no requirement for the contractor to be independent of the Registered Inspector, and indeed the contractor and the Registered Inspector may be one and the same person."

He went on to say again that any suspicion of collusion could be dealt with through the complaints procedure. I must say that that reply contained no thought about the fact that the simplest way of removing the suspicion of collusion would be to issue a direction to split the responsibilities so that no such conflict of interest could occur.

Mr. Linthwaite came to see me, seeking to take a complaint to the parliamentary ombudsman. I was happy for that to happen, as I was convinced of the rightness of his case, but I had an uneasy feeling about the outcome on the basis of the comments of the inspector of schools. The ombudsman replied on 3 October. He felt that he was constrained by the rules governing his own responsibilities from taking the matter any further. However, in his letter to me, he stated:

> "I see the strength of Mr. Linthwaite's argument that a complaints procedure that requires a complaint about a registered inspector first to be put to the contractor for the inspection who may even be the same person as the registered inspector cannot be seen to be fair and impartial".

I believe that that is a telling comment from a person at the head of the final stage of any grievance procedure affecting the citizens of this country. He went on to argue that while he recognised the concerns, the following stages of the Ofsted complaints procedure should ensure that justice was done—but why not consider a direction that simply removes the problem in the first place: the separation by Ofsted of the role of the contractor from that of the registered inspector?

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to consider the case for that change. One school has been affected by the issue, but there may be others. I do not intend to pass judgment on the outcome of the inspection. Some issues of injustice have been noted by Ofsted and they have been taken up with the West Yorkshire inspection and consultancy services. In that sense, the issue of the outcome of the inspection is finished. The action plan proposed by the school and the local education authority has worked and the school is once again going forward confidently and successfully, but the central area of concern remains: the perceived issue of a compromised process. Quite simply, making a statutory split between the contractor and inspector would allow the inspection process to go forward confidently and without the perceived taint of conflict of interest that was so evident at Belmont school.

I believe that the relevant legislation—the School Inspections Act 1996 and the Education (School Inspection) Regulations 1997—need amending, and that a simple statutory instrument could achieve that and would not be objected to by any Member of Parliament. Such a measure could prevent the issue from arising again, perhaps in a form that threatens the cohesion of a school so badly that it becomes a failing school through a self-fulfilling prophesy. No one wants that to happen and the remedy is in the Minister's hands. I thank the House for listening.

10.48 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar) on securing this Adjournment debate, which deals with an issue that is clearly of close personal interest to him, as well as to a significant number of those whom he represents. I commend him for the very measured way in which he presented his case to the House and for the very supportive role that he has played throughout, which includes the fact that he alerted me to his concerns ahead of the debate.

I was very pleased that my hon. Friend acknowledged the important role that school inspections play in the drive for higher standards. It is vital that Ofsted is able to do the job that we all want it to do: inspecting, reporting and providing expert advice that is underpinned by the evidence of its inspections.

It is also important that Ofsted has the full confidence of those it serves and that it is properly responsive and accountable to them. It is always worrying when teachers or others feel that they have not had a fair deal from an inspection, or that the conduct or reporting of an inspection did not meet the high standards expected.

Ofsted is a separate, non-ministerial department and, like other such departments, it is required to have procedures for handling complaints when they arise. It is important to recognise from the outset that Ofsted is the regulator of the contracted-out school inspection system. It is independent of contractors and those whom they employ, such as the team who inspected Belmont primary school.

To put this evening's debate in context, between 1 September 2000 and 31 August 2001 Ofsted dealt with 188 complaints of which four were upheld and 24 partially upheld. Out of a total of 4,448 inspections, that suggests a relatively high satisfaction rate or at least a low rate of complaint. Nevertheless, it is important that those who complain receive a fair and effective response.

As my hon. Friend said, Belmont primary school was inspected in March 2000. It was not a happy inspection. We have heard this evening that several complaints were made about various aspects of it. They have been carefully investigated through Ofsted's internal complaints process and, more recently, by its independent adjudicator.

That the process took some 13 months is, of course, worrying and Her Majesty's chief inspector, Mike Tomlinson, openly acknowledged that and offered his sincere apologies for the unacceptably long delay.

Although the delay was unacceptable, it was also uncharacteristic. The average time that Ofsted takes to investigate and respond to complaints is around 30 days, and 95 per cent. of complaints are tackled in the three-month target period. The case that we are considering is clearly exceptional.

Ofsted has acknowledged the problems and taken action to ensure that that sort of delay is not repeated. Procedures have been modified, and some changes have been made to the organisation. Ofsted has recently put a new look complaints section on its website. Early in the new year, it intends to publish revised complaints procedures which reflect some of the lessons that have been learned from the case.

As my hon. Friend said at the close of his remarks, he initiated the debate partly to ensure that others do not suffer similar problems. I hope that he will welcome the changes. He drew our attention to the quality of Ofsted's initial response to the various complaints. It was perceived as dismissive and inadequate. That perception was at least partly confirmed by the independent complaints adjudicator, Elaine Rassaby, when she examined the case. In the adjudication sent on 4 March 2001, she suggested, among other recommendations, that Ofsted should reconsider the original complaint in the light of all the available evidence.

Ofsted did that, and wrote substantively to Mr. Linthwaite on 11 May 2001. As my hon. Friend pointed out, it was a comprehensive nine-page reply. Ofsted acknowledges that its initial response in June 2000 was somewhat mechanistic and not as thorough as it might have been. Consequently, some aspects of the complaints that were initially rejected were later upheld.

The case demonstrates the value of the Ofsted complaints adjudicator as an independent reviewer at the end of the internal complaints process. My hon. Friend acknowledged that Elaine Rassaby's intervention was helpful to his constituents. The debate provides an opportunity to pay tribute to her for her work as adjudicator since July 1998. She reaches the end of her term at the end of the month. She has successfully established and developed the post and hands it on to her successor in good shape. Her successor is likely to be in post in January and, for the first time, will be appointed by the Secretary of State rather than Ofsted, in line with Elaine Rassaby's proposal, and for three years rather than one. That will enhance the independence of the post.

On the specifics of this case and, in particular, the concern at the heart of my hon. Friend's speech that the husband-wife relationship between contractor and registered inspector prevented fair consideration of the complaints, Elaine Rassaby expressed the view that this concern was properly addressed by Ofsted's complaints procedures. Those allow dissatisfied complainants to refer their concerns to Ofsted and finally to the Ofsted complaints adjudicator. My hon. Friend noted that the parliamentary ombudsman also felt that the ability to refer complaints to Ofsted should ensure that justice is done.

My hon. Friend suggested that it would be helpful to ensure a clearer separation of functions between inspection contractors and registered inspectors. The role of contractors is defined by Ofsted and is a contractual matter rather than being set out in legislation, so such a provision would not require a statutory instrument or other measure of that kind. So my hon. Friend's suggestion is, in the first instance at least, a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector, Mike Tomlinson. I know that members of his staff are paying attention to this debate and will report back to him on its content. Having listened to my hon. Friend's concerns, I want to make it clear that I will also ask the chief inspector to consider my hon. Friend's suggestion and write to him directly with a response to it.

On inspection judgments, it is important to note that complaints which questioned the objectivity and rigour of the inspection were not upheld. The judgment that a

[Mr. Stephen Timms]

school has serious weaknesses is not taken lightly. It is arrived at as a corporate decision, after extensive consideration of evidence gathered both before and during the inspection from a variety of sources, including discussions with the head teacher, staff and governors. It was Ofsted's view, following careful scrutiny, that the key judgment of the inspection team—that the school had serious weaknesses—was secure and supported by the evidence that had been gathered.

My hon. Friend noted early in this debate that the school had been told that it could not challenge the inspection judgments. Ofsted's view is that when complaints are upheld which have a bearing on the judgments in an inspection report, Ofsted's procedures allow for action to be taken. For example, an addendum may be added to a report and, in extreme cases, the report may be withdrawn, reissued or even declared null and void.

There is, however, no formal appeals system against inspection reports and judgments; nor is it our view that such a system would be appropriate. The then Education and Employment Select Committee, in its detailed examination of the work of Ofsted in 1999, considered this matter and reached the same conclusion that we did. Such a system could undermine the inspection process and lead to lengthy disputes between schools and Ofsted, which would then distract staff and governors from the priority task of developing and improving educational provision at the school.

This last point leads me to something that is easily lost in the discussion. I am talking, of course, about the impact of inspection on children and their educational opportunities. As I have already mentioned, the inspection of Belmont in March 2000 found that the school had serious weaknesses. As a result of that judgment, challenge and support mechanisms were triggered to help the school to tackle its weaknesses and to develop plans for improvement.

I was particularly encouraged to learn that evidence gathered during a monitoring visit to Belmont in July this year showed that the school was making good progress in addressing its key action points. I understand that the visit by HMI found improvement on all five issues raised in the original inspection, that progress was not just satisfactory but good on every one of the five and that the HMI visit uncovered no unsatisfactory teaching at all in any of the lessons that were viewed. My hon. Friend has confirmed that optimistic picture this evening, and I know that those improvements will be appreciated by the children and their parents. They are also a tribute to the staff at the school.

On the evidence before us, it is clear that mistakes were made in this case. Apologies have been offered and procedures re-examined and improved in the light of this case, and I think that that is right. Ofsted has an important job to do and high standards are expected of it.

Inspection is, above all else, about helping schools to improve. It encourages schools to build on their strengths and to address their weaknesses. The judgment that a school has serious weaknesses is intended to spur that school into improving the education that it provides, with education authority support.

The news that Belmont is making such good progress is heartening. I know that a great deal of hard work will have been put into achieving that. The school can expect a further inspection next year, because schools identified as having serious weaknesses are reinspected after about two years. I trust that Belmont will then be able to shed the "school with serious weaknesses" label, move on to be recognised as achieving continuous improvement, and play its full part in achieving our aim—and my hon. Friend's aim—of making a first-class education available to every child.

I hope that my hon. Friend will feel that lessons have been learned from this episode. I am grateful to him for drawing the matter to our attention and for the work he has done in following it for nearly two years. I also hope that he and Belmont parents, pupils and staff can now look forward to making further progress in the months ahead.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 4 December 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Aviation Summit

1. **Mr. Frank Roy** (Motherwell and Wishaw): If she will make a statement on her aviation summit, held on 3 December. [17487]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): The meeting that took place yesterday was a useful forum. It was perhaps the first opportunity for such a wide range of participants, including the Government, the Scottish Executive, the airline industry and the broader business community to get together. The discussion was useful, notwithstanding the events of 11 September. I plan to take matters forward in conjunction with the Scottish Executive, industry representatives and business interests to ensure that the key strategic issues for Scotland are included in the Government's forthcoming air services consultation paper.

Mr. Roy: I thank my right hon. Friend for her answer. Yesterday, did she get a chance to tell the airline industry that the biggest barrier to ordinary Scottish families using Scottish airports to go on holiday is the rip-off prices and fuel supplements that people are charged, not only in Scotland but in Northern Ireland?

Mrs. Liddell: I know of my hon. Friend's interest in the matter and am aware that he has raised it with the Department of Trade and Industry, which has now referred it to the Office of Fair Trading, which is looking at the issues involved. I wholly accept the point about the additional costs imposed on people flying to and from Scotland on holiday. There has been a marked increase in the number of no-frills airlines operating from Scotland, which is a significant benefit for Scottish leisure travellers. It is also a great benefit to inbound tourism because every flight that goes out to places like Brussels, Paris and Frankfurt et al comes back with foreign inbound tourists. I accept my hon. Friend's point about additional costs, but there has been a marked decrease in fares from Scotland and, as a result of the European Union's liberalisation of air traffic, there has been a significant decrease in airline fares.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): Does the Secretary of State agree that while good air links are vital to commerce and industry throughout Scotland, they are particularly important in the highlands and islands? May I ask two questions about that? First, is the right hon. Lady aware that a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House have been pushing the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), to designate a public service obligation on the Inverness-Gatwick route? What representations has she received on that?

Secondly, is the right hon. Lady aware of the immense shortage of air traffic controllers throughout the highlands and islands airport area? Given the National Air Traffic Services' decision not to go ahead with an investment in Scotland and the report in today's *Financial Times* on NATS' precarious finances, what representations will she make to ensure that that vital area—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That was about four questions; the right hon. Lady only has to answer one.

Mrs. Liddell: I shall try to be as all-embracing as possible, Mr. Speaker.

First, I have been lobbied extensively on Inverness airport, and I appreciate the seriousness of that long-running issue. Indeed, just a few minutes ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) pointed out to me that, next year, demand will far outstrip supply on the Inverness-Gatwick route. The Scottish Executive are looking at a public service obligation, and I hope that they will reach a quick conclusion.

I am aware of the difficulties that have been caused, especially recently, because of the shortage of air traffic controllers. The decision to delay the NATS centre is not directly related to that, but it is disappointing. However, NATS is committed to going ahead with the Prestwick centre and I have asked to meet its representatives on 15 January; I shall report to the House thereafter.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): I welcome the initiative of my right hon. Friend in pulling together some of the major players in the airline industry. However, will she consider including in any future consultations the trade unions, which are extremely concerned about the potential for job losses in the industry? I am sure that they would welcome the opportunity to make a constructive contribution to any debate.

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is my intention to set up, together with the Deputy Minister for Transport and Planning in the Scottish Executive, a series of working groups to look at specific issues, especially as we approach the aviation review, which will chart a 30-year future for Scottish aviation. I shall certainly make sure that trade union representatives are included in those deliberations.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): I am sure that the whole House accepts that the aviation industry has been badly hit by the tragic events of 11 September. But does the Secretary of State not realise that matters have been made worse by Labour's higher taxes and extra regulations on business? Would it not greatly assist the industry and help to secure jobs in Scotland if she announced a package of measures to reduce business rates, scrap the climate change levy and drop the Chancellor's plans to increase national insurance contributions?

Mrs. Liddell: As usual, we hear from the Opposition a cavalier disregard for the state of the environment. The business community in Scotland supports the Government.

Mr. Knight: What about jobs?

Mrs. Liddell: The right hon. Gentleman fails to take into account the fact that we have the lowest unemployment for 25 years, and the highest number of people in employment for 40 years. We will continue to work closely with the business community in Scotland. Because of that close working, there has been an increase in passenger traffic at Glasgow, Edinburgh and Prestwick airports since the events of 11 September. That is much to be appreciated.

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): Since the court judgment under the human rights legislation that people who live near airports have the right to a good night's sleep, I have received from Clydebank and Milngavie a significant number of letters asking that people there should have that. Can my right hon. Friend give me an assurance that when decisions are made about how to progress after that judgment, against which there may well be an appeal, the interests of such people will be taken into account, particularly in respect of the insidious growth of night flights at Glasgow airport?

Mrs. Liddell: I recognise my hon. Friend's point. As someone who lives under the flight path, I appreciate the force of that point. We will certainly take those factors into account. Planning matters are dealt with by the Scottish Executive, but everyone is aware of the need to minimise noise disruption to people who live under flight paths.

United Kingdom Delegations

2. **Annabelle Ewing** (Perth): What the Government policy is on Scottish Executive requests to participate in United Kingdom delegations to the EU and other international forums; and if she will make a sta[illegible]ent. [17488]

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): Government policy in this matter follows the memorandum of understanding and the concordats on international relations and co-ordination of European policy issues between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations. I commend them to the hon. Lady as excellent bedtime reading.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank the Minister for his answer. Taking the European Union as an example, can he clarify whether the pitiful 12 per cent. participation rate on the part of Scottish Executive Ministers in EU Councils since devolution, which is about the same rate as pre-devolution, represents a 12 per cent. limit on the number of meetings that Scottish Executive Ministers have sought to attend, or whether any requests have been turned down by the UK Government?

Mr. Foulkes: I am not sure what the hon. Lady and her friends are getting at. If she thinks that the British Government are unwilling for Scottish Ministers to participate, that is entirely wrong. If she is suggesting that Scottish Executive Ministers are not attending when they have the right to do so, that, too, is entirely wrong. When they are unable to attend, they contribute to the formulation of the United Kingdom line put forward by the Ministers who do attend. In 1999, Scottish Ministers attended six meetings; in 2000, nine; in 2001, 11 meetings to date. They have attended meetings on education, the environment, agriculture, fisheries, health, transport, justice and home affairs, and regional policy. As well as in the European Union, Scottish voices are heard at the G8, where the Chancellor speaks, at the United Nations Security Council and at NATO. If the hon. Lady and her friends had their way, Scottish and British voices would not be heard in all those forums.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Is the Minister aware that recent opinion polls demonstrate that opposition to the euro is stronger in Scotland than elsewhere? Can he clarify whether the Government intend to have the results of any future referendum counted separately by country?

Mr. Foulkes: No.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Will the Minister take the opportunity—unusually, perhaps—to agree with me that the best way for south-west Scotland and Scotland as a whole to be represented is within the United Kingdom? Will he once and for all condemn the rump of the Scottish national party at Westminster for its narrow and self-centred attempt to break up the United Kingdom? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Foulkes: Given the reaction from those on the Government Back Benches, I must agree with the hon. Gentleman. He will remember that there are more Scots in the British Cabinet than there are representing the Scottish national party in this Parliament, and they have a much louder, more effective voice. Imagine an independent Scotland with Alasdair Morgan as the Finance Minister trying to speak up—shout up—for Scotland. No, we are much better represented with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor speaking up for Scotland.

Barnett Formula

3. **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): What recent discussions she has had with the First Minister about the method of calculating the Barnett formula. [17489]

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): Discussions on a wide range of issues have taken place with the First Minister. To date, the Barnett formula has not been raised, as we have no plans to change it.

David Taylor: The Barnett formula was devised two decades ago as a temporary measure pending Scottish devolution and appears to be long overdue for reform. Is my hon. Friend aware that it currently produces levels of per capita education expenditure in Scotland that are 47 per cent. higher than those in Leicestershire, which has social problems every bit as severe as those of Scotland? Will he advise the First Minister that the Scottish Parliament should use its powers of taxation to fund part of its public services, as people in the English regions, including those who, like me, have Scottish roots, are getting fed up with bearing the burden?

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Hear, hear

Mr. Foulkes: The right hon. Gentleman expresses support, but in fact the Barnett formula has provided a stable, flexible and fair arrangement for funding Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland under successive Governments. I say to my hon. Friend that there are substantial variations within the English regions. Some of the less prosperous English regions have about the same per capita expenditure as Scotland. Perhaps he might like to raise the matter that concerns him in relation to education in Leicestershire when today's statement on local government finance in England is made at 3.30 this afternoon.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Does the Minister agree that one would have to come from a pretty anti-Scottish viewpoint not to recognise that the Barnett formula is a convergence formula that is squeezing increases in Scottish public spending to the tune of £350 million this year alone? Does he recall that that point was recognised by the Secretary of State in the 28 May edition of *The Scotsman*? She referred to what would happen

> "As Scotland becomes more prosperous",

and said that the formula

> "does come down over time."

How does that compare with the acknowledgement last week that Scottish growth is currently less than half that of the United Kingdom? How have we arrived at a situation in which, although Scotland is less prosperous, its increases in public spending are less? Would he describe that situation as a muddle or a fiddle?

Mr. Foulkes: I would describe the hon. Gentleman's argument as perverse. He clearly does not wish to see Scotland prosper. He is more interested in the SNP prospering than in Scotland prospering. The spending review has delivered £3.4 billion of new money to Scotland and £200 million was allocated in the Budget for the current year. We have delivered extra money for Scotland, just as we have delivered it for the whole of the United Kingdom. If the SNP thinks that Barnett is too mean and the English Tories think that it is too generous, most sensible people would think that it is just about right.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): May I tell my hon. Friend that I have had the honour of serving as an elected councillor in a local authority in London and that it is true that there is a great deal of poverty and deprivation in England as well? Does he agree that the argument that the Government can increase spending either in Scotland or in England and Wales is an entirely false proposition? Is not it one of the great achievements of this Government that, in addition to providing £6 billion of extra spending in Scotland, we have increased spending in England and Wales as well?

Mr. Foulkes: I hope that SNP Members will follow the example of my hon. Friend. He is talking up not only Scotland, but London, England and Wales. That is what we are doing; and we are spending more money not only on Scotland, but throughout the whole United Kingdom. That would be lost if any of the parties on the Opposition Benches, including the nice people down there on the Liberal Democrat Benches, ever got their hands on the reins of power. The only way of ensuring continued extra expenditure is with a Labour Government.

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute): Will the Minister please explain why the Government's interpretation of the Barnett formula is such that when a ferry service is running from Scotland to outwith Scotland from the constituency of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the UK Government will pay for it, but when such a service runs from a deprived area such as Campbeltown, they pass the buck and the bill to the Scottish Executive?

Mr. Foulkes: Ultimately, the taxpayer pays for it. It would have been possible for the Scotland Office to ensure that funding was available for the ferry. However, at the request of the Scottish Executive, the Secretary of State agreed to go ahead with administrative devolution. This afternoon, the Scottish Executive's Cabinet will consider whether to make the money available. My latest information is that Labour Ministers are enthusiastic about that. Perhaps the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid) should have a word with Liberal Democrat Ministers; I understand that they are rather mean about the matter. If he does not get on the phone to Ross Finnie soon, he might not have a ferry.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): As the Minister prays in aid an increase in total public expenditure in Scotland, can he tell us precisely whether the Barnett formula is working?

Mr. Foulkes: As I said earlier, the Barnett formula is stable, fair and works extremely well. I commend it to the hon. Lady. If she wants to find out about it, she should talk to her hon. Friends who were in government. They operated it and believed it to be stable, fair and flexible. On this occasion, although it is difficult to say it, we agree with them.

Mrs. Lait: I am interested that the hon. Gentleman is determined to stick with the Barnett formula, given that, in a debate in the House of Lords on 7 November, Lord Barnett said that convergence was never intended. A body of academic opinion in Scotland suggests that the formula works towards convergence. Does the Minister therefore agree with Conservative party policy that a long, hard look at it is required?

Mr. Foulkes: That is going a little far. I agree with the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan), but agreeing with Tory party policy is one step too far. The theory is that the Barnett formula would involve convergence. In the past few years, however, there has been no convergence. The formula is stable, flexible and fair, and we have no plans to reconsider it. I mean no disrespect to Joel Barnett, but he is no longer in government. We are in government, and we have no plans to review the Barnett formula.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I inform the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) that one of the most vociferous proponents of the Barnett formula was a former Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Forsyth, who was a soulmate of the shadow Leader of the House. He robustly supported it in the House of Lords debate. May I advise my hon. Friend not to listen to the strident voices of disaffected Tories or the jaundiced SNP? They are simply jealous of a constitutional settlement that is a pride and joy of the Labour Government.

Mr. Foulkes: You know, Mr. Speaker, I could not have put it better myself, and I shall not try.

Commercial Embassies

4. **Angus Robertson** (Moray): What discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive about opening Scottish commercial embassies to represent and promote Scotland's economic interests abroad. [17490]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): The Scottish Executive and the Government agree that Scotland is stronger as part of the United Kingdom. We therefore have no plans to reduce Scotland's influence by separating it from the network of British diplomatic posts abroad.

Angus Robertson: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, which was not a reply to the question that I tabled. However, does she agree that we may wish to repeat the highly productive and effective model of Scotland House in Brussels elsewhere in the world to promote Scottish interests? Is she aware of the transparent funding arrangements for sub-letting offices of the many bodies that use public money at Scotland House? Does she agree that such arrangements are successful because they are transparent and abide by the rules?

Mrs. Liddell: The hon. Gentleman should reflect on the fact that 58 officers of the Scottish Executive work internationally because of arrangements between the Scottish Executive, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Scotland Office to ensure that Scotland's voice is heard abroad. It is heard, just as the voices of Labour Members and Labour Members of the Scottish Parliament are heard effectively throughout Scotland. That meant one of our best results and one of the SNP's worst results at the general election.

Rosemary McKenna (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be better to harness the support of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for her "Friends of Scotland" initiative, especially the extensive network of 46 high commissions, 99 embassies, 10 missions and 69 consulates?

Mrs. Liddell: I agree with my hon. Friend that we are much stronger together and much weaker apart.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): Has the Secretary of State made an assessment of how much taxpayers' money would be wasted—spent—on establishing Scottish commercial embassies around the world? That money would be much better spent in the United Kingdom, strengthening the United Kingdom's—and Scotland's—position, rather than pandering to the prejudices of the Scottish nationalists.

Mrs. Liddell: I have not wasted any taxpayers' money assessing the impact of Scottish commercial embassies abroad, because Scotland's interests are well represented abroad, just as Scotland is much better represented in the Cabinet than it would be by the rump of the SNP that survived the last general election.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

The Advocate-General was asked—

Human Rights Act

26. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): How many actions under the Human Rights Act 1998 involving the Government have been brought in Scotland. [17512]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): Human rights issues can arise in the Scottish courts in a number of ways. For example, 10 actions involving potential declarations of incompatibility under section 4 of the Human Rights Act 1998 have been formally intimated to the Government. To date, so far as I am aware, no free-standing actions in Scotland against any Department of the Government have been raised under section 7 of the Act. The hon. Lady will be aware that the Government have been interested in a number of devolution issues raising human rights points, in which I have intervened as Advocate-General.

Miss McIntosh: Would the hon. and learned Lady agree that more than 1,300 cases involving human rights issues have been brought under devolution since May 1999? In answering, will she tell the House what added value her position has brought to the Government, and how accountable to Parliament she believes that she is?

The Advocate-General: I certainly agree that that is the correct number—it is the number that I gave recently in Parliament. So far as added value is concerned, the hon. Lady will be pleased to know that I did not intervene in 1,300 cases. I restricted myself, held myself back and saved public money. I intervened in only a small number of cases, when I thought that I could assist, for example, by explaining the UK position or by developing arguments that might be useful to the court in reaching a determination. I have the exact number elsewhere—I can give it to the hon. Lady—but I think that I intervened in about 20 cases.

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill

27. **Annabelle Ewing** (Perth): What role she has played in the preparation of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill as far as devolved aspects are concerned; and if she will make a statement. [17513]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): Officials in my Solicitor's Office have been involved in the preparation of the provisions of this Bill which, for Scotland, have both devolved and reserved aspects. In doing so, they have collaborated closely with officials in the Home Office and the Scottish Executive.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank the hon. and learned Lady for her answer. Jurisdiction of the devolved aspects of the Bill were ceded to Westminster under a Sewel motion—the 25th Sewel motion since May 1999. To give the House an idea of the scale of that, there have been only 23 substantive pieces of legislation in the Scottish Parliament in that time. Will the hon. and learned Lady support a reversed Sewel procedure to ensure that, when substantial amendments are made at Westminster—for example, with respect to the Proceeds of Crime Bill—the matter is referred back to the Scottish Parliament for proper consideration?

The Advocate-General: No, I would not support such a procedure. It is a matter for Members of the Scottish Parliament to raise matters in the Scottish Parliament as and when they wish. So far as Westminster is concerned, in relation to issues on which the Scottish Parliament has made a Sewel motion, the Westminster Parliament will legislate, and debate on the matter will take place here.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Would my hon. and learned Friend be prepared to ask her officials to meet Mr. Douglas Connell of Turcan Connell, and other Edinburgh lawyers who have serious misgivings about the Bill?

The Advocate-General: The policy of the Bill is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, and I will certainly pass on my hon. Friend's concerns to him.

Skye Toll Bridge

28. **Mr. Charles Kennedy** (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): What assessment she has made of the circumstances in respect of the toll collections on the Skye toll bridge. [17514]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): The operation of the Skye bridge and the collection of tolls are matters for the Scottish Executive. Therefore any assessment in respect of toll collections on the bridge is a matter for Scottish Ministers.

Mr. Kennedy: I am sure that the Advocate-General is aware that, for the first time since 1977, a Joint Statutory Instruments Committee of this Parliament is meeting to consider whether the legal circumstances as applied to this House at the time of this enactment were in order. The Committee will have particular regard for the fact that the legislation on the Skye bridge tolls was passed under a classified statutory instrument. Will the hon. and learned Lady undertake to conduct her own legal inquiry into the appropriateness of the matter, because there is now—in addition to the legal and Scottish Executive considerations—serious re-examination of the matter taking place at Westminster?

The Advocate-General: The right hon. Gentleman may be aware that the legal issues have been explored at some length in the Scottish courts. Indeed, the matter has gone, so far, to a division of the Appeal Court where it was explored at some length. In the legal context, if a further appeal is made, that can be explored further. On the work that I might do as Advocate-General, I remind him that my job is to advise the Whitehall Departments of the UK Government; it is not to conduct new investigations of the type that he suggests.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

The Parliamentary Secretary was asked—

House of Lords (Judicial Functions)

29. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): What plans the Lord Chancellor has for reform of the judicial functions of the House of Lords. [17516]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): As we made clear in our White Paper on reform of the House of Lords, published last month, the Government have no plans to alter the current arrangements under which the Law Lords are Members of the House of Lords.

Mr. Heath: The Government have made a complete mess of democratic reform of the House of Lords, so will they at least seriously consider judicial reform? Is it sustainable that the Lord Chancellor remains a member of the Executive, the legislature and the judiciary at the same time? Is not the highest court in the land compromised by its position in the legislature? Is it not time to establish a supreme court for this country that is clearly separate from the legislature—these Houses of Parliament?

Mr. Wills: We have considered those questions exhaustively and extremely carefully, and we are content with the proposals that we have made; otherwise, we would not have made them.

The hon. Gentleman rightly refers to the separation of powers. That is important, which is why we have that arrangement in this country, and we are keeping it because we believe that it works. I must point out that the Wakeham royal commission considered the arrangement under which the Law Lords sit in the House of Lords and concluded that it works. Because it works, we are going to keep it.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the position of the Lord Chancellor, and of course he is right: the office is unusual in the way that it combines different roles, but it is also unusually useful, because through it the judiciary has a representative in the Cabinet and the Cabinet has a representative in the judiciary. As such, we believe that the Lord Chancellor is well placed mutually to represent the views of each branch of our constitution to the other.

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): My hon. Friend says that he has no plans to revisit the issue, but, for the sake of clarity, is he saying that, although we are consulting on House of Lords reform proposals in general, reform of the judicial function forms no part of that?

Mr. Wills: I think that we have already made our position very clear on that.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): May I say to the Parliamentary Secretary that, while I do not question the utility of the Lord Chancellor in some functions that he identified, I think it objectionable that the Lord Chancellor may sit in a judicial capacity, bearing it in mind that he is a member of the Executive? That is difficult to reconcile with the proposition of the independence of the judiciary, which is enshrined in the European convention incorporated in domestic law.

Mr. Wills: I am always interested in the right hon. and learned Gentleman's views on the matter and there are circumstances in which it would not be appropriate for the Lord Chancellor to sit in a judicial capacity. That is well established, and it has been well established by many Lord Chancellors, but it is important that we do not set down rigid rules about when that applies. The very essence of our constitution is its flexibility and pragmatism. I would have hoped that the right hon. and learned Gentleman, of almost all Members of the House, endorsed that.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): Does my hon. Friend not agree that the judicial functions of the House of Lords could perfectly well be exercised by a separate supreme court? Allowing judges, senior judges and, indeed, retired senior judges to act as part of the legislature confounds the concept of separation of powers, so I urge him, as the consultation goes ahead, to think about whether it is appropriate for judges both to pass laws and enforce them.

Mr. Wills: I can assure my hon. Friend that we never stop considering such matters, but he obviously has deep concerns. I hope that it helps to reassure him if I refer him to a statement by the senior Law Lord, Lord Bingham, on 22 June last year. He set out carefully the principles that the Law Lords would observe in pursuing the question of separation of powers, their participation in debate and voting as well as their eligibility to sit in related cases.

Speaking on behalf of all the Law Lords, Lord Bingham made it clear that they did not think it appropriate to involve themselves in matters containing a strong element of party-political controversy; that they were mindful to avoid anything that could cause them to be ineligible to preside over any appeal to the House of Lords in its judicial capacity; and that, in deciding eligibility issues, they applied the same principles that apply in the courts elsewhere. As far as I know, Lord Bingham's statement has never been criticised.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I hope that the Minister will consider carefully the questions that have just been asked by Members in all parts of the House. Will he also acknowledge that judges in the higher courts bear an increasing workload? Their decisions are of great national and often international importance: England and Wales is the chosen jurisdiction for many international contract cases and arbitrations. Is the Minister satisfied that there is enough administrative support and back-up for judges not just in the House of Lords, but in the Court of Appeal and the High Court?

Mr. Wills: As the hon. Gentleman will recognise, I am not responsible for support for Members of the House of Lords. Of course we appreciate the importance of the work done in the High Court and the Court of Appeal, and the need for judges to receive the support they need to discharge their functions. We are engaged in constant dialogue with the senior judiciary, and as a result we have recently increased by two the number of lawyers giving support to the criminal division of the Court of Appeal. Moreover, since 1998–99 we have increased funding for the Supreme Court—which covers the Court of Appeal and the High Court, among other bodies—from just over £21 million to £23 million in the current financial year.

Court of Appeal

30. **Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): What further proposals the Lord Chancellor has for the Court of Appeal to sit in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [17517]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): The Court of Appeal civil division has sat on the Wales and Chester circuit since 1999, holding sittings at Cardiff and Swansea. The Master of the Rolls attaches importance to the court's sitting in Wales, and has now committed it to termly sittings, subject to suitable appeals being available for hearing. In recent years, the Court of Appeal criminal division has also been convened in Cardiff.

Mr. Llwyd: In the present climate, in which Welsh public law is building up, it is appropriate for the Court of Appeal to sit fairly frequently in Wales.

Will the Minister urge his Department to ensure that the Employment Appeals Tribunal also sits in Wales occasionally? In two cases last year, appellants wished to speak Welsh but were not allowed to do so, because the appeals were being heard in London. That is surely wrong in principle.

Mr. Wills: We will consider that point carefully. We attach considerable importance to the use of the Welsh language in courts, and the court service is committed to treating the English and Welsh languages on an equal basis in the administration of justice in Wales. Most forms, leaflets, reports and other documents are now produced bilingually, which I hope gives the hon. Gentleman some reassurance.

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

31. **Mr. Robert Syms** (Poole): If he will carry out an independent review of CAFCASS following its first six months of operation. [17519]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): CAFCASS is already subject to independent inspection by the magistrates courts service inspectorate. The MCSI undertakes a systematic programme of inspection visits covering all areas of CAFCASS. That includes a review of CAFCASS headquarters, which is due to commence this week.

Mr. Syms: It is a pity that the Minister is not going to proceed with an independent review. The service seems to be in a mess. There is the long-running dispute involving guardians ad litem, the service is over budget, and the chief executive has been suspended. There is much concern in legal circles. How does the Minister think the current situation, which is pretty poor, can be remedied?

Ms Winterton: As I said, an independent inspection of CAFCASS is under way. That is part of the operation of the service. The MCSI made a preliminary report to Ministers in September, and it will publish its first formal report in the spring. The latter report will be laid before Parliament and deal with any problems that have arisen. I assure the hon. Gentleman that, as he may already be aware, some of the difficulties arising from the guardians dispute are being dealt with in consultation. Additionally, I am having weekly meetings with the chairman of CAFCASS and receiving regular reports from him.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that there are more unallocated cases for children's guardians in Wales than ever before? Can she assure me that new guardians will be appointed so that vulnerable children are not left in limbo and waiting lists are not allowed to increase any further?

Ms Winterton: I thank my hon. Friend for that question, and I know that she has concerns about that issue which she has expressed previously. The latest information from CAFCASS shows that the current case load in Wales is 741 cases, that it allocated 16 new cases last week, and that 16 cases are outstanding. However, it can be quite difficult to compare that situation with the previous one because figures were not kept centrally. Nevertheless, I assure my hon. Friend that if self-employed guardians are not taking on cases, employed guardians will be taken on to fill the gaps.

Auld Report

32. **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): If he will make a statement as to his functions under the proposals of the Auld report on the review of the criminal courts of England and Wales. [17520]

36. **Mr. David Lidington** (Aylesbury): If he will make a statement as to his function under the proposals of the Auld report on the review of the criminal courts of England and Wales. [17525]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Michael Wills): The Lord Chancellor, the Home Secretary and the Attorney-General are considering Sir Robin Auld's recommendations and consulting on them. Among my functions in that process, I am conducting a series of roadshows across the country—*[Interruption.]* I am indeed, and I hope that the hon. Members who are making so much noise will give us the benefit of some of their views on the subject.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): No.

Mr. Wills: I am sorry that some Opposition Members do not wish to consider contributing to this important process. However, everyone else who has a central interest in the criminal justice system and members of the public will be attending the roadshows, and Ministers and officials will be listening very carefully to their views. I am sorry that we shall not have the benefit of the views of some Opposition Members.

Mr. Osborne: I thank the Minister for that answer and look forward to the roadshow rolling up in my constituency. He will be aware that chapter 4 of the Auld report deals with the role of the lay magistracy and is critical of some aspects of what it calls the locality of justice—the overly local orientation of lay magistrates. Is not one of the precise strengths of the lay magistracy the fact that lay magistrates are locally involved in justice? Rather than centralising criminal justice, should we not be decentralising it and perhaps reopening magistrates courts such as the one in Knutsford in my constituency?

Mr. Wills: The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the Government's great commitment to the lay magistracy and indeed to the concept of local justice. However, he will also be aware that local justice is a rather complicated concept, and that local justice in rural areas is quite different from local justice in a great metropolitan area. We have to be quite sure that we have a criminal justice system that delivers for everyone who needs it to deliver for them, as it has not been doing. Although local justice is part of such a system, it is very important that we have a court service that delivers effectively and does not allow undue delays for witnesses and victims. I very much hope that the hon. Gentleman will support us in our modernisation of that service.

Mr. Lidington: Have not the Minister's words just let the cat out of the bag? Whatever the performances at his travelling circus going round the country, the Government have already made it clear in hints, briefings and words today that they are critical of what they term the over-local nature of magistrates justice, that they want to subject magistrates to special training before they sit in the proposed second-tier courts and that they will press ahead with closing many magistrates courts entirely. The Government's real agenda is to create a centrally controlled and managed judicial system that is accountable to one politician: the Lord Chancellor, who is not elected and not accountable to anyone.

Mr. Wills: I think that before he asks a question or, indeed, makes a speech in this place, the hon. Gentleman might be better advised to do a little bit of research and read what Ministers have actually said. We have made it quite clear that our commitment to the lay magistracy is unassailable—*[Interruption.]* Yes, it is unassailable. We are committed to consulting. What he regards as circuses are regarded by those who have visited the roadshows as an extremely valuable exercise in consultation—something that his party signally failed ever to do when they were in government.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): On 6 November the Minister told the House that the Government wanted wide debate on the Auld report. The report, as he knows, includes proposals for judicial appointments by the Lord Chancellor in respect of the proposed unified criminal courts, with the inevitable substantial magistrates courts closures and serious potential damage to local justice, despite what the Minister just said. Does he deny that—according to a memorandum by a senior civil servant discovered in the Adam and Eve pub by St. James's park—the Government, before the consultation period has ended, have in preparation a draft Bill of no less than 400 clauses to deal with those and all the other matters referred to and included in the Auld report? Does he deny that the unified court system is ranked second in priority for the Bill and does he accept that unless the draft Bill is made available to the public before the consultation period ends on 31 January 2002 the subsequent few weeks of consultation will be a sham? Will he be good enough to let me have a copy of the draft Bill now?

Mr. Wills: Unlike the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne), the hon. Gentleman has obviously done some research, but I am sorry that it was not of better quality. We are conducting the process properly, not through documents left in pubs, but through a full-blooded process of consultation. We have made it clear that the consultation will continue until 31 January 2002 and we will publish a White Paper in the spring. At that point, we will be happy to discuss all our proposals with the hon. Gentleman.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

The President of the Council was asked—

Information Technology

42. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): What proposals he will make to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons about the future use in Committees and Select Committee proceedings of information technology. [17531]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): I understand that the Information Committee may well conduct an inquiry into the use of information technology. I am sure that the Modernisation Committee looks forward to that Committee's report and will wish to study it carefully. I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his energetic persistence on this issue which I believe should now be taken forward. The Modernisation or Procedure Committee might wish to take this up in the light of the Information Committee's work.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful for the Minister's kind words and the content of his answer. I note that the agenda is moving forward. At a time when the Clerk in the Chamber of the other place is already using a laptop computer in connection with the work of the other place, it is a problem for the House of Commons that it is still struggling to determine which forms of IT and electronic equipment will be allowed in our Committees. In the light of the Minister's answer, I ask him to use his good offices to ensure that all those with an interest—the Committees he has mentioned, and the Chairmen's Panel—are co-ordinated in any further discussions to try to decide a way forward so that we can all gain the benefit of information technology in our Committee work.

Mr. Twigg: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who has support in all parts of the House—

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Twigg: Well, possibly not from the shadow Leader of the House. The Chairmen's Panel has made a ruling on the matter that we may wish to consider afresh, bearing in mind that the panel consists of senior Members with a great collective experience of Standing Committees. We need to explore the reasons for their reservations. The Chairman of Ways and Means may discuss that shortly with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I endorse every word said by the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack). It is not often that we are in full agreement with each other. When my hon. Friend the Minister considers the matter, will he bring to the attention of his colleagues and the Chairmen's Panel the fact that we are slipping badly behind in IT? For example, in the Estonian Parliament, the whole Cabinet is now run electronically. [*Laughter.*] The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) thinks that that is a joke, but if a small country such as Estonia can develop its technology after only 10 years of existence, surely Committees of this House can reach that level.

Mr. Twigg: I recall the allegation after the 1997 general election that Labour Members who had been elected for the first time were robots. I am sure that that is not the example from Estonia that is being recommended today.

This is a matter that needs to be moved forward. We have just had a repeat of exchanges that first took place five months ago, when I first stood at the Dispatch Box. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) raised this matter then, and my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) also made a contribution. The matter will be taken forward, first of all by the Chairmen's Panel.

Parliamentary Recesses

44. **Mr. David Borrow** (South Ribble): If he will introduce proposals to reform the length and timing of parliamentary recesses. [17533]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I agree with those who would like more certainty over recess dates. I announced the dates of the Christmas Adjournment in our first week back, and I announced the February recess last Thursday. I shall endeavour to continue to announce recess dates as early as possible.

Mr. Borrow: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is no longer in the interests of proper parliamentary scrutiny and accountability for the traditional long summer recesses to continue? Is not a reform of those recesses to give better balance urgently required?

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): That is a planted question.

Mr. Cook: I can assure the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight), who made his remark from a sedentary position, that it is not a planted question, and I am grateful for the opportunity to put him right at this stage in our proceedings. A number of people, both in the House and outside it, have asked whether the House really needs to be in recess for such a long, unbroken period. I am sure that that is a matter that the Modernisation Committee will wish to consider in the near future.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Does the Leader of the House recognise that there is widespread support for the view expressed by the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow)? However, does he also agree that although rationalising the parliamentary year is extremely important, it is also important to ensure that business is properly organised when the House is sitting? Will the right hon. Gentleman comment on the need to regularise the allocation and choice of subjects for Opposition Supply Days? That has got us into a mess in the past few days, and we clearly cannot go on—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are talking about the parliamentary recess.

Speakers List

45. **Caroline Flint** (Don Valley): What proposals he has made to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons regarding the House of Commons adopting a speakers list similar to that used in the House of Lords. [17534]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): This is a matter on which Mr. Speaker's views will be the most important. I am aware from a number of approaches that some hon. Members would welcome such a list.

Caroline Flint: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. May I take this opportunity to draw to his attention—and to yours, Mr. Speaker—that many hon. Members of all parties would welcome the production of a speakers list for debates? That would enable hon. Members to know whether they were going to be called. Debates could be organised in a way that ensured that everyone could take part in them fully. I hope that my right hon. Friend will take the proposal on board, and that he will take the matter up with the appropriate Committees, and with Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cook: I appreciate my hon. Friend's continuing interest in the business of the House, and I welcome her continuing support for change. There is such a speakers list in the other place, and it might be worth examining whether that works to the satisfaction of the Members there. However, I stress that any measure introducing such a list would have to recognise the Chair's discretion to vary it, as appropriate, and make sure that any hon. Member called to speak had heard a reasonable proportion of the preceding debate.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I welcome what the Leader of the House has said. Would he be prepared to go further and give a commitment that, in his roles as Leader of the House and Chairman of the ghastly Modernisation Committee, he would always give priority to the spontaneity of the House's proceedings and to the requirement that hon. Members attend those proceedings? Does he also agree that nothing should be done to allow hon. Members to leave, not attend, be absent or have a rather easy life? Will he therefore say that any proposed list that would allow hon. Members to turn up briefly, deliver a speech probably prepared by their research assistants, and disappear would be completely unacceptable?

Mr. Cook: Any such list would have to be indicative. It could not be mandatory and, as I said, the Chair would have to have discretion to ensure that the conduct of hon. Members was reflected in who was called to speak.

I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman is being fair to the Modernisation Committee, of which his own deputy, the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight), is a distinguished and valuable member. I am sure that he gives the right hon. Gentleman a full report on our excellent proceedings. Moreover, I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman serves the House well by constantly running down the diligence, activity, presence and commitment of hon. Members. In my experience, all hon. Members work extremely hard and give of their best. It does not help for the right hon. Gentleman constantly to decry that.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): If there are to be any changes to a speakers list, could we also have a guarantee that people will be penalised for reading their speeches? I do not know whether the Leader of the House ever goes down to the other place, but a bunch of Zs are visible over people's heads because of the boredom of the many speeches being read into the record. That also applies in other legislatures. In the brief time that I have been in the House—nine years—I have seen an increase in the number of people reading their speeches into the record. If we adopt the idea of a speakers list without making it the rule rather than the convention that people do not read their speeches, this is in danger of becoming a very boring place.

Mr. Cook: I can assure my hon. Friend that I have never found any of his speeches boring or in any way over-prepared. I share his broad prejudice on this matter. Indeed, I am the despair of civil servants because of my reluctance to read text given to me. I believe that debates are better if we stick to the standing convention that notes are aides memoire, not scripts.

Online Consultation

46. **Margaret Moran** (Luton, South): Pursuant to his oral answer of 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 108, on online consultation, if he will make a statement on the use made of e-mail responses to consultation on draft Bills published on the internet. [17535]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): I am wary, after the previous exchange, of appearing to read my response.

E-mail responses to consultations are taken into account in the same way as other responses. More broadly, the Office of the e-Envoy is developing proposals to enhance opportunities for participation in the democratic process through modern information and communication technologies.

A Cabinet Committee on e-democracy has been established and will be chaired by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House.

Margaret Moran: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that when we are using new technology, such as e-mails, we go out to groups normally unheard in this place to ensure that their voice helps to inform our legislative process? Will he ensure that in the proposals from the Office of the e-Envoy, every effort is made to explore the opportunities for the House to use the new technologies and for that to help inform our modernisation agenda?

Mr. Twigg: I am happy to concur with my hon. Friend and to pay tribute once again to the pioneering work that she has done in this field. I believe that there is a commitment on both sides of the House to ensuring that we reach out to people who may be disaffected with Parliament and modern politics. Enhancing modern technology to ensure that people have access to decision making, and democracy is an important way of achieving that.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire was asked—

Recycling

47. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, pursuant to his oral answer of 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 106, on recycling, what plans he has to introduce more ambitious targets for the recycling of *(a)* paper and *(b)* glass in the next five years; and if he will make a statement. [17537]

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (on behalf of the House of Commons Commission): The House authorities will continue to follow Government guidelines. Future targets set by the Government for the recycling of waste are 25 per cent. by 2005, 30 per cent. by 2010 and 33 per cent. by 2015. The House will be pleased to know, however, that the House authorities have already exceeded the highest of these targets. In the current financial year, we expect 50 per cent. of waste to be recycled. In addition, the Serjeant at Arms is retaining a specialist to help set House of Commons targets recycling paper, glass and other materials for periods over the next five, 10 and 15 years.

The Administration Committee will be kept informed, and I also think that it would be appropriate for progress to be reported in the annual report of the House of Commons Commission.

Mr. Mullin: Grateful though we all are for the undoubted progress that has been made recently, does the hon. Gentleman share my disappointment that despite the lofty sentiments that emanate from this place on recycling, most of our waste still goes to incineration or landfill. That is certainly true of paper and probably of the several hundred bottles a day generated from the Committee Rooms—bottles of water, I should add. How can we hope to change the culture outside if we cannot change it inside?

Mr. Kirkwood: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point but, with respect, he is slightly out of date. It is true that in the recent past landfill has been used to dispose of waste, recycled and recovered, from parts of the parliamentary precinct, but I think that that practice has now changed. Certainly the House authorities and the Administration Committee are working hard to establish best practice. The hon. Gentleman is right that if we cannot show a lead in this matter it is very sad indeed.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Does my hon. Friend agree that we could save both paper and money if, instead of printing early-day motions daily, they were posted electronically every day and perhaps printed only once a week or once a fortnight?

Mr. Kirkwood: I understand my hon. Friend's point, which is well made, but as well as paying careful attention to the need for recycling, we must try to prevent waste occurring in the use of paper in the first instance. That is all most welcome. However, my hon. Friend should be careful about referring such matters to the Procedure Committee, as authenticity issues would be involved in the electronic posting of early-day motions. None the less, I think that the House authorities would encourage any such ideas and they should be put either to the Administration Committee or the Procedure Committee.

The President of the Council was asked—

Legislative Programme

49. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): If he will bring forward proposals for a continuous programme of Government legislation in a Parliament. [17540]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): As I said to the House last month, it would be desirable to have a smoother flow of legislation, which would enable greater parliamentary scrutiny, and a rolling programme over two years might help to achieve that.

Mr. Bryant: I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments, but is not it time that we put paid to that stop-start process of legislation which, frankly, is worse than the west coast line? Is not it time that we looked at it over a full Parliament, instead of even a two-year process?

Mr. Cook: I am not sure that I can encourage my hon. Friend to hope for a full parliamentary period in which to pass legislation. It is desirable that there should be some time limit in which legislation has to be completed, but I share his concern that it cannot be good for Parliament for there to be half a year during which it is not profitable to introduce new legislation because it cannot complete the process. That is why so much legislation is rushed; it is in the interests both of the Government and of Parliament that legislation should not be rushed.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

European Communities (Finance Act) 2001

Human Reproductive Cloning Act 2001

National Australia Group Europe Act 2001

Local Government Finance (England) 2002-03

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): With permission—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will not tolerate shouting. The Minister is putting a statement before the House.

Mr. Byers: I should like to make a statement about local authority revenue finance in England for 2002–03.

Public services are the clearest symbol of community and solidarity. They are literally what we provide together as a society. For millions of people, public services are social justice made real. The challenge for the Government is to take the action and introduce the measures necessary to raise standards, provide choice and improve quality.

I am pleased to be able to inform the House that this local government settlement will have total support from Government grants and business rates of £47.3 billion. That is an increase over this year of £3.3 billion or 7.4 per cent.—more than three times the underlying rate of inflation. The £47.3 billion will be made up of £19.9 billion in revenue support grant, £16.6 billion in business rates and £10.8 billion in special and specific grants.

Today, I am announcing details of the allocation to individual authorities of the £36.5 billion of revenue support grant and business rates. When taken together with the police grant of £3.8 billion and other minor adjustments, that represents an increase of 4.8 per cent. over this year's allocation.

The money will be going in, but on its own that will not be enough to secure the extensive improvements that the Government want in our public services. This extra funding must drive forward change. It must ensure that our programme of modernisation and reform is implemented.

I know that for some change is never easy, but we need to be clear that reform is not the enemy of good quality public services. Put simply, we cannot leave things as they are—the status quo is not an option, so we must invest in reform and insist on results. Today's statement, coupled with the local government White Paper, which we should publish before Christmas, shows how we intend to apply that approach to local government.

Councils deliver a wide range of services that affect all our lives and are vital in delivering real improvements to our economy and to our quality of life as well. They help us to provide better education services and to sustain a better deal for the more vulnerable members of our society. They are key players in providing a better quality local environment and safer communities.

This year, we introduced a system of minimum and maximum grant increases for those authorities with responsibility for education and social services. We believed that such a policy was necessary because we recognised the unfairness that could be caused by the simple application of the present funding formula, which we regard as unfair. I am pleased to be able to inform the House that this will be the final settlement based on the present funding regime. From 2003, we will introduce a system that is transparent, fair and just.

The introduction of a minimum level ensured that every authority in the scheme received a reasonable level of grant increase, but to pay for that minimum we imposed a maximum on grant increases and scaled back the rises received by authorities between those two levels. That approach was generally well received. This year, therefore, I am extending the scheme to shire districts and to a group of authorities comprising police authorities, fire authorities and the Greater London Authority. I am pleased to be able to announce that I am setting the minimum level for those authorities so that in 2002–03 they will receive a grant increase of at least the rate of inflation at 2.3 per cent. on a like-for-like basis.

I have, however, given special consideration to those authorities with responsibility for education and social services. Last year, the minimum increase for those authorities was set at 3.2 per cent. This year, with inflation at 2.3 per cent., I have had to consider whether we could match last year's figure. That would not be easy, but 3.2 per cent. would give those authorities an income well above the rate of inflation.

Some authorities and local government associations have put forward the case for an even higher increase. Some have suggested an increase of 3.5 per cent.; others 3.75 per cent. I have rejected those proposals. Instead, I want to reflect the value that the Government place on education and social services. Therefore, I shall introduce a minimum increase in grant of 4 per cent. for all authorities that provide those vital services.

The introduction of a minimum increase of 4 per cent. will make a significant difference to a number of authorities. It represents, for example, an extra £3 million for Halton, £2.4 million for Middlesbrough, almost £8 million for Liverpool, £3 million for Nottingham and £3.5 million for Leeds. That money is over and above that which would have been received under a simple application of the formula. However, a minimum level has to be paid for. Some of the cost will be met by placing a ceiling on the grant increases to be received by authorities in each group. Those ceilings will be 7 per cent. for authorities with education and social services responsibilities, up from 6.5 per cent. last year; 4 per cent. for fire and police authorities; and 10 per cent. for shire district councils. However, those ceilings do not fully meet the costs of bringing education or social services councils up to a minimum of 4 per cent.

This year, councils had their increase scaled back to pay for the introduction of a minimum level. Scaling back would mean that some of those authorities, which have raised particular concerns about the level of funding—such as, for example, Birmingham, Oxfordshire, Worcestershire, Kent, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Warwickshire, which today get a good settlement—would see a reduction to provide other authorities with an increase to the minimum level. If we were to maintain the policy of scaling back, Birmingham would lose more than £1 million, Oxfordshire more than £800,000, Worcestershire more than £400,000, Kent more than £2 million, Nottinghamshire more than £650,000, Derbyshire £875,000 and Warwickshire more than £400,000.

I have listened to the views of hon. Members, parents, teachers and those with responsibility for the care of the vulnerable. I believe that it would be unfair to scale back those increases. I have therefore decided to put an extra £41 million into the revenue support grant this year so that there will be no reduction in grant for those getting an increase that is below the maximum. I believe that that will be welcomed by all those with responsibility for providing these vital services.

The other groups of authorities between the minimum and the maximum levels will have their grant increase scaled back to pay for the floor for their group. However, for police authorities and fire authorities, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I will put an additional £5.5 million into revenue support grant to help to ensure that scaling back will be on a reduced scale.

In addition, following representations made on last year's settlement, I also propose to promote capital investment by excepting, from the floor and the ceiling limits, grant increases that result from new capital spending allocations. As a result of this change and by way of example, Salford will get an extra £1.7 million, Hertfordshire an extra £1.4 million, Bristol an extra £900,000 and North Lincolnshire an extra £600,000.

With those grant increases and the stability provided by a minimum level, there is no reason why this year there should be large increases in council tax. I have laid regulations before the House to ensure that taxpayers can see clearly by how much their council tax has changed for each tier of authority that is responsible. From next spring, that will be shown on the front of the council tax bill, not buried away in a leaflet. Our longer-term policies for council tax will be set out in the forthcoming local government White Paper.

The increases in general grant will be matched by further good increases in the grants that we will be providing for specific initiatives. For example, in the next financial year, I can confirm that, as has been previously announced, there will be £300 million for the neighbourhood renewal fund—money that will enable councils with the most deprived areas to tackle the real problems that they face. I can also confirm that £200 million will be available to help local authorities to build care capacity. That will be a significant contribution, allowing them to improve personal social services where we recognise that councils face real pressures at present.

Local authorities are a vital part of our democratic system. People rightly expect a great deal from their council. That is why, since we came to office in 1997, we have increased grant to local authorities by £11.3 billion—a real-terms increase of more than 20 per cent. This stands in stark contrast to the final four years of the Tory Government which saw a real-terms cut in grant of 7 per cent.

I believe that this settlement is an important step in ensuring that local councils can meet the needs and aspirations of the communities that they have been elected to serve. It shows that we value local government and the services that it provides. This settlement provides the means by which local services can be improved.

Public services properly funded to meet the needs of our people; local councils again recognised as a democratic tier of government—that is the way forward for local authorities. It is the approach that is at the heart of today's settlement. As such, I commend it to the House.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): First, I thank the Secretary of State for giving me prior sight of his statement. May I also welcome him to the House of Commons? It is very good of him to drop by. I am sure we are all very pleased that the minibus finally found its way off the bridge and down the M1.

Although we might welcome the Secretary of State here today, local authorities and council tax payers will not welcome his statement, and neither will Labour Back Benchers when they realise what it means for local authorities. He tells us that the settlement is generous. He says that there is no reason why we should see large increases in council tax next year, but we have heard that before. Every year, this Labour Government promise a generous settlement for local authorities and every year they say that there is no reason for high council taxes, but every year council tax rises, on average, by three times the rate of inflation. Every year the Labour Government make promises and every year they break them.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that almost a third of the increase in the pension for single pensioners has been taken away by an increase in council tax? Will he confirm that today's settlement will leave many local authorities struggling to maintain services and facing not a 6 or 7 per cent. increase in council tax, but a rise that is well into double figures? Will he also confirm that today's announcement was delayed from last week because of the complaints from local authorities when they saw the figures for money to be top-sliced from their post-16 education budgets?

The Government will claim, of course, that increases in council tax is not their fault, but it is this Government's failure properly to fund social services spending and their imposition of extra burdens every year on local authorities that constantly squeeze council budgets. It is, of course, people who live in Labour or Liberal Democrat-controlled councils who suffer most because those councils have the highest council taxes in England. Will the Secretary of State confirm that 13 of the 20 councils with the highest council tax are Labour controlled? None is Conservative controlled. I understand that the Secretary of State has had other things on his mind recently. The fiasco of his handling of Railtrack meant that he has not—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We will not dwell on those matters, will we?

Mrs. May: No, Mr. Speaker, indeed not, but the right hon. Gentleman simply has not had the time to fight the cause of local government, so council tax payers and those who depend on council services will suffer as a result.

Let us get rid of some of the myths that surround this Government's spending on local government. Myth No. 1 is that the increase announced by the Secretary of State is what all councils will get. It is not. He announced a 7.4 per cent. increase, but that overall figure includes more than £10 billion of special and specific grants. Will he confirm that councils will have to bid for much of that

[Mrs. May]

money, with no guarantee of getting anything at the end of the day? Will he also confirm that for many district councils, his announced increase of 4.8 per cent., excluding special grants, is an increase of only 3.5 per cent.?

The right hon. Gentleman says, "I want to reflect the value the Government place on education and social services. I shall introduce a minimum increase in grant of 4 per cent. for all authorities that provide those vital services." Will he confirm that the 4 per cent. increase for education and social services will, on the basis of the past few years, barely cover the teachers' pay award and will leave schools with budget cuts and social services underfunded? Will he also confirm that when Labour came into power it promised a revision of the standard spending assessment and local government finance within a year? Now that revision is promised for 2003–04. Labour is taking six years to do something that it promised to do in one.

Myth No. 2 is that the standard spending assessment reflects what local authorities need to spend; it does not. Councils spend £1 billion more on social services than the Government allow in the SSA. Does the Secretary of State accept that social services are underfunded by £1 billion overall? Does he also accept that money recently announced for the next two years to relieve bed blocking sounds, as one GP told me, like a lot,

> "but by the time it cascades down to the bottom it may be no more than water poured on a desert."

Myth No. 3 is that this Government give councils the freedom to spend on local priorities; they do not. More and more money comes to local authorities as specific grants—ring-fenced to be spent on the priorities of the Government, not those of local people. Will the Secretary of State confirm that, on his figures today, almost a quarter of funding now comes from special and specific grants? Will he pledge to reverse that trend and reduce the percentage of funding coming through specific grants?

Myth No. 4 is that the Government deal fairly with local authorities. They do not—just ask the shire counties. Yet again, the settlement will transfer resources from the shire counties to other authorities. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that over the lifetime of the last Parliament, under Labour shire counties lost an estimated £700 million in funding? Will he also confirm that, under Labour, London local authorities have lost £450 million in funding?

Myth No. 5 is that the Government fund any new requirement imposed on local authorities; they do not. Over the past four years or so, the Government have steadily loaded yet more regulations, burdens and costs on to local authorities. Best value costs over £200 million; new regulations on fridge recycling will cost over £50 million; concessionary travel fares will cost £50 million; regional transport plans will cost one shire county half a million pounds alone; and the Railtrack fiasco has cost local authority pension funds almost £100 million. Then there are the extra education plans, the abandoned cars directive, recycling targets and the Homelessness Bill, all of which add to local government's costs. When will the Government get off the back of local councils and let them get on with the job of providing the services that local people want?

The final myth is that it will all get better; it will not. The spectre of revaluation looms, and so does the threat that, if it is around, Labour will use revaluation to increase council tax by stealth yet further in some parts of the country, notably the south-east and London.

The Secretary of State says, "Public services are the clearest symbol of community and solidarity" and that the settlement "shows that we value local government and the services that it provides." It is this Government's attitude to local services that provides the clearest symbol of Labour in power: increased central control, more red tape, freedoms curtailed, and all spin and no substance. Social services will continue to be underfunded and council tax will rise by much more than inflation. This Secretary of State is driving local government, like Railtrack, into the buffers, and council tax payers will pay the price.

Mr. Byers: I think that the hon. Lady wrote those comments before she had the opportunity to see the details of the settlement. If she had seen it, she would have recognised that an increase of £3.3 billion, or 7.4 per cent., is a significant shift in the Government's funding of local government, particularly when compared with the years of Conservative rule and their relationship with local government.

The hon. Lady spoke of shire counties and the difficulties that they will experience as a result of today's settlement, and we wait with interest to see how shire counties respond. However, I shall share with the House some figures that will reveal that the hon. Lady's case comes straight from the Harry Potter school of fiction. Between 1998–99 and 2002–03, the average increase for shire counties is 4.9 per cent. From 1994–95 to 1997–98, under the Tories, it averaged 1.9 per cent. That is the truth of the situation. Shire counties had their services decimated because of the Conservative Government's approach to local government. The situation is the same for London: there were cuts under the Conservatives, but more money is coming from the Labour Government.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) said that council tax increases will reach double figures and she sought to scare pensioners. However, she failed to recognise the fact that, under this Government, pensioners do not rely just on the state pension as they would under the Conservatives, who said that they would do away with all the gimmicks. According to the Conservatives, those gimmicks are the £200 a year winter fuel allowance for pensioners and free television licences for the over-75s. Pensioners know that they are getting more income as a result of measures introduced by this Government. The Conservatives also imposed a massive increase in fuel duty through VAT which hit pensioners; we reduced that to 5 per cent. We will take no lessons from the Conservatives about caring for pensioners—they know full well that they are getting a good deal from Labour and that they would not get that from the Conservatives.

On financial support, the hon. Lady is right to say that we are giving targeted grants to support the raising of standards in schools and help reduce bed blocking in our hospitals. Funds are being provided to help local authorities and schools to tackle those very real pressures. The important message of today's statement is that all of that is over and above the 4 per cent. that we have provided as a minimum for all education and social services.

Opposition Members representing shire counties such as Worcestershire know that we have listened to their concerns—*[Interruption.]* They may leave the Chamber, but they know that today's settlement and our decisions will be welcomed by parents and head teachers throughout counties like Worcestershire. When people have had the opportunity to digest the statement, they will realise that we have been fair, truthful and honest. The settlement is a real-terms improvement for local authorities, which will make no complaints about it because they will recognise that it is one of the most generous that they have had for years. The additional funding that we are giving local government in today's settlement and the minimum levels for all authorities that we are introducing for the first time mean that there is no reason for large-scale council tax increases, but there is every reason to expect real improvements in local authority services.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in Derbyshire, Bolsover and areas that used to have a lot of pits but now have none, unemployment is still the order of the day? In my part of Derbyshire, we have got a big job to do if we are to provide jobs for the future. Will the settlement ensure that people can get on with infrastructure projects like junction 29A, which could provide 9,200 jobs in the north of the county? One thing is certain—the settlement is far in excess of those in the 1980s. Five Tory MPs for Derbyshire used to get up on a day like today and demand cuts in the rate support grant for their own county. Those days, thank God, are far behind us. What is the settlement today?

Mr. Byers: For a number of years, my hon. Friend has been a powerful advocate for Derbyshire and Bolsover. I am pleased to tell him that there will be a 6 per cent. increase for Derbyshire; an extra £21 million will go to Derbyshire county council, which the county will welcome. In addition, it will not lose as a result of scaling back; it will be able to retain £875,000 as part of today's settlement. That is a good settlement and it is good news for parents, teachers and the communities in Derbyshire. I know that for many years Derbyshire has felt that it has not had a fair deal from the local government settlement, but we have done our best for the county today.

My hon. Friend mentions junction 29. I have been made acutely aware of that. I suggest that he waits for the local transport settlement next week, and I hope that he will be as pleased then as he is today.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that councils throughout the country will be disappointed that we have had another settlement based on the same outdated, flawed, virtually impenetrable and unfair system? I welcome his belated statement that next year there will be a different system.

Despite all the right hon. Gentleman's talk of setting councils free, will he acknowledge that the settlement represents a tightening of the Government's iron grip on local councils? It increases the level of special and specific grants by 15 per cent., which means that the proportion of Government funding that comes through those grants is 22.8 per cent. Will the Secretary of State also acknowledge that local councils will have to find well over £1 billion of their own money to provide their share of matching funds so that they can access even the standards funds?

Is it not the case that the Liberal Democrats and the Treasury are better than anyone else at predicting council tax rises? Does the Secretary of State accept that in the Red Book, the Treasury shows that council taxes are set to rise next year by 6.8 per cent.? The Minister for Local Government shakes his head, but that is what the Red Book shows. Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that while Government spending is likely to go up by 6.2 per cent., council tax payers will have to increase their spending by 6.8 per cent. and that businesses will contribute by 9.8 per cent.?

On council taxes—a matter that was raised by the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May)—will the Secretary of State confirm that based on band D, which the Conservatives always say is the best indicator, the council tax rises of Labour and Liberal Democrat authorities were 6.3 per cent. last year, while those of Tory authorities were a whopping 8.6 per cent.?

Will the right hon. Gentleman nevertheless confirm that social services departments will be bitterly disappointed by the settlement? Although the increase of £684 million may seem generous, when that is set against the more than £1 billion that social services departments are already spending above SSA, it is clear that many of them will fall far short in their ability to deliver high quality services to children, elderly people and other vulnerable groups.

Overall, the settlement is undoubtedly better than we would have expected under a Tory Administration, but it will still mean significantly higher council taxes, an inability to provide services to many of the most vulnerable, and another massive erosion of local democracy.

Mr. Byers: I begin by agreeing with the hon. Gentleman's figures for band D increases. I understand that in Labour and Liberal Democrat authorities, the rise in council tax was about 6.3 per cent. and that in Conservative authorities it was about 8.6 per cent., which gives the lie to the argument of the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May).

On ring fencing, I agree with the hon. Gentleman: this year and in the settlement for next year, there will be a significant rise in ring-fenced funding going to local authorities. There will be extra money going in, but it will reflect the national priorities established by the Government. I believe that we have come to a stage where ring fencing has gone far enough. I would like to think that this will be the final year in which there is an increase in ring fencing. I hope that in subsequent years, it will be reduced as an element of local authority finance.

When hon. Members have the White Paper in a few weeks time, they will see that that is the direction in which we intend to go.

The hon. Gentleman was wrong about the details of the pre-Budget report, which referred to a 6.8 per cent. increase in council tax yield, rather than in council tax charges. The yield is increasing for a number of reasons, but mainly because more dwellings now come within council tax. We estimate that the number will increase by about 130,000 next year. The collection rate for council tax is also improving. It is increasing significantly and the yield will improve as a result.

[Mr. Byers]

The hon. Gentleman raised specific concerns about social services. There will be an increase of some £680 million, or 6.5 per cent., in the standard spending assessment and ring-fenced grants. That sum will be seen as a genuine improvement by many people working in social services, to which it will make a very real difference. We do not, however, ignore the growing pressures on social services, which will need to addressed, especially in respect of care for the elderly and for children.

This is the final year in which the arrangements will operate under the present funding regime. I hope that the new regime to which we will move in 2003 will more accurately reflect the needs of individual local authority areas. That simply is not the case with the present funding formula, which is why we have had to introduce a minimum level for authorities, reflecting the unfairness of the present system. This is the last time that we shall do so. In the circumstances of the existing funding regime, we have produced a set of proposals that will be good news for council tax payers and excellent news for people who use council services.

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, especially the £3 million extra for Halton borough council, which will be greatly welcomed in the local authority area that I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg). However, what would happen if the Government were to cut public spending to 35 per cent. of gross domestic product? What would be the impact on the local government settlement announced today, which provides a £3.3 billion increase? Would a cut be made?

Mr. Byers: That is exactly the implication of the Conservatives' spending position. They shed crocodile tears about the need to provide finances for local authority services, yet we know full well that their objective—it was stated by the shadow Chancellor and by the shadow Home Secretary during the election campaign—and hidden agenda is to make huge cuts in support for local authorities and other areas of public expenditure.

Opposition Members may shake their heads, but that is the reality and they cannot ignore the fact that that is the position of their party. If they want to reduce the percentage of GDP that goes into public spending, the implication is that public services will be affected. They cannot have it both ways. They seek to do so, but the public will see through them.

The good news for Halton is not only the increase that I have announced and our introduction of the minimum level, from which it will benefit, but the rather technical change that we have made in the way in which capital credit approvals are dealt with, from which it will also benefit.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): The right hon. Gentleman would do well to seek to repair his own credibility before he starts impugning that of other people. In all his cooing to local government about its freedoms, is he aware that we will this afternoon debate a Bill that will give the Government power to direct education spending? Would not his sweet words be more credible if the Government dropped that part of the Bill and made it clear that they would not attempt to hypothecate any form of spending? Furthermore, does he recognise that social services have a serious backlog of crises and that care homes have been trying to increase their fees because they cannot make money under the present level of funding? Many local authorities do not have the funding to meet those demands, and the consequence is that many old and vulnerable people now face a very uncertain future. That must be dealt with.

In his reforms, will he recognise that there are very serious problems in rural areas, especially in the aftermath of foot and mouth disease, and desist from the constant leaking of money from rural areas into Labour-controlled urban areas?

Mr. Byers: The right hon. Gentleman obviously has not had time to read the details of the settlement; otherwise, his comments would have been more gracious. North Yorkshire, which is hardly an urban heartland, will receive an increase in grant of 6.3 per cent. I do not know whether he wants to give some of that back; if so, I am sure that there would be plenty of volunteers who have not got 6.3 per cent.

The right hon. Gentleman should recognise that it is a good settlement for North Yorkshire and his constituents. He should acknowledge that teachers and those who deal with the vulnerable in North Yorkshire have received a good settlement today. They will realise that one of their Members of Parliament has failed to recognise that.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I thank my right hon. Friend for the statement, which announced a generous settlement compared with statements by Tory Ministers in the past. The assistance to education and social services is welcome. A lot has been done, but there is still a lot to do.

Will my right hon. Friend consider the third block of grant, which is used for street lighting, street repairs, footpaths and parks? He should tackle those matters so that we can improve street lighting and replace old street light columns. We must spend some money on those additional services.

I thank my right hon. Friend for his assistance to the special interest group of municipal authorities—SIGOMA—and for the welcome that we received when we requested meetings with him. We have taken steps in the right direction, but I ask my right hon. Friend to consider the third block.

Mr. Byers: I hope that my hon. Friend and his authority, Wakefield, will welcome the fact that today's settlement means an increase for it of some £8.8 million, which will make a genuine difference. He is right to point out the increasing political importance of quality-of-life issues, such as street lighting, the condition of streets and abandoned vehicles. The size of today's settlement will perhaps allow local authorities to commit more resources to those important matters, which mean a lot to them and the communities they represent.

My hon. Friend has been a great champion of SIGOMA. As he knows, we have considered its position carefully. Last year, it received an average increase of only 3.5 per cent.; this year, it will get an average increase of 4.46 per cent., which will make a genuine difference to authorities that for too long have been unjustly treated by the unfair funding formula. The changes that we have introduced this year mean that they will get a good settlement and be able to make a real difference to their communities.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): When will the Secretary of State give us the details of the new formula? Does not he realise that vagueness about them does no good?

Mr. Byers: The details will be worked through. I shall try to find consensus about the way forward for funding local government. Worcestershire is a good example of an authority that has suffered from an unfair funding regime for too long. Most of us would agree about that.

I should like to introduce a local government settlement system that will last for decades, whatever political party is in power. The current formula is not right and does not work well; consequently, people suffer. We shall begin the process when the settlement is out of the way. I must consult on this settlement; after that, we shall begin to review and work on a method of doing away with standard spending assessments in order to allocate funds on a proper needs basis.

I am more than happy to talk to people from Worcestershire about how we achieve that. We shall begin the process next spring. When the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer) has had a chance to consider the matter, he will realise that Worcestershire has a good settlement this year. We are not going ahead with scaling back; that will also benefit Worcestershire because it will keep all the money that it gets from the settlement that we have announced this afternoon.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): I welcome the extra money for Liverpool. My right hon. Friend is in danger of becoming the council tax payer's friend, to add to his growing reputation as the rail traveller's friend.

Does the settlement take into account the inefficiencies of authorities such as the Liberal Democrat council in Liverpool? It overspent £529,000 on central services, which cater mainly for officers. They made up the money by taking £529,000 from services that affect my constituents. That has led to 31 redundancies in my constituency alone in the weeks before Christmas for people who work in the parks and cemeteries. Is that the sort of council that should be rewarded as generously as my right hon. Friend has done today?

Mr. Byers: The allocation is for the people of Liverpool, and it reflects the strong case that was put by the Members of Parliament for the Liverpool constituencies. That has been reflected in today's announcement. It is important to see the additional funding for local authorities not as funding on its own but as part of the drive forward to modernisation and reform that we all want. I understand my hon. Friend's anger about the way in which his constituents have been treated by the Liberal Democrat-controlled council in Liverpool. There is never a good time for anyone to lose their job, but the weeks before Christmas must be the worst time of all.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Taxis.

Mr. Byers: I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that some people in this House, such as my hon. Friend, fought and won political battles against that sort of conduct, so we will take no lessons from Liberal Democrats about policies. Talking about works of fiction, as we were in relation to Harry Potter, a "Focus" leaflet is a good work of fiction for anyone who comes across one.

We have provided the floor—the minimum level—for Liverpool, so it will receive an extra £8 million that it would not have received if we had just applied the funding formula. I hope that money will be used. It is not for the Liberal Democrat council to use on a whim; it is provided to meet the needs of my hon. Friend's constituents.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Will the Secretary of State help me, because I am slightly perplexed? He mentioned that, over the past five years, £11.4 billion extra had been put into the rate support grant. Will he tell me why my local Labour-controlled council in west Norfolk has, over the last five years, consistently put up the council tax by far more than the rate of inflation? On the basis of today's figures, will he give an assurance that King's Lynn and West Norfolk borough council will not have to put up its council tax by more than the rate of inflation? The right hon. Gentleman was quite complimentary about shire counties. Will he confirm that they will be kept, in future?

Mr. Byers: King's Lynn and West Norfolk will get a grant increase above the rate of inflation through the provisions that we have introduced today. Norfolk county council will get a grant increase of 6.2 per cent.—a generous settlement that will be welcomed by people in Norfolk. It will get even more, I regret to say, than Derbyshire, which shows the even-handedness of our approach to this process. We must ensure that people keep focused on the need to provide quality public services.

I go back to the message that we can provide the funding, but that is just one part of the equation. We all recognise that, in local authority services and elsewhere in public services, just leaving things as they are—or even just putting more money in—will not be enough. Funding must drive change, which must drive reform and modernisation. That must be our key message to local government and other public services.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that this settlement will be received with considerable relief by the London boroughs? They have been struggling with cost pressures, which have led to crippling recruitment and retention problems, with rapidly rising population numbers and with three quarters of the nation's homelessness total?

Will my right hon. Friend provide information on two further aspects of the settlement? First, has he succeeded in achieving the end of the council tax benefit subsidy limitations? Secondly, will he assist us further with the cost of temporary accommodation for Britain's homeless families by asking his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to revise the thresholds and caps for housing benefit, to allow London authorities to address the homelessness crisis and to receive full funding to enable them to do so?

Mr. Byers: The Government are still discussing the council tax benefit subsidy limitation, about which I hope to be more specific when we publish the White Paper.

[Mr. Byers]

My hon. Friend is aware that the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is already considering housing benefit, on which he will no doubt be able to make a statement at some future time.

My hon. Friend mentions the pressures on London local authorities, of which we are acutely aware. When people have the chance to read the settlement, they will see that, once again, London has a good deal. They will recognise that we have reflected on the pressures and that we have been able to respond positively. I hope that the capital and its local authorities acknowledge that we have ensured that, compared with what happened in the early 1990s, this settlement allows them to meet the real pressures that London authorities experience.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): Will not a 7.4 per cent. increase overall mean above 7.4 per cent. for some authorities, but significantly below for others? Will not local authorities such as mine, whose acute social needs are not recognised by the standard spending assessment, again find it difficult to make ends meet? They may again be forced to raise council tax above the rate of inflation, because the unfair SSA system disadvantages communities such as mine and, in particular, unitary authorities.

If the Secretary of State reads the social service performance league table, he will find at the bottom a disproportionate number of unitary authorities and seaside resort unitary authorities. There is something wrong with the grant, not the performance of those local authorities.

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman makes a good case for changing the formula; it is one reason why we shall do so. Indeed, he gives the example of pressures on seaside towns. Such areas perhaps have more pensioners in their population, which puts increased demands on local authority services. That is one reason why I hope that we can devise a formula based on the needs of a particular local authority. The current system has little, if anything, to do with the needs of a local authority area, so if we can move to such a changed system, we shall achieve real benefits. I understand the pressures to which he refers and I believe that we can accommodate them, certainly by April 2003.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is considerable relief in Sheffield that the debilitating cycle of cuts, cuts, cuts in local government public services is coming to an end and being reversed? Will he take steps to ensure that those increases go into public services, and not for the wrong priorities of some councils—for example, the recent 30 per cent. pay increase for the chief executive and senior executives in Sheffield, offered by the Liberal Democrat council?

Mr. Byers: Sheffield is to receive a £16 million increase as a result of the settlement I have announced today. The priorities are for each local authority to determine, but the important point, as I said in my statement, is that local government is an important tier of democratic government. It is for Sheffield's council tax payers to judge whether they are getting a good deal from their Liberal Democrat-controlled council. No doubt they will reflect on their chief executive's pay increase and they also know that a Labour central Government have allocated an extra £16 million to Sheffield, so they will no doubt ask their Liberal Democrat-controlled local council, "What benefit are you giving us as a result of Labour's £16 million increase?"

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Does the Secretary of State recall that, days before the 1997 general election, the Prime Minister promised reform of the area cost adjustment for the 1998 financial year? That means that this is the fifth local government finance settlement in which reform has not been included.

Does the Secretary of State also recall that, last year, Cambridgeshire, which is badly affected by the area cost adjustment, lost out again because of the application of floors and ceilings and the re-evaluation of data for the area cost adjustment? Is any such penalty being paid by Cambridgeshire in this settlement, and will he commit himself to thoroughgoing reform of the area cost adjustment, including recognition of relative costs in SSA changes?

Mr. Byers: I think the hon. Gentleman will concede that this year's 5.2 per cent. grant increase is good for Cambridgeshire. He will also be pleased to know—he tried to make a point about this—that the authority will receive the increase in full: there will be no scaling back to pay for the minimum level.

As for the area cost adjustment, according to my recollection the Prime Minister said in 1997 that we would begin the process of reviewing it, although the hon. Gentleman may correct me. In any event, changes are now to be introduced. I look forward to being here in a year's time to build bridges, to produce the local government settlement and to ensure that the new system is fair and just. It may even benefit Cambridgeshire.

Mr. Neil Turner (Wigan): I welcome the 4.3 per cent.—£8 million—increase for Wigan, but I note that Westminster has been given a £13 million increase, raising its grant to £204.7 million. As Westminster's population is about two thirds the size of Wigan's, does this not emphasise the need for a radical overhaul of the whole SSA system to allow authorities such as mine a proper share of the cake—the very generous increase that my right hon. Friend has provided this year?

Mr. Byers: I am pleased to learn that Wigan will welcome the extra £8 million. I think it is a good settlement.

Westminster will receive a 7 per cent. increase, owing to the way in which the formula works. Real pressures affect authorities such as Westminster, as my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) will know—her constituency includes part of the Westminster local authority area—and those pressures must be reflected in the needs assessment.

When we embark on the introduction of a new formula it will not be easy to reach a consensus, but I think we should at least try to do so.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Which part of the revenue support grant is intended to cover the expense incurred as a result of last year's floods in the Vale of York? There were extensive floods in Rawcliffe, Thirsk and other parts of the area.

Does the Secretary of State intend the new formula to plug an existing gap? Will the budget anticipate, for the first time, the movement of people who have reached retirement age to counties such as North Yorkshire? At present, no expenditure projection is made to take those elderly people into account.

Mr. Byers: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has already made an allocation to deal with the financial consequences of last year's floods.

The hon. Lady mentioned elderly people who move to a different local authority area. I am more than happy to consider how we can accommodate that situation in the time lag between the count taken to identify those who have moved—elderly people, or perhaps school pupils—and the influence on the final allocation, but the Office for National Statistics is often involved, and must be given plenty of time to ensure that the figures are accurate. We cannot afford to announce a settlement and then, a week or two later, find that the figures must be reviewed, inaccurate figures having been used owing to the pressure of time. I want to get the figures right before we make the settlement.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): A 5.4 per cent. increase for a shire country such as Nottinghamshire represents an improvement, but a new system will be in place in 2003–04. My right hon. Friend described it as "transparent, fair and just". One way of judging whether it meets that standard will be to observe, in 2003–04, whether Nottinghamshire's schools get the same sort of deal as those in Herefordshire and Hertfordshire. Should we not be moving towards a fair funding formula for schoolchildren?

Mr. Byers: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has heard my hon. Friend's comments—*[Interruption.]* She heard them before she left—she is doing something about them already.

Nottinghamshire not only will receive more than £20 million extra because of today's settlement, but will be able to keep all the increase because this year we are not operating the policy of scaling back. If we had not changed that policy, more than £650,000 would have been removed from the allocation. There are significant benefits from that change, and there is a real-terms improvement in funding for Nottinghamshire.

My hon. Friend would undoubtedly say that the Government will have to take into account in the new local authority funding formula the pressures on schools, care for the elderly, services for children and many other factors that particularly affect shire counties. Although this is the final year of the current regime, I like to think that within the constraints under which we have been operating, and with the additional money that I have been able to find, we have been able to produce a fair settlement that will lead to real improvements. Nevertheless, I still believe that we can do much better. The real challenge is to ensure that, in next year's settlement, we meet the needs of Nottinghamshire and other councils.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): The Secretary of State may be aware that South Gloucestershire unitary authority is at the bottom of the league table on education SSA funding per pupil, and I assume that nothing in his statement will lift us from that position. My constituents are very keen to move to any new system, on the basis that we can go in only one direction. Will he therefore comment on the arrangements for the transition between this year's settlement and that for next year? Specifically, will there be damping? I appreciate that there might be damping to avoid big losses for the losers, but will there be damping on gains, or will authorities receive them immediately?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman is right: when we move to the new system we clearly will have to consider transitional arrangements. My worry is that, when I have conversations with colleagues, everyone seems to think that they will be a winner, which is why they want the funding formula to be changed. However, there will be losers—such is the nature of the regime. We have to ensure that we have transitional arrangements in place so that the changes can be introduced over time.

The hon. Gentleman specifically mentioned the position of South Gloucestershire unitary authority. This year, its grant increase is 6.2 per cent. and its education SSA increase is 6.6 per cent. I hope that will make a very real difference to his area. It is one of the best settlements that the authority has had, and, compared with the settlement for other authorities, it is certainly a generous one.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): If we are looking for someone to fight the cause of local government, as the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) put it, we certainly would not be looking in her direction. In the many years in which they were in power, the Conservative Government did nothing but undermine and undervalue local government.

I, too, welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, particularly his promise to reform local government finance. May I, however, caution him to watch his civil servants very carefully? Every re-organisation of local government finance that I have experienced has promised to be fairer and more open and to make more resources available; if he manages to pull it off this time, he will deserve the gratitude of us all.

I suspect that, as in all such statements, the devil is in the detail. As I have not yet had an opportunity to study the detail, will my right hon. Friend tell us whether the very serious problems that have been raised with him by social security authorities in north-east England are dealt with by today's statement, and whether the very serious difficulties facing them will be avoided?

Mr. Byers: When my hon. Friend has an opportunity to look at the settlement, he will see not only the extra £5.8 million for Gateshead, but that increases across the north generally will help to meet the pressures that are coming from social services authorities. With the constraints of the current funding formula, we have not been as generous as I perhaps should have liked and there will be some disappointment in some quarters. However, with the minimum level that we have been able to introduce, we have been able to ensure that there will be a reasonable increase for all social services authorities not only in the north-east but across the country. That will make a real difference.

[Mr. Byers]

Additionally, the £100 million that has been provided to social services to help with bed blocking for the remainder of this year will increase next year to £200 million. Authorities in the north-east will also benefit from that proposal.

I am mindful of the caution expressed by my hon. Friend about the review. All I can say to him is that I will be more than happy to be judged by him and my colleagues on whether the system is fair and just.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for the prominence he gave to Worcestershire in his statement, which I am sure is a tribute to the effective lobbying by the county's head teachers and governors on education funding.

I wish to press the right hon. Gentleman on the council tax benefit subsidy limitation. It appears that the SSA for Worcestershire will rise by 6.2 per cent.—on the face of it, a good figure—and the general grant by 6.1 per cent. Does not that mean that the council tax will have to go up by more than 6.2 per cent. to keep pace with the SSA? As the actual unadjusted figures show a 1 per cent. increase in SSA and a 1 per cent. cut in general grant, a still bigger increase may be necessary after the details have been worked through. What will happen to council tax benefit subsidy limitation?

Mr. Byers: I understand that in the hour of questions on the statement hon. Members have not had the opportunity to consider the figures in detail, but when people—including parents and teachers—in Worcestershire and elsewhere have had that opportunity they will see that the new arrangements are a move in the right direction. They do not solve all the pressures and problems in Worcestershire and elsewhere, but they are an improvement on what we have seen over several years.

We are still discussing the council tax benefit subsidy limitation, and I would like to think that I might be able to say something about it when we publish our local government White Paper in a few weeks' time—not long to wait. There is no reason why authorities such as Worcestershire should need to put up council taxes by more than 6.5 per cent. or 6.2 per cent. The issue is the level of grant, and people will see that the grant from the Government to Worcestershire and many other shire counties has been far more generous not only this year, but for the past two or three years. If the shire counties recall the early 1990s when their grants were cut by the Conservatives, they will recognise that Labour is their friend in government and the Conservatives certainly were not.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): I, too, welcome the general increases in my right hon. Friend's announcement. I especially welcome the additional resources that will be available for personal and social care packages, which have been a particular problem in Sefton and Knowsley.

I join others in welcoming the changes that my right hon. Friend intends to make in the funding formula to leave behind the Alice through the looking glass formula and introduce one based on the real needs of constituencies such as mine. I look forward to my right hon. Friend making that announcement from the Dispatch Box in a year or so's time.

Mr. Byers: I thank my hon. Friend. Knowsley will get an increase of some £5.9 million, which will be well received. He is right to point out the needs of local authorities such as Knowsley that still face great pressures from high long-term unemployment, which need to be tackled. When people examine how we have been able to allocate the funding, they will recognise that within the constraints under which we operate this is a good deal for all local authorities. We have been able to introduce a minimum level for every type of local authority, including fire and police authorities. Everybody will get an increase of at least the rate of inflation and many authorities, including Knowsley, will receive increases significantly above the rate of inflation.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must move on.

Points of Order

4.39 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that yesterday European Standing Committee B had to abandon its work because of a technicality. Unfortunately, it was considering the European arrest warrant system, which is not only an important constitutional change but will affect everybody in the United Kingdom. It now appears that a decision will be taken in Brussels at the end of this week without the House of Commons having had an opportunity to scrutinise that far-reaching change. I would be grateful if you could tell me whether you have received notice that the Government wish to make a statement about the implications of those changes, or whether any attempt has been made to offer an alternative time to scrutinise that important point.

Mr. Speaker: We have heard nothing about that matter. I sympathise with the point that the hon. Lady makes and the difficulties that she has outlined. I suggest that she takes up the matter with the Leader of the House—perhaps at this week's business questions, which take place on the Floor of the House.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's shambles is a serious constitutional matter. A unanimous decision was required in the Justice and Home Affairs Council, and the imposition of a scrutiny reserve on the recommendation of the European Scrutiny Committee is therefore extremely important. Furthermore, the Scrutiny Committee also decided that this matter should be taken on the Floor of the House. Will you, Mr. Speaker, be good enough to ensure that the Leader of the House comes to the House to explain the situation, and that a proper debate takes place on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Speaker: Ministers will have heard what the hon. Gentleman has had to say on this matter.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Further to my point of order yesterday, Mr. Speaker, which can be found at column 76 of yesterday's *Official Report*. I seek a ruling following your most helpful statement last week that hon. Members should ask direct questions and expect direct answers. I do not know whether you have had an opportunity to read yesterday's *Official Report*, but we did not get a direct answer to any of the questions that were raised. Madam Deputy Speaker gave a most helpful ruling, when she said:

> "The Minister must relate his remarks to the motion on the Order Paper."—[*Official Report*, 3 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 76.]

In my view, he failed to do so.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Lady has put that matter on the record.

Health (Patients' Rights)

4.41 pm

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): I beg to move,

> That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the National Health Service to provide a patient with treatment in a private hospital or in a hospital outside the United Kingdom in certain circumstances; and for connected purposes.

The intention behind this Bill is to alleviate the pain and suffering of tens of thousands of patients waiting for treatment in the national health service. The purpose of my Bill is to introduce some patient power into the NHS. Too many people are waiting too long for treatment and, despite the Government's pronouncements, the situation is getting worse, not better. In my health authority area of Salford and Trafford, the latest Department of Health figures show that the percentage of patients waiting more than 12 months for in-patient treatment has more than doubled: 2.9 per cent. of patients waited more than a year in March 1997, but that figure rose to 6.4 per cent. in August 2001—an increase of 121 per cent. The same story is repeated across the country.

The right hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), who is the Labour party chairman and the Minister without Portfolio, owned up to the decline last week. He told the BBC that, although there had been improvements in some parts of the NHS,

> "in other areas we have even gone backwards".

His honesty made headlines. It was the first time that a Cabinet Minister had publicly acknowledged that some parts of the health service had deteriorated since Labour was voted in on the claim that voters had only

> "24 hours to save the NHS".

For patients and their families, of course, this failure is not news. For people waiting month after month for an operation to alleviate a painful or even life-threatening condition, it is a daily reality. This Government have increased NHS funding, just as the previous Government did, but it is no good for the Government simply to throw money at the problem. A new approach must be found. All too often, the Government turn away from radical solutions for improving the NHS, accusing those who propose them of wanting to privatise the service.

The reality is that people are being forced into paying for treatment in the private sector by this Government, because they are told that they will have to wait, in pain, for months before they can be treated. If they thought that six months would mean six months, they might be prepared to wait, but they have no guarantee about that. Six months can run into 12 months, and a cancelled operation may push the treatment even further away.

Patients have nothing that they can depend on, so they turn to the private sector. Some of my constituents have spent their life savings on treatment. For example, Mr. Hickson, a widower from Timperley, could wait no longer for his hip replacement, and spent everything that he had saved for his retirement on private treatment.

Another constituent, Mrs. Mary Kyng, was in severe pain following a fracture and needed a hip replacement. She was told, not that she would be operated on in seven months, but that she faced a seven-month wait before she could have an operation, and that that would be "at the earliest". After enduring pain for several weeks, when she

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could not get up and down her stairs or care for herself properly, she was desperate for treatment, so she took out a loan to cover the cost of a private operation. She has now had her operation but says that she will be paying off her debts out of her state pension until she is 75. When I wrote to the Secretary of State on her behalf, asking whether she could receive some form of compensation from the NHS, I was told that seeking private medical care was "a personal decision". My constituent is paying the price for the Government's failures.

Another constituent wrote to me recently asking whether he could go to Germany for his knee replacement operation. He was told that he would have to wait a minimum of 12 months to have the operation done here, but he has been informed by the hospital in Germany at which his nephew is an orthopaedic surgeon that he could have the operation there as early as this week but would need the NHS to cover the clinical costs.

It should be possible for patients to seek treatment either in the private sector or overseas if the NHS has failed to treat them within a reasonable time. Although the recent ruling in the European Court regarding patients' rights brought that closer to reality, in practice patients are being prevented from seeking treatment elsewhere because they have to wait for health trusts to authorise it. A lucky few on the south coast can benefit from Government pilot schemes, but that does nothing for my constituents or for those of most right hon. and hon. Members up and down the country.

Health trusts will argue that they can provide the treatment but for patients there must be some guarantee. They should be given a time when they know they will be treated, rather than a vain hope.

The Government set great store by targets. They have put pressure on hospitals, health trusts and health authorities to make waiting lists appear shorter, sometimes by distorting clinical priorities. In some cases, patients with life-threatening conditions are denied urgent operations so that those with less serious but more easily treatable illnesses can jump the queue. Hospital managers have been discovered removing patients' names from official waiting lists so that their hospital appears to be meeting Government targets.

We need honesty, transparency and treatment according to clinical priorities, not priorities set in an arbitrary fashion by the Secretary of State. This June, he said:

> "The maximum waiting times will fall from 18 months today to 15 months by spring next year, then to 12 months and by 2005 it will be down to 6 months."

At present, however, patients die waiting for cardiac surgery. A consultant at Wythenshawe hospital, Ben Bridgewater, has said that an awful lot of people who die seem to do so within the first six weeks of going on waiting lists. He argues:

> "Changing waiting times from 18 to 12 months would be tiptoeing around the edges. It won't make a difference. We need to almost eradicate the waiting lists."

Obviously, something radical has to be done.

My Bill would do two things. First, it would give Ministers the power to fix a maximum waiting time for all treatments. It might be 12 months at first, reducing to six months in due course. It would be approved by affirmative resolution in the House. That would achieve transparency and accountability. Crucially, patients would have a right to treatment within the guaranteed time; they could rely on more than just a ministerial aspiration.

Secondly, my Bill would give clinicians the power to specify a maximum safe waiting time for a patient on clinical grounds. If the new maximum waiting time was too long for a particular patient, if the condition would deteriorate through waiting or if there was a real danger that a patient would die on the waiting list, the consultant could recommend a maximum safe time.

I am pleased to have the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) as one of the distinguished sponsors of my Bill. He has given a great deal of thought to the matter and has led the way with his proposal for what he described as "NHS International", whereby British NHS patients could seek treatment overseas. Indeed, hospitals in Europe, reading his original articles on NHS international, believed that the scheme was up and running. Inquiries flooded in from European hospitals asking how soon they could treat NHS patients trapped on long waiting lists. I am sure that I am not the only Member who received inquiries from constituents who saw a ray of hope in the proposed scheme.

The right hon. Gentleman has expressed fears that the private sector may be more expensive than overseas hospitals. I believe that if my proposals were adopted, the result would be an increase in competition to which private sector prices would respond. In any case, at a time when the health budget has been underspent, the cost would appear to be less of a problem than the structural and capacity constraints of the NHS.

Power in the NHS has to shift from the bureaucrats to the patients. Patients must have a right to be treated within a guaranteed time, and that time must be based on clinical, not political, priorities. If the NHS fails to treat a patient within that time limit, it must foot the bill for overseas or private treatment.

The Government have pilot schemes for overseas treatment and allow a limited number of people to receive treatment in private hospitals, but they are not moving quickly enough and they are not going far enough. To relieve the burden on the NHS requires radical solutions now. My Bill could ease the anguish and suffering of tens of thousands of people who are waiting for treatment, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Graham Brady, Mr. Frank Field, Dr. Ian Gibson, Miss Julie Kirkbride, Mrs. Marion Roe, Dr. Richard Taylor, Mr. Nicholas Winterton and Mr. John Burnett.

HEALTH (PATIENTS' RIGHTS)

Mr. Graham Brady accordingly presented a Bill to require the National Health Service to provide a patient with treatment in a private hospital or in a hospital outside the United Kingdom in certain circumstances; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 18 January, and to be printed [Bill 61].

Education Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Before I call the Secretary of State, I inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.51 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is pleasing that the Second Reading of a Bill that continues our challenge to raise standards takes place on the same day that the United Kingdom achieved its best ever performance on international comparisons of achievement for 15-year-olds. I know that the whole House will congratulate our teachers and young students, who, in the words of *The Sun*, showed:

> "Our kids are the brainiest",

while, in the words of *The Times*, UK pupils were "near top" in world-class tests.

In reading literacy, our country came seventh. Only two countries significantly exceeded our score. In maths, we were eighth, and again, only two countries achieved significantly better results. In science, we were fourth out of 32, with only Korea significantly exceeding our score. It has always been the Government's aspiration that our country should have a world-class education service. That is what has guided us. Today's Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development results show that we are on the way to achieving that, and I thank all teachers and all who work in our schools for making it possible.

Today, we have also received the latest Ofsted report into literacy and numeracy. As hon. Members will know, last year, the results of the key stage 2 tests faltered, staggered or stood still—whichever verb one wants to use. However, over the lifetime of the literacy and numeracy strategy, we have seen an 18-point increase in literacy and a 17-point increase in numeracy. Some of the largest increases in progress were achieved in our poorest local authorities in schools where children had under-achieved for decades.

The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) was kind enough to give his speech to the BBC in advance of giving it to the House. I noticed that he commented that the Ofsted report was "damning". I have no objections to high standards and high aspirations. I do not mind how he judges his performance, but I question his use of the word "damning", especially as Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, Mike Tomlinson, said today of his own report:

> "The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies continue to have a profound effect on the teaching of literacy and mathematics in our primary schools and our reports pay tribute to the very hard work which schools have put into making the Strategies a success.
>
> The . . . Strategies have brought about substantial improvements in the teaching of literacy and mathematics and raised standards achieved by girls and boys in primary schools."

If that is a damning indictment of what is currently going on in our primary schools, long may it continue.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): Does the right hon. Lady also agree with the chief inspector of schools that the main reason that, in his words, there are problems this year is the shortage of teachers? Does she accept any responsibility for that?

Estelle Morris: I am not sure that the chief inspector said that that was the main reason. If I remember correctly, he said on the "Today" programme this morning that it was puzzling that the results had stood still. He went on to say that we cannot expect year-on-year improvement and that, in a strategy of such scope and importance, there were bound to be times when things stood still. He added that teacher shortages and teacher instability could be one of the factors that had an effect.

That is exactly the reason why, in previous years, this Government have taken measures in legislation and elsewhere to introduce training salaries and golden hellos, and the effects of that legislation are now coming through. That is why we had an eight percentage point increase in the number of people entering initial teacher training this year, and it is why we have 12,000 more teachers in our schools than we had four years ago.

The most interesting comment made by the hon. Member for Ashford—certainly in the official Opposition amendment—relates to the Conservative party's new-found love of local democracy. The amendment tabled by the Liberal Democrats also refers to local democracy. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), who speaks for the Liberal Democrats, has always wanted to put power into the hands of local authorities, rather than those of schools or parents, so I can take that point from him because it has been his consistent approach throughout the many years that I have known him. However, such an approach by the hon. Member for Ashford represents a U-turn of great proportions: gone are the free schools, and power has gone back to local authorities.

The Bill is intended to build on the excellent work that schools, governing bodies and all those who serve our children have achieved in the past four years in taking forward the standards agenda. Almost four years ago, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department, the former Secretary of State for Education and Employment, introduced the first major legislative programme to kick-start our drive to raise standards in schools, and much has been achieved since then.

Four years ago, almost one in three of our infants were taught in classes of more than 30, so 485,000 youngsters started their education in classes that were too large for them to be given the individual attention that they needed. The House will know that that figure has fallen to 0.5 per cent., so that fewer than 8,000 of our infants are now taught in classes of more than 30. As well as the success of the national literacy and numeracy strategy, the amount of money spent on capital projects in our schools has trebled. For the first time, there has been sustained and significant investment in the buildings in which our teachers teach and our pupils learn.

We have already begun to provide major investment in the teaching profession, ensuring that we can reward our good teachers for teaching well, increasing their support in terms of classroom assistants and strengthening their professional development for the first time for a long time. All that and our other achievements, such as those in the tests for seven-year-olds and 11-year-olds and at GCSE and NVQ levels, represent a huge tribute to the

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head teachers and their staff, to the support staff and the governing bodies and to all those who work in our schools. They have achieved a great deal. On that issue, if on nothing else, I know that I speak for the whole House in paying tribute to the work that they do on our behalf for our children.

I hope that I shall also find agreement in saying that, against that background of significant progress during the past four years, there is still a considerable way to go. Some schools are still not good enough. Some children do not get the start in life that they need. The Bill is intended to build on existing legislation to provide new ways to tackle failure and to create more flexibility for our good schools. Such legislation would not have been possible four years ago.

It is crucial that we give schools more freedom and flexibility against a background of an accountable profession. We must know that teachers can use that freedom in the best interests of their children and judged against an evidence base. We now have the most accountable of all public services, which we did not have four years ago, and teaching is the most publicly accountable of all the professions. We know more than we ever did about the performance of every school in the country. Against that background of a hugely accountable profession and service, now is the time to say that, in that framework of accountability, we should devolve and trust those people who are well able to get on with the job that they need to do.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I must have said something that sparked off some interest.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Much of the accountability that the Secretary of State mentions is the result of the many reforms that were introduced under Conservative Governments, such as the publication of examination results, but will she help us on one issue: when will she publish key stage 1 test results, school by school?

Estelle Morris: I have always given credit where it is due. Ofsted and performance tables were clearly introduced under the previous Government. That was the right thing to do, we were right to keep them and we were right to reform them. For example, next year, we shall have the first value added key stage 3 results. I am happy to recognise what was done in the past. We have built on that.

We have no plans to change the publication of results except, next year, to introduce value added for key stage 3. In 2004-05, we shall be able to extend that to other age ranges.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): The right hon. Lady rightly talks about trusting teachers. Is it not ironic that she is introducing a Bill that has nearly 200 pages, 211 clauses and 22 schedules? How will she persuade a profession that already feels overburdened that the Bill is genuinely deregulatory?

Estelle Morris: The teaching profession will not count the number of clauses in the Bill. It will judge us by how things change on the ground. Those members of the profession who can use the powers that we give them will do so and they will be freed up.

Let me give an example that shows the dangers of the Tories' approach. They tend to count the pieces of paper that are sent to schools rather than reading what is in them to judge whether they are helpful. The Bill will split key stage 4 from key stage 3 in the national curriculum and it will free up the national curriculum to give more power and freedom to schools. The only way that we can do that is to rewrite in legislation the whole national curriculum. The irony is that many clauses re-establish legislation from previous Bills, but we have had to do that to free up the national curriculum now. When the hon. Gentleman considers the Bill further, I hope that he will reflect on that point.

We have always known—we are now in a position to build on this—that the way to improve all our schools is to learn from the best teachers in the best schools. Good ideas about educational reform are always born in our best schools. The way to transform the education service is to evaluate what goes well in our good schools and make sure that we make it available to all schools.

Like other hon. Members, I know from visiting schools that many schools are already finding solutions to some of the challenges that we still face. We need to give the good schools the freedom and flexibility to innovate further and we need to ensure that we can evaluate what they do and allow all schools to learn from them.

The first part of the Bill will introduce the new legal frameworks to give us the power to back the schools that have good ideas but that do not fit the rules as they stand. We will also establish a schools innovation unit to make sure that those ideas are supported and are shared with other schools. When our best schools come up against legislative barriers that stop them trying the solutions that they think will work, they will be able to ask for the legislation to be varied for a pilot period if that is what is needed. That is a power to free schools to do the things that they want to do to benefit their pupils.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): Liberal Democrats obviously welcome any measures that will allow more autonomy for individual schools, but does it make sense for the Secretary of State herself and her Department to make those decisions? Would it not make sense for the local education authorities to exercise some of that control? Would that not be a real understanding of decentralising decision making?

Estelle Morris: It would be entirely wrong for any Secretary of State to make the decision by his or herself—heaven forbid. The decisions will be based on the advice of Ofsted and on performance information. I have seen it quoted once or twice that the Secretary of State will take the decisions, but they will be taken on the basis of advice and good quality information.

There are two reasons for our approach. First, some LEAs are not good and we would not want to give such powers to weak and struggling LEAs. We also want national consistency, which is important. If Ofsted provides guidance and we use qualitative data and if the Secretary of State makes allowance for that and takes decisions according to what the provisions permit, we shall have a system that ensures national consistency.

However, I am grateful to hear that Liberal Democrats welcome the power to innovate. It may sound strange, but it will be hugely useful.

Let me give an example of how that power could have been used. Many of the deregulation measures in the Bill on which there is unanimity among hon. Members create flexibility at key stage 4. That flexibility could have been introduced earlier had the power to innovate been on the statute book. Schools have gone slightly over the line of what is legally acceptable for a flexible key stage 4 so that they meet the needs of the child. I do not criticise them for that; it is what they have had to do against the background of the legal framework. That is an excellent example of how greater freedom and the power to innovate will be useful.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Briefly, my right hon. Friend knows that I welcome many of the powers in the Bill. However, if we are trying to promote innovation and an entrepreneurial spirit, and some of the initiatives of the education action zones failed to be as innovative as many of us hoped, from where will she get the entrepreneurs of education who will produce the ideas? How will she deliver that, because one problem has been finding enough innovators and good champions of new ideas?

Estelle Morris: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I take it seriously. There are many innovative ideas in schools. Part of the problem is that schools and teachers work in isolation. There has to be a mechanism in the education system for people to get together to develop an innovative idea. Much of the Bill's thrust is to allow clusters and partnerships between schools to develop which have been frozen out of the system over the past 20 years—this is an interesting subject for debate—because of the consequences of the accountability framework that the previous Government put in place. It is necessary to keep that framework and to put levers for co-operation back into the system so that people can share good ideas and learn from each other, because that is badly needed.

The Bill introduces other new flexibilities. Clauses 34 and 35 give schools significant flexibility on staffing. Schools will be able to share staff so that, for example, other schools can benefit from strong subject departments and staff can learn from one another. There will be new opportunities for schools to make use of further and higher education staff in delivering education where that is appropriate. Schools will have greater freedom to involve properly trained assistants in working with children. We are not introducing a flexibility in staffing for its own sake; we are concerned about the quality of education that we offer our children.

Of course there is work that only a qualified teacher should do, and the Bill recognises that. Clauses 129 and 130 also recognise that properly trained classroom assistants have a major supporting role. We are creating for the first time a framework within which schools can develop the model of staffing that will best help them to raise standards.

There will also be new freedoms for schools to deliver wider services. It is a tragedy that in many deprived areas the school with the most resources is often shut when the rest of the community could use it. It is excellent that the Bill allows schools to extend the services, such as child care and adult education, that they provide to the community. In that way, schools can be at the centre of the provision of services that are offered to communities. The services will not just be optional extras, but vital to a school's community. They will provide what communities want and people need.

Schools will also have the freedom to join together to provide LEA services. LEAs and schools have been involved with us in pilots to establish innovative models that deliver local authority services. If LEAs choose to they can contract out some of their services to schools. To reassure the Liberal Democrats, the funds that are delegated to local authorities for their purposes under our fair funding arrangements can be devolved to schools only with an authority's permission. There will be a partnership. LEAs and schools will decide together on innovative ways of providing services, such as those that improve a school, and might choose to put schools at the centre.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) *rose—*

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough) *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I shall give way again to the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Willis: Does the Secretary of State accept that there is a massive contradiction in the proposal that will effectively ring-fence budgets and the idea of developing across-the-board facilities and services within local authorities? Is she not aware that if we try to improve education without considering health, housing and other services that local authorities provide, we will repeat the problems that we already experience? Surely there is a need to let local authorities be innovative in the use of their resources to provide an over-arching facility for young people, so that they get the best start in their education and continue to get the best.

Estelle Morris: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's objective of ensuring that there are services supporting education, and I do not differ from him one iota in acknowledging the effect of health and housing inequalities, poverty and poor social services provision on efforts to raise standards. However, I am prepared to do everything in my power to make sure that the money that the Government secure for education goes to education and to schools. I pay tribute to local education authorities for allocating that money in the past four years. However, it is imperative that funding supports the changes that we are now asking schools to make, so I want to take reserved powers, which I know to be opposed by the Local Government Association, so that, if necessary, we can ensure that money goes to education.

Chris Grayling *rose—*

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central) *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), and then to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), but then I must make progress.

Chris Grayling: Does the right hon. Lady realise how frustrating it is for head teachers to have to deal with

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micro-managed budgets and to lack the discretion to make decisions within their own schools about how to use the funds available to them? They constantly have to work with prescribed pots of money, which involves a huge amount of work and removes their ability to make the right decisions for their schools.

Estelle Morris: They do not find it as frustrating as dealing with ever-diminishing budgets for 20 years. The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, but if he talks to heads in his local schools he will find that, last year, we removed ring-fencing from the standards fund. Head teachers will tell him now that the standards fund no longer consists of separate pots of money that have to be spent on certain things; they have the freedom to carry that money forward or to vire, as long as they achieve the right outcomes. Any head teacher will acknowledge that, last year, there were far fewer ring-fenced budgets.

The Government have an obligation to make sure that there are funds to support the introduction of our key strategies, such as the literacy and numeracy strategies. I would defend again and again the fact that we attached money to those, and because they were properly funded, teachers were given training and support, and progress has been made.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: My right hon. Friend has not yet said anything about the clauses dealing with Wales, just as the Secretary of State for Health failed to refer to provisions for Wales when introducing the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill. Will she look carefully at the respective merits of the situation in Wales, where there will not be ring-fencing, and the situation in England, where there will? I take no particular view about which is better, but I would like to believe that new Labour will consider the two, and consider, on the basis of evidence, which works best.

Estelle Morris: Let me be clear about ring-fencing. The Green Paper on the reform of local authority finance separated the education budget into the schools budget and the budget for LEAs. We hope that that clarity and openness will ensure that schools get the money that they need. Nothing is more frustrating for head teachers than hearing politicians in central Government make speeches about money that never gets to them. Clarity is key, so we have taken the power to make sure that the schools budget and the LEAs' budget are transparent.

The only ring-fencing introduced by the Bill is a reserved power—to which I shall turn in a moment and which I suspect will rarely be used—to make sure that local authorities passport money to schools. The Opposition bemoan that fact, but I am serious about the fact that I want the money to go to schools, and the Government will take powers to ensure that that happens.

I shall now make progress on introducing the Bill. Schools will be given major new flexibilities in governance. They will be able to choose for themselves the model of leadership and management that best suits their circumstances. They will be able to create new forms of partnership with other local schools. Within a framework, they will be able to decide the size and precise composition of their governing body and form joint committees to carry out some work. That could mean partnerships to develop specialisms and maintain shared sites or work in any area where schools can benefit from sharing strengths. There will be new freedoms for schools to federate so that, for example, weak schools can benefit from the effective leadership and management of good schools.

At the heart of the Bill are measures to support schools, but it will be for them to decide what suits them best. However, the Bill gives them a chance that they have never previously had to work together more closely, from informal working together to joint committees and full federation. The Bill introduces a range of options, but it will be for the schools to decide what is best for them. We want to give the best schools even greater freedoms. They already receive lighter-touch inspection, which is working well. However, when their success shows that they can manage their own affairs, we want to give them more scope to do so. Under the Bill, successful schools will earn greater autonomy over the curriculum and teachers' pay and conditions. Again, it will be for them to decide whether or not to take up that autonomy. We will lay down strict and challenging qualifying criteria which, however, will be objective, open and available to all. Any school will therefore be able to take up the challenge to try to qualify so that we get an improving system that provides schools with an incentive to improve and allows the number of qualifying schools to rise over time.

The new autonomies for our best schools will support innovation and provide an incentive for other schools to improve their performance. Most importantly, for the first time, they will put our best schools, head teachers, teachers and classroom assistants in the driving seat for the next stage of educational reform. The accountability framework that we have developed gives us a chance to give freedom to some schools, but we have a continuing responsibility to raise standards in our weakest schools. The principle of intervention in inverse proportion to success means that we will free the best schools, but intervene decisively to turn around those that are unsuccessful. Our record on that is good and I pay tribute to everyone who has worked hard on the most difficult task in teaching—going into a failing school and turning it around. More than 800 schools have come out of special measures since 1997. We have cut the average time taken to turn schools around and reduced the number of schools subject to special measures from 234 in 1999–2000 to 138 last year.

However, we must intensify our efforts. There are serious weakness as long as one school is not as good as it should be or as long as one school is subject to special measures; that means that children are not getting the best possible start, which is the most important thing at the beginning of their life. We have always had schools that are not as good as they should be; I acknowledge that some of them face particularly challenging circumstances and work with children who deserve the most support.

There is even more reason to make those schools the best and give them the support that they need. Some do not have good leadership and some do not have the organisation that they need, which is why the Bill, in addition to reaffirming our commitment to do all that we can to work with those schools, gives us a reserve power to involve external partners if that is the only way to turn a school around. That partner may be a local education authority, a cluster of successful schools or a private, voluntary or public body. The only thing on which it will be judged is whether it provides a way to turn around a school that is not available to the LEA or the school at the moment. So that there is not a shadow of doubt, I pay tribute to LEAs that have worked hard to turn schools around and continue to do so. Surely no one in the House disagrees that there are some schools whose problems have yet to be solved and which can be improved. That is the innovation that we invite, and the direction in which we want to go.

If the governing body is part of the problem, as it sometimes is, the Bill will give us powers to replace it with an interim executive board while the school is turned around. In the past, Governments have too often turned their back on such schools. We are the first Government to turn them around in significant numbers. That is why, in the interests of raising standards for every child, we shall continue to do so.

However, it is not enough merely to raise minimum standards. Teachers and parents have always wanted an education system that can teach children as individuals. Every teacher strives to do that, and every parent wants that for their child, but it has never been possible to make it happen in the past. We believe that we have the potential and the chance to develop an education system that can more closely be tailored to the needs of the individual.

That is why we want to take powers to support innovation and to free schools to take new approaches to staffing, making possible more accelerated learning. We want to free the best schools to develop the next wave of reform, and make sure that 16-to-19 provision can be adjusted to meet the needs of local young people.

In the new year we will publish a consultation paper setting out our proposals for a new coherent 14-to-19 phase of education that will enable each individual to develop more fully their talents and aptitudes. In the Bill, we separate key stage 4 of the national curriculum from the other key stages, so that we can create the legal framework that will enable the conclusions of our consultation on 14-to-19 education to be put into effect.

Through the Bill, we are also promoting innovation within schools. We are promoting innovation in the provision of new schools. The Bill will extend city academies so that they can be set up outside urban areas, in which case they will not be called city academies, and will allow all-age academies. The Bill also introduces a new approach to the supply of schools. Where a wholly new secondary school is needed to meet a rising demand for places, any interested party will be able to present a proposal—

Mr. Willis: Apart from the LEA.

Estelle Morris: No, any interested party, including the LEA, will be able to present proposals. However, the measure will not squeeze out every other party but the LEA. It is a way of inviting a number of partners and creating a level playing field. When we decide between the proposals, we will take into account quality, value for money and local opinion, following full local consultation.

The programme of reform—I come now to the reserve power—depends on schools receiving the increases in funding that we are putting into the system. The new resources that we have introduced have reversed decades of under-investment and are a measure of the Government's commitment. I have already said that capital investment has increased to three times the amount in 1996-97. There has already been a £550 per pupil increase in real terms, compared with four years ago, in revenue spending. Over the next two years, that will rise to £760 per pupil.

It is essential that the extra money makes its way to schools. We have made sure that we delegate more to schools than has ever been delegated before, but in the Bill we will take a reserve power to require local authorities to set at least a minimum level of budget. I say again that I anticipate that the power will rarely be used, but it will allow the Government, if necessary, to make sure that schools benefit from the extra money put in centrally.

Chris Grayling: The Secretary of State has been speaking for 32 minutes on a Bill which is, for her, a flagship piece of education reform. Why, during that time, has she made no reference to teacher work load or antisocial behaviour in the classroom—the two issues which, according to every independent organisation, dominate the problems in our schools?

Estelle Morris: I am moving the Second Reading of a Bill which does not include those issues. Not all legislation needs to do so. The hon. Gentleman must realise that there are more ways of achieving change than passing laws in the House of Commons. Some things need a legislative framework, some need orders, some need directions, some need letters and some just need money. If the hon. Gentleman wants me to tell him what we have done with regard to pupil behaviour, I will do so.

There are more than 1,000 learning support units in our secondary schools. They did not need legislation; they needed only the commitment of a Government who were prepared to put in the resources and listen to teachers. Every secondary school in our excellence in cities areas now has learning mentors. That did not need legislation; it needed a Government who were committed to making the change and putting in the resources. By next September, every excluded child will have a full-time education in a pupil referral unit and there will be more such units. That did not need legislation; it needed a Government who were committed to doing it and who would provide the resources.

That is exactly why I have not referred to those matters in relation to the Bill, which contains measures to change the procedures and processes for making exclusions. It will give more powers to head teachers and ensure that they are given more freedom to remove from school pupils who are interfering with the learning of students and annoying staff as well. It gives them more freedom to get troublemakers out of school. The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell must realise that the fact that something that is not in the Bill does not mean that it is not being acted on. We are already acting on the problems in schools, which is better than spending six months in the House introducing legislation.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): There is a problem with regard to the so-called better schools, some of which are taking the exclusion route too freely. That results in school hopping, which happens when parents

[Dr. Brian Iddon]

who see that their children are likely to be excluded go to schools with spare places, which, in my opinion, are taking more than their fair share of difficult pupils. Is that problem being dealt with?

Estelle Morris: I have huge sympathy with my hon. Friend's point. The perfect example is that of a child in year nine who is excluded, cannot find a place in a school that is already filled to capacity and therefore goes to a school that has places. By the nature of life, such schools will often have more than their fair share of challenging pupils. That is why we have deliberately targeted them in making our decisions about allocating resources in respect of learning support units and mentors. However, there is also a wider problem, and I have thought about it a lot, as it is difficult to solve. I believe that the solution is for local head teachers to meet, talk and find a solution meeting the needs—"allocating" would be the wrong word—of excluded children.

The Bill contains a measure to ensure that all local authorities must have forums where such matters are discussed. I very much hope that head teachers will accept their responsibility not to put any school in a position—I shall not speak about "loading", which is a terrible word to use in respect of children who have as much entitlement to education as anyone else—where it has more than its fair share of challenging pupils, if another way can be sought. I accept that, if a school is full, it is genuinely difficult for it to take in other pupils. I applaud schools that do their share in that respect despite already being full or almost full.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) has made a good point about a significant problem. I genuinely believe that that problem cannot be solved by central diktat. My responsibility is not only to send the resources to the schools that end up with the challenges, but to put in place a framework to ensure that schools can make decisions about how these matters are dealt with.

Mr. Willis: Will the Secretary of State guarantee, whether by central diktat or otherwise, that no school that can opt out under the Bill, no new academy that is created, no new city academy or city technology college that continues to function and no new faith school will be permitted to have an admissions policy that does not allow the local education authority to place a child where there is a place in a school?

Estelle Morris: I am happy to give an assurance that all those schools, including city academies, will be covered by the admissions framework that applies to all maintained schools. That is an important point. Many city technology colleges already take excluded children and do a reasonably good job with them. The issue that faces the education system is huge. I have seen the problem best solved by head teachers who have been generous in spirit, like the hon. Gentleman in a former life, and got together locally to ensure that the needs of the children are well met.

The Bill takes forward a number of other important reforms. It continues the radical transformation of early education and child care. One of the most effective things that this Government have done in the long-term interests of education standards in this country is ensure that every four-year-old who wants a nursery place has one. Our commitment to ensuring that that also applies to three-year-olds is well on the way to being met.

The Bill gives us powers to build on the successes of the past four years and it will lie at the heart of our endeavour to ensure that we continue to succeed in the next four years. It is a major package of reform that will affect every school and every child in the country. It makes our good schools the leaders of educational reform for the first time and gives us more powers to work with and improve struggling schools. It paves the way for the long overdue reform of the curriculum for 14 to 19-year-olds and the opportunities that it offers, and emphasises the value that we should place on vocational education. At long last, it gives us the legal framework to consider the way in which we staff our schools. It also gives us the framework to continue to raise standards. That is our pledge to parents, teachers and others. I commend the measure to the House.

5.30 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I beg to move, To leave out from 'That' to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'this House, whilst supporting the principle that schools should be given greater freedom to use innovative methods to deliver improvements in standards, declines to give a Second Reading to the Education Bill because it contains nothing that will help schools solve real problems such as falling standards of discipline and the teacher crisis; gives even more power to the Secretary of State instead of devolving power down to schools and head teachers; effectively ends any kind of local democratic control of schools; and because it adds new tiers of bureaucracy to the organisation of education, increasing still further the already overwhelming bureaucratic burden on teachers.'

I am pleased to speak not only for the Opposition, but the vast majority of those who are involved in education in England and Wales. The overwhelming reaction of those who know what is going on in our schools is disappointment and hostility. They are disappointed because the Bill fails to tackle the many genuine problems in education. They are hostile because too much of the measure will harm schools, local democracy and the role of Parliament.

Once, long ago in opposition, the new Labour mantra was standards, not structures. Yet today we are considering a Bill of 211 clauses and 22 schedules that are devoted mainly to structures. No wonder the disappointment is so deep and the opposition so widespread.

The Secretary of State deserves congratulations on two matters. She mentioned the first the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development figures, which show how well our 15-year-olds did when they were tested in 2000. I am delighted about that. Everyone involved deserves the congratulations of the House, and I am happy to congratulate the right hon. Lady on that success happening on her watch. However, thanks to the excellent state schools that I attended, I am mathematically competent enough to work out that those children were born in 1984 and that, for the first 13 years of their education, they benefited from the reforms of the previous Conservative Government.

The Minister for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge): Thirteen years?

Mr. Green: For the benefit of the hon. Lady, there are 13 years between 1984 and 1997.

Margaret Hodge: They were born in 1984.

Mr. Green: Yes. I am interested that Government Front-Bench Members do not believe that education starts at birth or that parents have anything to do with their children's education. That is an insight into Government Front Benchers. They believe that parents neither have nor should have anything to do with their children's education. Never has new Labour so exposed itself.

I also congratulate the Secretary of State on her unblushing ability to describe the Bill as deregulatory when it centralises power in her hands more completely than any previous education measure. Only Wales partially escapes her all-embracing clutches. The hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) made a good a point when he suggested that, rather than seizing all power instantly, she might care to wonder whether that was wise.

I was fascinated when the Secretary of State said that there might be bad boards of governors, bad local education authorities and bad schools and that she wanted the power to intervene in all cases. It does not appear to have occurred to her or her colleagues that there may be bad central Government politicians who should not be allowed to intervene. Not only are Government Front-Bench Members so arrogant that they do not want parents to have anything to do with education, but they believe that they are the only repositories of wisdom on the subject. Such hubris will be greeted, as always in the long run, by nemesis.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The point that I was making earlier was that we should look at the evidence, and I apply that to those on the Opposition Benches as well as my own. Part of the evidence, which compares Welsh school funding with English school funding, suggests that there is a great deal more funding within the schools in England, possibly because of ring fencing, but I would simply ask the hon. Gentleman to look at the evidence.

Mr. Green: Looking at the evidence is usually a good thing before legislating. One of the many problems with the Bill is that it will be impossible for the House to look at the evidence, because so much is reserved for secondary legislation. I shall return to that and to the issue of over-centralisation in a moment.

It is worth while pointing out the sheer irrelevance of the Bill to the many crises facing our school system. I know how sensitive the Government are to having the teaching unions quoted at them, so I apologise if I offend their sensibilities when I cite today's briefing from the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers, which states:

> "Generally, the Bill, once again, seems preoccupied with structures. The Bill seems ill focused on tackling the greatest problem in education at the moment, namely, recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of high-calibre staff."

That seems exactly right. I do not always agree with the NAS/UWT, but that seems to be spot o[illegible]

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Has my hon. Friend noticed that, for example, in Danetre school in my constituency, the cost of recruitment of new teachers has risen tenfold over the last three years to £10,000 a year? Does he agree that that is not only a sign of the times, but a dead loss to resources that would otherwise be available to the school for the teaching of children?

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend makes a characteristically sensible point. I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House will find that that experience is repeated all over the country. It is a severe problem, and one of the many that schools are facing. We know that hard-working heads and dedicated teachers are applying day-to-day solutions to those problems, and we should all pay tribute to them.

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the provisions in the Bill to pay off the loans of students who become teachers is a positive inducement for new recruits to the teaching profession?

Mr. Green: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that clause 180 is one of the few good bits of the Bill. I was going to talk later about the bits of the Bill that I do not find particularly damaging, and I am happy to say that that clause is one of them, so I have previewed that part of my speech.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Does my hon. Friend agree that that provision is a bit rich coming from a Government who forced those loans onto students in the first place?

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend is right. I was suggesting—in a spirit of generosity to the Government, as I feel that most of the Bill is lamentable—that I was happy to acknowledge one of the few of the 211 clauses that was not too bad.

The Government have many crises to address. In health care, the patients waiting on trolleys are the visible signs of the crisis. The crisis in our schools is more subtle and quiet. Today's Ofsted report, to which the Secretary of State referred, warned that improvements in literacy and numeracy were stalling. Despite the right hon. Lady's attempts to deny it, the chief inspector said this morning that the main reason for that was a shortage of teachers. Teachers say that the main reason for that shortage is that too many teachers are leaving the profession because there is too much red tape and not enough power to discipline disruptive pupils.

The tests that the House should set the Bill are: will it encourage a single extra teacher to stay in the profession; will it cut the red tape that is driving teachers out of the classroom; and will it improve discipline in our schools? The answer to all those questions is a very clear no.

If, as I suspect, the Government are not keen on the NAS/UWT, let me quote the general secretary of the Secondary Heads Association, John Dunford, who has said that the Bill is

> "peripheral to the central concerns of schools . . . It is a rag-bag of proposals, which fail to address the issues of teacher shortages, excessive workload and inequitable funding".

So, if the Government want to have a row about how relevant the Bill is to the real problems in schools, they are going to have to have it with the people who work day to day in them, and they will lose that argument.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): I understand that the Conservative leader's flagship policy to solve the

[James Purnell]

very problems that the hon. Gentleman is addressing is to give children vouchers that would take them from state schools to private schools. Does he support that policy and will he table amendments to further it after the Bill receives a Second Reading?

Mr. Green: The hon. Gentleman's idea of the Conservative party's policy review process is fantastically misconceived, so I suggest that he reads more about it before intervening again.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Green: I have been generous in giving way in the past few minutes, but I must make progress. I shall give way in a moment.

The Secretary of State paints a rosy picture of the Bill and the state of education. She is decent and sincere and I am sure that she means it. Indeed, I now think that the whole Government, some of whom are rather less decent and sincere, believe it as well—the Chancellor pointedly ignored education in last week's pre-Budget report. In their panic over the health service, the Government seem to have forgotten that the Prime Minister used to say that education was his first priority. How quickly panic overtakes principle in the world of new Labour today.

Instead of the new money and the new ideas trailed before the pre-Budget announcement, we have the Bill—this rag-bag. Let me make it clear that Conservative Members would welcome genuine moves to give more freedom to schools to improve standards. During our period in office, we took steps to give schools precisely such freedom and many took those opportunities successfully, but I remind the Secretary of State that precisely those freedoms were taken away by this Government's last attempt at a flagship education Bill. On the charge of over-centralisation, she has much previous form and the Bill, for all the Government's bluster, is straightforward centralisation.

Many people recall the remark that sums up what a lot of us dislike about the Labour view of life—Douglas Jay's immortal saying:

> "The gentleman in Whitehall really does know better".

What is less well known is that he was talking about education policy, so 60 years on I pay tribute to new Labour's modernisation. These days, it is the lady in Whitehall who really does know best; otherwise, nothing has changed in the Labour world.

For those on the Government Benches who still cling to the fond illusion that the Bill will give new freedoms to schools, I recommend that they read it and get as far as clause 2. They will find that they are to vote the Secretary of State power to give her favoured applicants

> "exemption from any requirement imposed by education legislation".

Any requirement imposed by any legislation may be ignored, but only at the whim of the Secretary of State.

I suggest a test for those on the Government Benches. Would they like that power to be given to a Secretary of State of whom they do not approve? If they think it too powerful a weapon in the hands of such a Secretary of State, will they consider doing their job as parliamentarians tonight—holding the Government to account and suggesting to Front Benchers that this is a step too far? I expect them to do that only privately—I am not unrealistic in my demands of Labour Back Benchers—but I hope that somewhere on those Benches are a few people who value the democratic rights of this place.

I also know that, on both sides of the House, there are those who think deeply about how to create a world-class education system, which is clearly what we all want. I hope that some agree that we simply cannot achieve it by driving everything from the centre. If every big decision has to go across the Secretary of State's desk, however good the advice she receives we shall achieve not innovation, but delay and political second guessing. Frankly, if the Archangel Gabriel were available to be Secretary of State for Education and Skills, we would still not give him the powers that the Secretary of State wants for herself.

This country needs remotivated teachers, schools that can think for themselves and local authorities that can take their own decisions, but we shall get none of those from the Bill. Of all the criticisms, this is unanimous. Peter Smith, general secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, says:

> "Under the guise of deregulation and freeing schools to innovate, the real effect of this bill will be to give the secretary of state huge powers, under regulations which are rarely subject to parliamentary scrutiny. Far from being a liberal revolution, Whitehall is tightening its grip over schools."

David Hart of the National Association of Head Teachers says:

> "The idea that heads have to prove success to the satisfaction of the secretary of state is highly prescriptive and over-bureaucratic."

David Hart also said—I was enchanted by this—that the proposals were all spin and no substance, a phrase that many Conservative Members will recognise.

In case Labour Members are still disturbed by the range of opposition to the Bill from every teaching union, let me move away from trade unions and give them the view of a leading councillor—a leading Labour councillor, as it happens—Graham Lane, chairman of the Local Government Association's education committee. According to him:

> "This Bill enables the Secretary of State to take more powers for herself and I am concerned that such intervention could stifle the creativity and innovation we need."

The Secretary of State is completely friendless when it comes to centralisation, and I hope that she will reflect on that. She also appears to have no friends when it comes to her proposed treatment of local government. The Government are particularly keen to hide the Bill's effects on local education authorities. Notwithstanding their vehement attacks on Conservative proposals to scale down the role of LEAs before the election, that is precisely what the Secretary of State is doing now. The only difference is that we suggested devolving power down to heads and other teachers, whereas the Government are taking powers back to the Secretary of State.

The plans to give the Secretary of State new powers over local school budgets, and to create new tiers of bureaucracy with statutory school forums and admission forums, will effectively abolish LEAs by stealth and hand their powers to Whitehall. If the Government want to remove education powers from local government, they should be honest about it: the worst of all worlds is retaining the current structure as a facade after removing all the substance, which is precisely what the Government are trying to do.

I used the phrase "all the substance" advisedly. A copy of a most helpful document has fallen into my hands. The document is called "Education Bill 2001: a briefing for Labour MPs". There are many interesting facts about it. For instance, it is described as emanating from the Department for Education and Skills. I think that when my constituents pay their taxes, knowing that some are spent by the Department, they may hope that that portion is spent on schools, universities and pre-schools, rather than on political documents produced for Labour MPs to be helpful to the Government. I hope that the Secretary of State has considered the propriety of such action, because I am sure that others will.

Quite apart from the existence of this rather dubious document, its contents are fairly interesting. Page 14, which deals with LEAs, tells us:

> "The Secretary of State's power to direct is extended to any education function."

Any education function? Can the Secretary of State say how she will exercise that power? Will she want to abolish single-sex or grammar schools? Will another Secretary of State want to get rid of voluntary-aided schools?

I remind the House that this explanation of what the Bill really contains does not come from Conservative central office; it has been handed out to Labour Members so that they can be helpful to the Government. If they do not understand it, the back of the document invites them to contact the Department's special advisers—on a telephone number that I shall refrain from giving in public—*[Interruption.]*

The Government have recent form in connection with the use of special advisers for improper purposes. I think that the Secretary of State has been caught out, like her right hon. Friend, in doing the same. If the Government think that Labour Members will be helpful to them now, it is already too late. The Local Government Association has a Labour majority, and it also usually tries to be helpful to the Government.

Mr. Andrew Turner: My hon. Friend may not have heard the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy), from a sedentary position, ask what was improper about using a civil servant—*[Interruption.]* A special adviser is paid for by the taxpayer. Jo Moore was defended as a civil servant, under the civil service disciplinary code. I hope that my hon. Friend, as a former special adviser, can explain to the hon. Gentleman why such a use of a civil servant is improper.

Mr. Green: So far has the arrogance of power penetrated this Government, that they genuinely do not know why it is improper to use people whose salaries are paid by taxpayers of all political views and none to promote the partisan interests of the Government of the day.

Estelle Morris: The Bill does not raise that issue and I do not know why the hon. Gentleman is addressing it. However, I suspect that he may have an assistant who is paid with Short money, which is taxpayers' money that is given to the Tory party to promote Tory policy. I would also not be at all surprised to learn that there is a document circulating on the Opposition Benches that has been prepared by someone who is paid with taxpayers' money. The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy) is that the document—it is not a secret document—was prepared, as is long-established practice, by a political adviser, not a civil servant. There is a difference.

Mr. Turner: It was a civil servant.

Estelle Morris: If the hon. Gentleman does not know the difference that is his fault. Political advisers and civil servants are not the same thing; he will have to look up the definitions.

Mr. Green: I advise the right hon. Lady to stop digging. On the front of the document, it states:

> "From the Department for Education and Skills".

I therefore assume that it has the imprimatur of the right hon. Lady's permanent secretary, who is supposed to be the accounting officer and guardian of propriety in her Department. I suggest that she should be worried about what she has been caught doing today.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Perhaps we can clarify the point for the benefit of the whole House. Is my hon. Friend saying that the document has come not from Millbank or the Labour party, but from the Department for Education and Skills, and that it has been given to hon. Members of one party but not to those of another? That must be improper.

Mr. Green: It was certainly designed—*[Interruption.]* I was a special adviser, but neither I nor anyone else who was a special adviser at that time ever produced this type of document.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I advise the House that the point has now been well aired and it would be advisable to move back to the content of the Bill.

Mr. Green: I am very happy to do so, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The fact that the Government do not recognise the impropriety is all that the House needs to know about the issue.

The purpose of this wretched document, which is supposed to be about the Bill, has already failed. The document is supposed to try to make Labour Members helpful to the Government, but the Government have already lost the argument with their own side. The Local Government Association has a Labour majority, and understandably it usually tries to be helpful to the Government. It is therefore all the more damning that the LGA's key message on the Bill includes statements such as:

> "The LGA has concerns about the interventionist theme that runs throughout the Bill. The LGA believes that such interventions and the move towards centralised decision-making undermines local discretion and conflicts with the Government's commitment to involve communities in local decision-making. The LGA is explicitly opposed to ring-fencing of Local Authority Education

> Budgets. The reserve power will both diminish local accountability and makes joined-up and strategic working between services at a local level more difficult."

One cannot be more explicit than that. The Labour party at a local level is telling us that this Labour Government are centralist and anti-democratic. How right they are.

Additionally, with the creation of statutory school forums and admission forums, the Bill adds a whole new tier of bureaucracy to education. Is the Secretary of State seriously telling us that what we most need in education today is more committees and more paperwork? We need the exact opposite. The recent National Union of Teachers survey showed that 37 per cent. of teachers leaving the profession cited Government initiatives and paperwork as their main reason for getting out, which is more than cited pay as the main reason. Furthermore, how will the school forums work? Will it be one school, one vote? If so, will not primary schools always outvote secondary schools, and what effect will that have on the allocation of resources? None of those vital practical issues is addressed in the Bill.

That brings me to another important failure of the Bill, and back to this ever-useful and rather controversial document for Labour Members. With an almost magisterial use of weasel words, the document states:

> "Education Law will become more flexible, with only the key powers and duties set out on the face of the Bill, reducing unnecessary prescription."

How very reassuring—but totally bogus—that is.

The Bill is another turn of the ratchet in making Parliament irrelevant. All the key decisions will be left to the Government to implement in secondary legislation. None of us can know what the Government really have in mind on any of those vital details. That itself is a democratic disgrace, but it has only been compounded by a programme motion that makes it explicit that the Government will savagely curtail consideration in Committee. The Government are denying the opportunity of proper debate on the Floor of this House and they are denying the opportunity of proper scrutiny in Committee. It is bad governance.

This Bill—any Education Bill—should be important enough for the Government to want to get it right more than they want to get it quickly. Rushed legislation is inevitably partly bad legislation. In this case, as it will be left to teachers, parents and students to suffer the consequences, I should try to salvage some of the good points among the mass of bad ones in the legislation.

As I said, I applaud the way in which the Government are seeking in clause 180 to reverse some of the mistakes that they have made in previous Bills. Notably, we support the removal of the ban on schools forming federations. We think that such federations can be helpful and we welcome the removal of the ban. I would also welcome moves towards increasing diversity by lifting restrictions but, as I said, innovation is not promoted by saying, "You can do what you like as long as the Secretary of State likes you".

I also think that the Government and the Secretary of State have the balance broadly right on faith schools. The vast majority of existing faith schools do a good job in educating their children and they deserve our support.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Like my hon. Friend, I support what the Secretary of State has said on faith schools. However, like me, was he struck by the fact that not one Labour Member who spoke in the recent Education Question Time expressed support for the Government's proposals on faith-based schools?

Mr. David Lammy (Tottenham): Yes they did.

Mr. Green: Apparently one did. I suspect, however, that my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) and I are closer to the Secretary of State's views on the issue than are many Labour Members and, in particular, Liberal Democrat Members. I urge her to have courage on the issue. I think that she is doing the right thing, and I hope that she maintains her stance on it as it is the correct one.

Overall, however, the Bill's good intentions will mean nothing. Conservative Members have an alternative vision of education that is based on real freedoms, real respect for professional teachers, objective measures of success and a desire to take daily decisions out of the Department. We believe that the Government should be concentrating on creating the right conditions in schools, including proper powers for heads and teachers to impose discipline, less interference and paperwork from Whitehall, and a genuine commitment to local control.

The Bill offers the exact opposite. Its centralising agenda will prevent us from ever having a world-class education system in England and Wales because it will continue to demoralise teachers and drive them from the profession. If the Bill is enacted in its current form, England and Wales will be moving in the exact opposite direction to the rest of the world, where Governments of all types are trying to decentralise education.

The Secretary of State has done one remarkable thing with the Bill: she has assembled against her a coalition that encompasses the Conservative party, some other minor parties, two organisations for head teachers, most of the other teaching unions, the Labour chairman of the LGA education committee and the Labour-dominated Local Government Association. There comes a time in the life of every Government when arrogance cuts in and Ministers measure their success by the scale of the opposition. May I tell her that when Governments reach that stage, they are heading for the rocks? The Bill is a prime example of such arrogance. It does not deserve support, and I urge the House to vote for our reasoned amendment and against the Bill.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Before I call the next Member, I remind the House that there is a 12-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

5.59 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on her introductory speech and on the conduct of her office since she took over.

I am sure that all my constituents share my delight at the progress in literacy and numeracy under this Government and I congratulate all the teachers involved in that work. They, like parents and children, face immense difficulty in learning in our ill-disciplined society. We must all remember that it is easier to make speeches in the House of Commons than it is to try to teach children in our schools today, with all the pressures that are brought to bear on them.

I regret to say that in politics we tend to concentrate on those issues on which we do not agree with each other, but I must say that I do not in any way support the Government's desire to have more religious schools. It is wrong to divide children and communities, and more religious schools would bring about the sort of division that we are trying to move away from, especially at a time of growing concern about social exclusion and the breakdown of social cohesion in our society. We should try to subtract from the divisive aspects of our society, not add to them.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there are grounds for addressing the lack of inclusivity in existing faith schools? The Government say they want inclusive schools, but faith schools are allowed to select exclusively on the basis of faith, which means that many children are unable to obtain places. Does he agree that there is a case for restricting the proportion of children who can be selected on the basis of faith by those schools?

Mr. Dobson: I do not take my hon. Friend's moderate position. I do not think that any selection on the basis of the religion of parents should be allowed. I do not like the idea of existing or future schools selecting children, and therefore rejecting other children, on the basis of their parents' religion. That is a system of sorting out the sheep from the goats, distinguishing the "in" group from the "out" group, and it promotes sectarian views.

If we need an example of a society dominated by sectarian views, we need look no further than Northern Ireland. I ask everyone in the House and outside to think whether those extremist Protestants who were harassing Catholic children going to school would have done so if Protestant children had been going to the same school. I suggest that they would not. That is an extreme example, but segregated schooling must limit the contacts that children have with people from other parts of society. It prevents them from learning directly what all children have in common and it enhances the perception of difference.

Chris Grayling: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No, I do not have time.

Segregated schooling reinforces the concept of them and us, and it can promote the fear and hostility that arises from lack of knowledge. Some religious schools do not limit their selection to religious grounds. Some choose pupils on the basis of whether they will fit in with the ethos of the school; in many cases, that means, "Will those children be easy to teach?" It means excluding children without much parental support, children with special needs or children who do not speak English at home. Despite the lessons of the Christmas story, many Church secondary schools say, "There is no room at the school" to children from homeless families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, because the school is filled with better-off and more privileged children.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) *rose—*

Mr. Andrew Turner: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Dobson: No, I do not have much time and I do not want to take time from other hon. Members who wish to speak.

To be fair, some Church primary schools take all-comers. Some of them have to do so because their catchment area is predominantly not of their religious faith. In those circumstances, I wonder why they continue as Church schools at all. Less than 2 per cent. of the population of England attend Church of England services on a Sunday. More than 40 per cent. of the population have no organised religious belief, but supporters of religious schools say that Church schools would be and are popular; most reputable polls show that not to be the case.

The Church of England now says that it wants to establish 100 more Church secondary schools, partly by taking over existing non-Church schools. That must mean that some of the children living near those schools, who could have expected to go there, will be turned away in favour of Church of England schoolchildren from further afield. More choice for some will mean less choice for others.

Nothing will persuade me to support the concept of school organisation committees, on which the Church of England and the Catholic Church have two thirds of the places, being allowed to have a say—*[Interruption.]* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State says that I am wrong and, if so, I apologise, but I understand that the churches have a disproportionate number of places on those committees. If they do, it would be improper for them to be able to make decisions on selection.

It is also claimed that Church schools do better, in some way or other, than non-Church schools. It is certainly true that there are some brilliant Church schools and some lousy ones, and that applies across the board. There are excellent non-religious schools and excellent Church schools, and there are poor schools that have a Church involvement and others that do not. A substantial number of surveys have proved that case.

Based on experience in my constituency, I can tell the House about recent events. At the end of the summer, I visited South Camden community school, the secondary school that my children attended a few years ago, to present the records of achievement and prizes. It was a most impressive and moving ceremony. All the children were dressed up in their best. Only three children were wearing trainers—perhaps they could not afford anything else—which showed how seriously the occasion was taken. Teachers at the school are highly committed to helping the children to overcome all sorts of difficulties. I had a wonderful impression of the school that day. More recently, my view has been confirmed by the Ofsted report that praised the school for its teaching, learning, examination performance, an ethos of tolerance and respect, and the spiritual, moral, cultural and social development of its pupils.

Since 1966 or 1967, I have had the honour of being a governor of Argyle primary school in King's Cross, and there are not many more deprived places in the whole of the country. It received an Ofsted report last week that

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Eton, Harrow, Roedean or Cheltenham Ladies college would have been proud to receive. The summary said that it was an

> "outstandingly effective school that provides a shining example of what can be achieved."

The report said that the school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development was "outstanding in all respects". The report is littered with the words and phrases, "excellent", "outstanding", "the highest quality" and "brilliant". The school's test results are described as

> "very high—well above average".

Argyle primary school, like South Camden school, has a high proportion of Bangladeshi children and a high turnover of pupils because parents come and go. They serve deprived communities and the children of refugees, asylum seekers and homeless families. Like South Camden, Argyle school has helped disadvantaged children to fulfil their potential against all the odds, and neither school is a Church school. The teachers and parents come from a variety of religious faiths and no faith at all, but they have worked together against the difficulties. I ask those who are in favour of Church schools what extra would their "special ethos" have added to those success stories?

Sadly, and ironically, the only school in my constituency to be closed because it was failing was a Roman Catholic secondary school. It used to take in large numbers of needy children who had been rejected or excluded by other Catholic secondary schools in north London. Eventually, it sank under the weight of the problems that others had piled on its teachers.

That did not reflect well on the system that allowed the school to get into such a mess—and I am not referring to Camden education authority. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) laughs, but if he thinks that Camden education authority is something to laugh at, he should look at its results. They are better than in Kent.

Finally, the evidence shows that the crosier is not a magic wand to be waved over struggling inner-city schools: hard work is what is needed. One of the other characteristics of many religious schools is that, for one reason or another, they have excluded Asian children. All sorts of people have suddenly rediscovered the Christian commitment because they want to send their children to schools that do not have many Asian children. That is one of the main reasons why other religious groups increasingly have demanded their own religious schools, on the grounds that it would be "only fair" to treat them equally.

It is probably obvious that I am a person of no religious faith. I attempt to show respect for all other people's religious faiths, and I respect those who, like me, have no such faith. However, I do not support the creation of further divisions in our society.

The Government have rightly said that not all the divisions between children and young people in our society are caused by religious schools. That is true: there are dozens of other sources of division but, at this time and at this point in our history, we ought to be trying to reduce those divisions, not increasing them.

6.12 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), and I shall return to many of the comments that he made, as his speech was very pertinent to the debate.

I suspect that, if Baroness Thatcher and the late Sir Keith Joseph had tried to introduce this Bill, Labour Members would have howled it down. The Bill bears all the hallmarks of centralisation and of a Secretary of State who wants extreme powers.

This Labour Government want to put into legislation Conservative pledges from the 1997 and 2001 general elections. What is the difference between the free schools policy advocated by the Conservative party at the last election, and what is proposed in part 1?

Mr. Damian Green: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willis: I am only a few sentences into my speech, but very well.

Mr. Green: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to answer his question. The free schools policy would have taken power out of politicians' hands and given it to schools. The Government's policy is to take power away from schools and local authorities and to give it to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Willis: I am grateful for that intervention and clarification. The House will be astounded that a Conservative shadow Secretary of State should consider the Bill too extreme. Many hon. Members will remember grant-maintained schools, and I seem to recollect that the relevant legislation meant that it was the Secretary of State who took the decision to allow such schools to opt out. Of course, parents had a say in the matter, but it was the Secretary of State—not local authorities or the schools themselves—who made the final decision.

The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) is new to the education portfolio, but other hon. Members will remember the so-called great Education Reform Bill. It became the Education Reform Act 1987 and allowed the Secretary of State to take enormous powers unto himself. For example, he was able to dictate from the centre the curriculum in every school in the country. Even so, the Tories now say that this Bill is too extreme.

It is easy to be seduced by the Secretary of State's undoubted sincerity. No hon. Member would deny her that accolade. Parts 1 and 5 of the Bill have siren qualities, and purport to give much more freedom to schools. However, the Bill will require raft after raft of regulations, as the implementation of each clause will entail secondary legislation. The Minister for School Standards, when he responds to the debate later tonight, must give the House a guarantee that those regulations will be produced while the Bill is being considered in Standing Committee. It will be very difficult to determine what the Bill will do if we do not know the effect of the secondary legislation.

Labour Members must recognise that the Bill will create a de facto national education system. The Secretary of State will possess Kremlin-like powers over every secondary school in the land. The Bill condemns to the history books the comprehensive ideal, which the

Government have clearly wanted to undermine. The Bill will also further undermine the principle that decisions should be made by democratically elected members of local authorities, because it will take huge powers away from those authorities. Moreover, as the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said, it will introduce yet more selection by faith, specialism and postcode.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The hon. Gentleman has set out what he thinks that the Bill will do. However, it applies to Wales as well as to England, and much of what he described will not apply in Wales. I hope that he will deal with that in his speech. The Liberal Democrats are in partnership with the Government in Wales. At the end of this Second Reading debate, how do Liberal Democrat Members intend to treat those elements of the Bill that have the support of their colleagues in the Welsh Assembly?

Mr. Willis: That is a fair point, and I shall answer it directly. The Bill treats the Welsh Assembly in a way that is fairly honourable, as it moves most of the relevant powers to the Assembly. Any proposal that elements of the Bill should be imposed in Wales, or that the powers that the Bill confers should be used there, will have to be brought to the Welsh Assembly for debate. In contrast, without leaving Sanctuary buildings, the Secretary of State can make all the decisions that affect England. She will not have to bring any proposal back to the Floor of the House.

I have set out the fundamental difference between the effects of the Bill in England and Wales. It will be difficult for hon. Members, in Standing Committee and on Third Reading, to deal with that element of the Bill. We should have much preferred there to have been a separate Bill for Wales, enabling the Welsh Assembly to carry out some of the Secretary of State's functions. However, the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) made his point well.

The Bill will create a two-tier, two-speed school system. Schools serving the most challenging and deprived communities will be penalised by a Labour Government because of their poverty. New Labour's proud boast in 1997 was that a war would be waged on social exclusion, but the Bill does not do that. Indeed, the general secretary of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities has described the Bill as a "rag-bag" of centralist policies designed to consolidate the votes of middle England.

Our secondary school system is not a failure. The Secretary of State began the debate by quoting the latest OECD figures on the achievements of 15-year-olds. How can we talk about a failing system when we have such outstanding results? For the Secretary of State to stand at the Dispatch Box and talk about successful and failing schools in the same breath is insulting to the many schools that are trying, against the odds, to succeed.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman referred to history. As I think that the House will want to echo the comments about the performances reflected in those tables, does he recognise the enormous contribution towards the education of 15-year-olds that the introduction of the national curriculum made? Does he agree that it was one of the great achievements of the last Conservative Government?

Mr. Willis: It is lovely when one is fed lines. I remember the national curriculum's introduction in 1988. I remember cartload after cartload of boxes, and an office that was stacked full of these publications. I remember the Tory Government bringing in Sir Ron Dearing to slim down the curriculum so that it was manageable. The slimmed-down national curriculum, which was introduced in the early 1990s, was certainly a step forward. We have always said that we want a nationally based curriculum, but it must be minimal in what it tries to achieve. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman looks at the impositions placed on schools by Chris Patten; no, I mean John Patten. I apologise—Chris Patten is a nice man. I must not get my Pattens wrong.

The Secretary of State was right that our system is not perfect. There are local education authorities and schools that have failed generations of children. That is unacceptable and must be challenged.

My main criticism is that the Bill does not build on the strengths of our comprehensive system but deliberately sets out to undermine its principle. We welcome proposals in parts 1 and 5 to give heads and teachers greater professional freedom. Everyone in the House, before and after the last election, has argued for that. Measures such as greater flexibility and relevance with regard to the curriculum, the ability of schools to provide a range of additional services and flexibility over the school week—even the school year—are welcome. Proposals to form companies, borrow capital and attract investment are all exciting possibilities, provided that they are co-ordinated within a broader community of schools. For rural schools, such powers would be particularly useful, given that post offices and local banks are being closed. Some of the most deprived urban communities have also lost those facilities and schools could provide some of them. We welcome that proposal.

We have reservations about discarding or abandoning national pay and conditions for teachers, although we recognise that the House will have to get to grips with regional costs for public sector workers. That key issue applies to us all. No one has the solution, but I had hoped that it would be in the Bill.

Fundamentally, we reject the view that only successful schools, as defined and agreed by the Secretary of State, should have these freedoms. All schools that are not in special measures should be eligible for these freedoms and decisions should be taken locally, not by the Secretary of State. That is a fundamental issue on which we will, if necessary, seek to divide the House on Report.

There is no definition of a successful school in the Bill. Yet at the whim of the Secretary of State, successful schools will be able to opt out of the provisions for up to six years. [HON. MEMBERS: "Four years."] No, three plus three. Presumably, that will prohibit some 1,500 schools that currently have serious weaknesses, because clause 53 gives the Secretary of State the power to close all those schools without consultation with the local authority and hand them over to non-LEA providers.

We challenge the narrow view that five good GCSEs is the criterion of success for a child's education. If that is all that matters and if that is how we judge a successful

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school, an awful lot will fall by the wayside. We find it appalling that a significant number of secondary modern schools in Kent have no hope of achieving the Secretary of State's golden rule. Yet it is important that many of them are recognised for what they achieve, often in difficult circumstances.

Mr. Chaytor: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the issue is not the distinction between successful and failing schools but the definition of success? He is making assumptions about how the Secretary of State will define successful schools.

Mr. Willis: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman because that is my point. Nothing in the Bill says what a successful school is. The Secretary of State made it clear on several occasions today that her definition of successful schools—and it is the one that the Prime Minister has used, time after time—is those which achieve 50 per cent. of pupils getting five A to C grades at GCSE. What is more, she says that if a school gets less than 25 per cent. A to C grades over a period of three years, it is deemed to be failing and therefore due to be closed. How else does the House accept the main criteria?

Mr. Chaytor: When the Secretary of State was challenged on that point before the Education and Skills Committee a few weeks ago, she said precisely the opposite. She said that five GCSEs would not be the only criterion for determining a successful school and that other matters would be taken into account, such as the value added progress and Ofsted reports.

Mr. Willis: I am glad that the Secretary of State has made another statement to another audience. If she was that clear about what a successful school was and how it will be judged to be successful or failing—there is nothing in between—it should be in the Bill. I am sure that the Minister for School Standards, who is listening intently to this exchange, will respond to that point in his reply.

We have just completed a survey of 244 so-called failing schools that did not meet the criteria set by the Secretary of State for success—that is, with 25 per cent. A to C grades over three years. Each school had had a good Ofsted report; it had been deemed by Ofsted to be successful within that framework. None was in special measures. However, they were all trying to cope with huge problems.

Each school has three times more pupils eligible for free school meals than the national average. They have almost twice the number of children with statements of special educational needs—an average of 38 per cent. They have more than three times the national average for unauthorised absence and three times the national levels for exclusion. That is the framework in which those schools are working, and it is high time that the Secretary of State, and the House, recognised that teachers, head teachers, governors and LEAs are doing a remarkable job with some of those communities. We should recognise their achievements rather than constantly accuse them of failing. Yet these are the very schools that will be denied the freedoms that the Secretary of State will give to successful schools when instead they need to innovate and offer radical changes in the curriculum, the way that they work and the personnel who come into those schools, often in very difficult circumstances. The Secretary of State will merely tell them that they will have to have more of the same. We must not allow that to happen. If we do, we shall fail many of our young people.

Mr. Andrew Turner: As reinforcement of that point, does the hon. Gentleman agree that, under the Secretary of State's criteria, King's Manor school, Guildford, would never have been allowed to initiate the innovative recovery programme that has been adopted thanks to Surrey county council?

Mr. Willis: With reluctance, I have to agree with the hon. Gentleman, although I have a caveat: according to the criteria, the former King's Manor school would have been allowed to ask the Secretary of State for her specific permission to do something else. However, it is certainly true that Surrey county council would not have been allowed to take that decision, even though it was the responsible local authority. Although I may disagree with some of the things that the council has done, I strongly defend its right as a local, democratic authority to take those decisions. The hon. Gentleman's point is well made.

Another aspect of the divisions that will be created by the Bill was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras: the policy on specialist and faith schools. Although such schools are not specifically referred to, parts 1 and 5 will provide over-arching legislation that affects them.

What expert at the Department for Education and Skills thought up the idea of specialisation at the age of 11? What happens to the sporty child in a rural comprehensive who decides to specialise in languages? What happens to the urban Jewish child who has a flair for dance, but who finds that the only specialist arts school is the local Roman Catholic high school? The policy is barmy.

We do not oppose schools having a special ethos. We want all schools to be able to promote their special characteristics, but it is for the schools to choose that ethos, not for the Secretary of State to provide a menu and tell them, "If you don't choose from that, you don't get the money."

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): Schools in my constituency that are seeking special status are doing so partly because they want to reinvent themselves; they want to establish a new reputation in the community. They have a choice as to the specialism that they provide. Do not specialist schools act as a beacon to other schools in the area, and are not their facilities shared by the community rather than used by only one school?

Mr. Willis: I admire the hon. Lady's idealism. Every specialist school that I know has done it for the money. Fundamentally, they want the extra £500,000. If hon. Members on either side of the House think that there is some glorious journey towards the arts, languages or science—*[Interruption.]* If hon. Members say that that is so, I have to believe them: it would be wrong not to.

The hon. Lady has, however, put her finger on the pulse. Many of the schools in which I worked—at the sharp end of the Government's definition of failure—are the very ones that would find it difficult to raise the £50,000 entry fee to achieve specialist status. How can the Government say that they want equity for all while they are telling schools that they must find a £50,000 entry fee? If the Secretary of State thinks that it will not make a difference for half England's schools to achieve specialist status by 2005, with each of them receiving £500,000, we are living in cloud cuckoo land.

The hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) may well say that the one or two schools in her constituency that achieve specialist status will be able to do exciting things. I completely agree, but what about the three or four that do not receive that £500,000? What pecking order will that create? I thought that new Labour was about equity and fairness of access—that those were its principles—but there it goes.

Faith schools are part of that issue. In a nation where 92 per cent. of the population do not attend church, can we really believe that, deep down, there is a secret desire to do so and to educate children in single-faith schools? There is no logic in the Government's acceptance of Lord Ouseley's damning conclusion, after the Bradford riots, that segregation in Bradford schools was a contributory factor in the breakdown of race relations, while saying that they want to create more single-faith schools. If there is a logic, perhaps the Minister for School Standards will explain it.

On many occasions, the Secretary of State has argued that we should bring Muslim girls schools back into the maintained sector. That is a poor reason for the introduction of a deliberate policy of setting up more single-faith schools.

In response to the hon. Member for Ashford, who made the same point at the Tory party conference and during his speech today, the Liberal Democrat party is certainly not opposed to Church schools. The existing concordat between non-conformists, Roman Catholics and Anglicans has worked well since R.A. Butler set it up in 1944. I should probably agree with him that if we were starting again we should not start from where we are now, but the reality is that we have to start there. It is where we move to that concerns me most.

I also understand that the former Secretary of State for Education and Employment, now the Home Secretary, had little option but to include in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 the right of other faiths to receive state funding for single-faith schools. If he had not agreed to that provision, he would have been challenged in the European courts. At the time, he had little choice. To be fair to him, he said that he was opening a Pandora's box and did not know where the provision would lead. However, to promote such expansion without considering the consequences as the Government are doing shows the lack of realism in current education policy thinking.

Parents want good schools for their children. The fact that so many people are prepared to put themselves through a faith test, and then to abandon that faith, to get their children into good schools demonstrates that point.

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham) *rose—*

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) will help us all if he indicates to whom he is giving way.

Mr. Willis: I am rebuked, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I give way to the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban).

Mr. Hoban: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify whether he is in favour of or against the extension of the current right of Catholics, Anglicans or Jews to set up faith schools to Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus? Thus far, his argument has eluded me. He says that there is no demand, but that if such schools were set up, it would lead to segregation. Is he for or against that extension?

Mr. Willis: Under current legislation, with the 1944 concordat and the 1998 Act, I accept that there is a right for faiths to apply to the Secretary of State for funding to establish a single-faith school. That is how the law stands. I question the extension of that right, because the Secretary of State has advanced no evidence to demonstrate that there is a demand throughout the nation for more single-faith schools.

The point that I want to emphasise and that we shall make in an amendment in Committee is that no school in receipt of state funding should be allowed to have an admissions policy that deliberately excludes a child either because of their faith or because they have no faith. We cannot have situations such as that in Oldham, where Blue Coat Church of England school, which is surrounded by the homes of Muslim children, deliberately excludes those children while accepting Church of England children from an area of 20 miles around Greater Manchester, because its policy states that families must attend church and Sunday school for two years for children to get into the school. No Secretary of State can possibly accept that, and all that my hon. Friends and I ask is that the Secretary of State accepts the logic of a policy in which schools cannot discriminate in their admissions policy on the basis of a child's faith or lack of faith.

Mrs. Ann Cryer: I am still not sure what the hon. Gentleman is saying about faith schools. We start from where we are now and cannot put the clock back, so if he were the Secretary of State, would he agree with the Government and encourage the expansion of faith schools, abandon any commitment to them, or keep their current number?

Mr. Willis: I have a great deal of time for the hon. Lady and, as I said, we are where we are whether we like it or not. We have a huge number of Church schools, and the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England have ploughed significant resources into building and managing their schools over the years. I understand the problems of trying to create a secular system so far down the line. Let us remember that the state's involvement started in 1870, with Forster's Elementary Education Act. Oddly enough, Forster was the Member of Parliament for Bradford at the time.

I am questioning the Government's blind belief in an expansion of faith schools and the blind acceptance that the Church of England should have another 100 secondary schools simply because they want to fill in the gaps. I genuinely do not believe that communities will prosper if they have separate faith schools. I want to amend the Bill so that, if a single-faith school is created, it cannot discriminate in its admissions policy purely on the ground of faith. That is a reasonable request.

James Purnell: Given that we are where we are and that the hon. Gentleman said that the Liberal Democrats

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favoured devolving power to local education authorities, is not the Government's policy of allowing all faiths to have such an opportunity, but leaving the local school organisation committee to decide, exactly in line with his principles?

Mr. Willis: I would scrap the school organisation committees tomorrow because local authorities should do that job and their democratically elected members should take those decisions. I want to control a situation that is getting out of hand. The hon. Gentleman may not be familiar with Oldham, Burnley or Bradford, but if he were, he would recognise the huge problems of polarisation in society, and the hon. Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) knows full well what those issues are in her constituency.

Finally, I come to teacher recruitment. The hon. Member for Ashford was right that the biggest problem with the Bill is that policies to further the recruitment and retention of teachers are missing. That is the only major issue on which everyone involved in education agrees. The problem is that many schools in, for example, the constituency of the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy) find it virtually impossible to recruit and retain teachers.

In some of the poorest communities elsewhere in the country—such as Bradford, where I was last week, or Oldham or those in the north-east—we shall increasingly find that the schools that get the proposed freedoms, receive the extra £500,000 and attract the extra resources will be those that attract and retain the teachers that they need, and the poorer schools will suffer.

Today's Ofsted report on literacy and numeracy standards shows that Mike Tomlinson, the chief inspector of schools, makes a very important point: in many of our inner cities, the inability to retain teachers is a key factor in preventing educational standards from being raised. Sadly, the Bill will do nothing for poor communities, and I ashamed that a Labour Government have introduced it.

6.45 pm

Mrs. Janet Dean (Burton): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this debate. The Bill contains a wide range of measures, many of which, such as allowing schools to work closely with the community, are greatly welcomed. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and her colleagues on the many achievements that have been made in the past four years. Class sizes have fallen for our infants and results in literacy and numeracy and in GCSEs have improved. The increased funding that the Government have made available has helped schools to begin to tackle the backlog of building repairs that we inherited.

In the sixteen years that I spent as a member of Staffordshire education authority, I saw class sizes grow year after year. I saw teachers dispirited and the fabric of our schools deteriorate because of the lack of funding. Although we still have to tackle the disparity in funding, which adversely affects authorities such as Staffordshire, extra resources have gone directly to our schools, which has given head teachers the flexibility as to the best use of that money.

Even with the reduced role of the education authorities and the greater autonomy that schools now enjoy, since 1997, schools and college have begun to work more closely together for the good of the communities that they serve. The emphasis on competition, which developed under the Conservatives, has begun to be replaced by co-operation. Indeed, I am pleased to say that, in spite of the Tory policies, that potentially destructive competition was resisted by local head teachers and governing bodies in some areas of my constituency.

I believe that we should take care to ensure that some of the measures proposed in the Bill do not inadvertently again encourage division. For example, the proposals on earned autonomy could further divide the so-called best schools from the rest, by allowing them to pay teachers more than schools in less affluent areas, where the need to recruit the very best teachers is even greater.

There are two specialist schools in my constituency, and a further high school has applied to become one. I have supported their applications, knowing that such status has brought them extra funding and that the feeder schools also benefit from the support given by the specialist high schools. However, it is significant that, in my constituency, the schools that have gained specialist school status have been the largest and most popular schools, which have been those most able to attract outside finance. I do not want the other high schools, which have not become specialist schools, to be undervalued; they, too, are improving their results. Very often, they have to cope with more challenging catchment areas, as other hon. Members have said.

If we continue down the road of specialisation, we need to ensure that all our schools can become specialists and that they share that expertise with neighbouring schools. We must also be aware that the freedom of choice for parents will always be limited by accessibility and by the space available at a school. The idea of a successful school being allowed to grow is in itself limited. How large can a school become before its size is unacceptable? If there is a growing school, there will be a shrinking school nearby, offering less choice and opportunity to its pupils.

I am concerned about the expansion of faith schools, and I speak as someone who attended a Church of England primary school and who was a governor of a Church of England first school and a Roman Catholic primary school at the same time. I commend the work that church schools have done for many years. As hon. Members have said, in many cases, those schools grew up when no other form of education was available. Church of England schools—whether aided or controlled—operate generally as local schools, taking pupils from the catchment area around them, whatever their religious beliefs.

I recognise that it is difficult to argue that there should be no expansion, or that other faiths should not establish schools. That is the dilemma, but I have great doubts about the wisdom of a policy that could create further divisions in society. If we are to encourage the development of faith schools, we should encourage the development of multi-faith schools.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will reassure me that the changes that the Bill introduces will not jeopardise our comprehensive system in the long term.

6.50 pm

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I wish to talk about rural schools. My part of Somerset has many schools in a vast area. We do not have enough teachers and one of the problems is recruitment.

Bridgwater shows the problem in a microcosm. It has both the best and the worst school in Somerset. The best school in Somerset has no problem in recruiting teachers, but the worst school has the problem of finding enough teachers of the right quality. I have read the Bill carefully and, for all the talk of golden hellos and golden handshakes, we still face the problem of recruiting enough teachers to that area.

Lord King, my predecessor as the Member of Parliament for Bridgwater, carried out a survey of all the head teachers in the constituency just before the last election, to find out how many teachers were required in each discipline. Throughout the area, we discovered that there were not enough teachers.

Special needs teaching is another problem in this vast rural area. We have not got enough special needs teachers. Someone with special needs cannot get a teacher for just two hours a week, because there are not enough of them to cover this huge area.

Minehead is part of Exmoor, which is such a large area that one could fit central London into it. There is just one school in that area, so parents have no choice. Their children have to go to that school and those with problems cannot be excluded from it. The Bill contains provisions for such children to be put into special areas or into special needs classes, but that is physically impossible in that area.

As the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) pointed out, many villages do not have facilities such as post offices so the parents have to work elsewhere. What can one do with children with special needs if there are no alternative schools to which they can go? In Minehead, 142 children have special needs, so I hope that the Minister will explain how the Government will provide the backing so that such children are looked after.

Another problem in rural areas is that of sub-standard wooden classrooms. Because of the policies adopted over the past few years, we are still going through a modernisation process. However, in my constituency the gable ends of some school buildings have fallen out, but will enough money be made available to modernise those classrooms? In the short term, I suspect that the answer is no. Minehead middle school was built for 500 pupils, but it now has 750. It still has five wooden classrooms and it is trying to replace them. Will the Bill make more money directly available to the schools and areas that need it?

Chris Ruane: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the fact that the money used to improve school buildings increased from £680 million in 1997 to more than £2 billion this year?

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that interesting intervention. I am referring to rural areas that do not have enough money to improve the school buildings. I do not dispute the figures, but the money is not going to the rural areas that need it. The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) is present and I think that he will agree that, in Somerset, it has been extremely difficult to obtain enough money to carry out such work.

I also wish to refer to the problems facing governors. The Bill seeks to make enormous changes throughout the education system, but governors already have enough to do. How much more can they be expected to do before we start losing them? People will not be prepared to take on the responsibility for schools or to put themselves forward to help their children and their schools.

I also wish to point out that Minehead college has applied for TEC status. The hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) made the interesting point that schools do not apply for specialist status only for the money, but schools in West Somerset are applying for such status precisely for that reason. Minehead college has raised the £50,000 it needed—in fact, it has raised £65,000—when the total budget for West Somerset district council is only £4 million. That shows just how desperate people are to raise enough money so that they can educate their children locally in the manner that they want.

Caroline Flint: May I correct the hon. Gentleman? My point was not that money does not play a part, but that the money could be used to enable schools to innovate and to break through boundaries in a way that they could not if they did not have the money. That is what the Government are trying to achieve. Schools bid for money so that they can have the freedom to do the things that they could not possibly do without it.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: I misheard the hon. Lady, and I apologise for that. However, I maintain my point that schools seek the extra money that is available and that every school that aspires to it should be given the chance to obtain it.

The support systems in Somerset are inadequate for the area that they cover. I hope that the Bill will ensure that resources are given to those schools that want to climb the educational ladders but that cannot do so because of their inability to recruit teachers. Furthermore, if small rural schools have three classes and they cannot recruit a third or fourth teacher, class sizes will gradually rise. I do not see anything in the Bill that deals with that problem and, although a safety net is in place, the problem seems to occur far too frequently.

I am sorry to have drawn a raft of problems to the Minister's attention. Many hon. Members have been visited by groups of constituents today, and Michael Lerry of the National Union of Teachers has just been to see me. He made it absolutely clear that the union would like as much help as possible to be given to rural areas. Parents cannot send their children to the schools of their choice, because such areas do not have enough schools to provide them with that choice. All schools want to succeed but those in my area do not always have the opportunity to do so. We are not a wealthy area and we do not always get the resources from the county that we feel we deserve.

6.58 pm

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): About a fortnight ago, I spoke in the debate on the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill and particularly on the Welsh clauses in it. My initial remarks related to the constitutional arrangements that enable this place to allow the Welsh Assembly to use secondary legislation to devise a devolved way of working. The Government, who support the current constitutional arrangements that deny

[Mr. Jon Owen Jones]

the Welsh Assembly primary legislation powers, must work harder to make the present system clearer and more coherent.

Although important clauses in the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, and this Bill, refer to Wales, Ministers have not addressed any of those issues at all. Perhaps, when my hon. Friend the Minister sums up, he will deal with them then. However, I made the same point when we discussed the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill and was notably ignored when that Minister summed up.

The Bill is, in effect, two Bills. They deal with the same subject matter, but address it in widely different ways. I am in a difficult position because I am being asked to support different lines of argument for England and Wales. They relate to the direction that local government is taking and the promotion of various provisions. Specialist schools, faith schools, league tables and formal testing at seven are to be promoted in England, but not in Wales. Therefore, one set of rules will apply to Welsh constituents and another to everyone else.

I am a loyal member of the Labour party and will vote in favour of Second Reading, which I can justify because the Bill contains many measures that should apply to my constituents and they will not benefit from them if it is defeated. I sympathise with the arguments that were ably made by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), although I probably should not say that because he is the spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats. I appreciate their dilemma. However, were they not consulted on the mechanism to introduce clauses that apply to Wales, because that would have been the time to raise their concerns?

I join my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) in voicing concerns about the promotion of faith schools. Many other people are also worried about them. The Commission for Racial Equality criticises faith schools because it believes that they will increase segregation in inner cities. In the circumstances—there were riots in several cities this summer; we are battling against a fundamentalist regime in Afghanistan which is based on religious schools; and the British National party is enjoying its highest level of support for 25 years—I do not think that it is an appropriate time to promote faith schools.

Faith schools are said to improve standards, but there is no clear evidence to support that. They attract the better-off and the argument that they improve standards is reduced when we take into account the effect of such a background on scholastic achievement. The constitutions of countries such as France and the United States, which have benefited from revolutions against the old order, contain the principle that the state should have no part in promoting religion. There are no state-funded religious schools in those countries and it is not clear that they suffer as a result, especially in the light of the ability of the US to integrate people from widely different backgrounds. I should have thought that Opposition Members would have sympathy with arguments that come from the lips of American politicians, who would be amazed at the idea of the state promoting faith schools.

The Government recently proposed outlawing religious discrimination. It is hard to understand how it is consistent to promote faith schools and to outlaw religious discrimination. It is hard to understand how a real Protestant—not someone from a Church of England school—could explain Protestantism without saying how it is based on the belief that there is something wrong with Roman Catholicism. Perhaps Ministers would prefer Luther to have nailed the 95 theses to the door in Wittenburg because he was in complete agreement with the Pope and Calvin to have believed that the Church of Rome was not the anti-Christ, but a friendly neighbour. However, that is not the case. I find it hard to understand how a proper teaching of the theology of Protestantism can sit side by side with an inclusive view of Catholics. There is already a Seventh Day Adventist school. What are the Government going to do about minority sects with increasingly bizarre opinions of other religions?

On specialist schools, is 11 an appropriate age to decide a child's specialism? That poses great difficulties in rural areas, where there is not much choice. In an area with five schools, it is inevitable that one will become a specialist science school and the best science teachers will gravitate to it. Teachers from other disciplines will gravitate away from that school because they will feel marginalised. In those circumstances I would not want to have to decide what is in the best interests of my child, because I would have to consider whether he is going to be a scientist, an artist, a talented musician or whatever, and take the view that he is not going to change.

The idea of specialist schools sharing their superior resources in one discipline is unrealistic. The head of the National Association of Head Teachers said that that was

> "like expecting Liverpool to lend Everton Michael Owen once every fortnight."

In Wales, Jane Davidson has listened to the people of Wales and has suggested proposals that are largely supported by them. I welcome the move towards a Welsh baccalaureate and the proposals on teacher assessment for young children under seven instead of making them take statutory tests. I am concerned, however, about the lack of prescription on local government ring-fencing, which has been deplored in some quarters. It has been suggested that the threat of ring-fencing might work, but only four of the local authorities in Wales pass on more than 80 per cent. of the money that they receive directly to schools. The figure is far greater in England. I have a mixed view on the differences between the two systems.

I want the two Governments on both sides of the Severn to show some humility. They must be prepared to examine the experiences in their countries and in Scotland and Ireland, and to look objectively at what works. After all, we are new Labour, and what works is what counts. If there is evidence that some of our proposals are not working and that something is working better elsewhere, perhaps we will have the humility to accept that and learn from the experience of others.

7.8 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): In preparing for the debate, I wrote to several head teachers and representatives of the professional associations in my constituency. They came back with a number of issues that they wanted to raise. The representative of the National Association of Head Teachers said:

> "The major issues concerning the members of my Association include . . . pupil behaviour . . . bureaucratic demands *v.* teaching demands . . . identification of personal time *v.* workload demands",

and what it calls

"the manic approach to target setting".

A representative of the National Union of Teachers, which is not known to be an educational dinosaur, said:

> "Most of the criticisms and worries communicated to me stem from the increasing number of pupils who are behaving in unacceptable ways . . . Other sources of discontent are the plethora of ill-thought-out changes which are visited upon schools. Teachers (real, serving teachers who know what conditions in classrooms are like) are not sufficiently involved . . . These, behavioural and bureaucratic matters, are the ones I should like to see the Government confronting rather than the (at best) spurious involvement of private enterprise".

I do not agree that the involvement of private enterprise is spurious, but I certainly agree that the Bill does nothing to address the important issues identified by representatives of teachers on the Isle of Wight.

The Island secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers said:

> "The present doctrine of 'Inclusivity' when applied without flexibility to Schools increases the number of disruptive children . . . and creates a false belief in Management and Governors that a School which excludes . . . will be . . . a failing School . . . The Island Teaching Council ran a survey to which more than half of all Island Teachers responded. The preliminary data shows that disruptive children in the classroom is the main reason why Teachers . . . leave the profession . . . Classroom Teachers are in favour of . . . 'Zero Tolerance'".

That is a reference to the stand taken by Medina high school. Since half-term, the headmaster, Kevin Prunty, courageously and with the support of his governors, has operated a policy of zero tolerance of bad behaviour, foul language and attacks on children and teachers in the classroom. His reward is to have been applauded by almost everyone who was consulted, with the conspicuous exception of other high school head teachers and the Liberal Democrat-run Isle of Wight council. Those people are not supporting head teachers in their difficult task.

Mr. Laws: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that other schools in his constituency simply let misbehaviour by pupils go unchallenged?

Mr. Turner: The Isle of Wight council closed the only available pupil referral unit and assumed that the children whom it would have dealt with would be dealt with in schools. Other head teachers are still struggling to deal with them, but Medina high school has recognised that it is not fair to the mainstream, motivated majority to have disruptive children in the classroom.

The greatest weakness of education more generally, and I am referring specifically to the philosophy behind this Bill, is that there has been a failure in the supply of good schools. To be fair, the Government, who have been desperate for solutions, have been willing to try a range of measures. In some cases, they have advanced and built on the lessons of the Conservative years. They have increased the accountability and freedom of schools and I wholeheartedly support such moves, as I am sure do other Conservative Members.

The Government have tried to give schools—except, of course, grant-maintained schools—more responsibility for their budgets. They have involved Ofsted and they have tried to deal with failing schools and LEAs. I was privileged to work in Southwark after that authority had been found to be failing by Ofsted. I am pleased to say that policies that we should have introduced were introduced by this Government, who privatised the management of that failing LEA. I am sure that those measures will deliver improved education for the children of Southwark, as indeed they will in a number of local authority areas. The Government are proposing to go further in the publication of results and on the policy of value added, which was always something that would have to be built on the publication of results.

In other areas, Labour has not shown the support that I would have liked for additional accountability and freedom. In fact, the Government have built up additional barriers to accountability and freedom. They made it more difficult to exclude pupils, and I am glad that the Secretary of State now accepts that the policy was mistaken and damaging. They have tried to reduce choice in access to grammar schools and grant-maintained schools. I am glad to see that by encouraging the development of specialist and faith schools, the Secretary of State now accepts that that policy, too, was wrong and damaging. I welcome the Government's proposal to introduce academies.

The Government allowed the creation of the first privately managed state school, King's college in Guildford. I was privileged to be involved in that. I was working with Surrey county council and with one of the people involved in setting up the school. We had to work very hard within the legislation in 1998 and 1999 so that we could create the school.

The Government are trying, and they are sending out some of the right messages, but they are working from a weak base because they do not have the philosophy right. Conservatives believe in genuine devolution of real freedom and power to heads, teachers and governors, so that they can innovate, because that is the best way to do things. Labour believes in devolution subject to the approval of the Secretary of State of each devolved power in each school on each occasion. That is a bureaucratic nightmare, and I feel that the chickens will come home to roost in the form of the mounds of paper that will have to cross the Secretary of State's desk.

Of course, the Liberal Democrats do not believe in either of those philosophies. They believe that devolution was right in 1988, and anything introduced after that was a grave error. I am staggered to hear of the Liberal Democrats' opposition to faith schools, or at least I would be staggered if I were not familiar with the behaviour of the Isle of Wight council. The Liberal Democrats on that council would not even consult parents on whether they wanted a Christian high school on the island. They were afraid of the consequences and of an effective campaign by Christian parents and others who wanted that choice to be available on the island. At the moment, those who want to go to a Christian high school have to go to Portsmouth.

At least Labour is trying, but as I said, it has read the arguments and learned the words, but it does not understand the philosophy, which is one of giving greater power to schools. The Bill will give far too many powers to the Secretary of State and far too few to schools. I shall illustrate my argument by reference to one provision, the power for schools to exclude pupils. The Secretary of State said that she was giving head teachers additional

[Mr. Turner]

powers. The explanatory notes say, on page 21, that subsections (1) and (2) of clause 49 re-enact existing provisions. They continue:

> "The rest of the clause provides for the procedures . . . to be set out in regulations . . . Under the proposed regulations, the procedures . . . will be largely unchanged."

The notes go on to mention two minor ways in which, under the current Secretary of State's proposals, the powers might be tightened up, but of course what one Secretary of State does by regulation, another Secretary of State can reverse by regulation. That is the problem with which the Bill presents us. If the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), had passed such regulations, they would have made it much more difficult for schools to exclude pupils, rather than much easier, which is what the current Secretary of State says she wants to do.

If the Bill is to be improved, and I believe that it can be, it must set out clear, objective criteria that the Secretary of State guarantees to apply in devolving additional powers to schools. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) hit the nail on the head when he said that we cannot see in the Bill what will be the criteria by which the Secretary of State will judge whether a school is failing or successful. If we cannot see the criteria, how on earth can head teachers and governors see them?

The Government have not been very good at setting criteria for their proposals. They set no criteria for deciding which local authorities receive money for early excellence centres. There are no criteria for the education maintenance allowance pilot scheme or education action zones. There is no criteria for success either. How can we and others judge the Secretary of State's intentions and success if she is shy of setting out criteria or targets for success under the Bill? The Bill presents many opportunities to good schools to do more. It would be an even better measure if it gave them those powers as of right.

7.20 pm

Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): The Bill carries the simple but powerful message that the hard-won progress in the primary sector over the past four years must be sustained and spread to the secondary sector and beyond. It was a scandal that in 1997 little more than half of 11-year-olds achieved the required standard in literacy and numeracy. It is now a cause for celebration that about three quarters of pupils are doing so. It is also a reason to believe that when we all work together we can make significant improvements to the quality of education.

I have seen that difference in many schools in my constituency. Last Friday, I visited the Willows primary school in Woodhouse Park; it was truly inspiring to see the children's achievements and the dedication of the staff, including lunchtime organisers who, through the excellence in cities funding, are now also learning mentors for the children. My constituency has more than its fair share of poverty, but poverty is never an excuse for poor performance. Many schools in my area are proving that, whatever the barriers, improvements can be made. Ten years ago, only 6 per cent. of pupils at Newall Green high school achieved five or more A to C grades at GCSE; that has now risen to 32 per cent. A few years ago, 15 per cent. of pupils at Jeff Joseph Sale Moor technology college achieved five or more A to C grades; now 35 per cent. do so. I underline the fact that Jeff Joseph is in Trafford's selective system, which means that its intake does not include the 35 per cent. of children who go to grammar school.

I warmly welcome clauses 44 and 46, which will put admissions forums on a statutory basis and give local authorities a greater role in co-ordinating admissions arrangements. I have mentioned that part of my constituency is in Trafford, where there are no fewer than 35 admissions authorities, 24 of which are primary schools, mostly voluntary aided; in the main, that part of the admissions system works well. In addition to the local education authority, there are 10 secondary schools, each of which is its own admissions authority, with its own criteria, procedure and admission dates.

Next month in Trafford, parents will be notified of the 11-plus results and sent a form to indicate their preference. Parents whose preference is for a school where the LEA is the admissions authority must return the form within six weeks; those who choose one of the other 10 schools or, indeed, a school outside the authority, do not need to return the form at all. As one can imagine, the result is chaos. Some parents do not understand the system at all and fail to return the form on time; others do not send in the form, but apply to individual schools that act as their own admissions authority; others respond by sending in the form, but also make separate, sometimes multiple, applications to individual schools; others express one unrealistic preference and, when their child does not get a place, find that all places in their local school are gone.

As a result, far too many parents are offered places that they do not want while others, of whom there are a large number in my constituency, end up unhappy about having to send their children to schools outside the authority. I am sure that we all agree that it is unacceptable that parents cannot send, or have confidence that they will be able to send, their children to high quality schools in their own area. The Bill will ensure better co-ordination of admissions arrangements, but that will require great co-operation between the bodies involved. Of course, maintained schools will still be able to set their own admissions criteria, but agreeing a common admission date and establishing more transparent administrative processes will help enormously.

In the Bill, the Government rightly place great emphasis on diversity in education, not as an end in itself, but as part of the journey towards excellence. I want to concentrate on two aspects of that diversity, both of which are controversial and have already been mentioned in our debate. The first concerns faith schools, on which I part company with my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), both of whom argued forcefully that faith schools are divisive. I do not accept that that is always the case or, indeed, that it should be seen as the case.

The first argument for extending the range and number of faith-based schools is practical. If we allow Roman Catholic, Church of England and Jewish schools, how can we refuse applications from Muslim and other faith groups? As long as they provide adequate facilities, teach the national curriculum and achieve a high standard of teaching, there are no grounds for refusal.

The second argument relates to faith schools' impressive record of achievement. I fully accept the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras that the fact that a school is denominational does not guarantee high quality education and, indeed, agree that the fact that a school is not faith based does not mean that it cannot achieve high standards. None the less, the results speak for themselves. At the end of key stages 1 to 3 and at GCSE, denominational schools outperform the rest. Last year, for example, Catholic schools results were 7 per cent. above the average in Maths and English at key stage 2, and 5 per cent. above the average in science. This year, the number of pupils in denominational schools achieving five or more A to C grades at GCSE was 7.5 per cent. higher than in non-denominational schools. I am not saying that all faith schools are necessarily good schools but, in my experience, the best faith-based schools, far from being inward looking, strive to develop in their pupils an understanding of, and a sense of responsibility for, the wider world.

Bigotry should always be condemned and the behaviour of those responsible for confrontations at the Holy Cross primary school in Belfast is utterly unacceptable. However, strong communities are not uniform; they are made up of a wide variety of groups with different interests and beliefs, all with a capacity to enrich the lives of other people. I see no reason why, in principle or practice, that should not be reflected in our education system.

Another controversial aspect of diversity is the development of specialist schools. Some people argue that that is a return to selection by the back door; in the Trafford part of my constituency, we still have selection by the front door. I have always been opposed to that form of selection, and remain so. There are a number of specialist schools in my constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) was right and the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) was wrong: specialist schools do not seek to be divisive or chase the money, but regard specialism as part of an overall strategy for improvement.

Newall Green and Jeff Joseph, which I have already mentioned, are both specialist schools. Newall Green is an arts college and Jeff Joseph a technology college. Another school, Brookway, is a sports college, and I warn my hon. Friend the Minister that a bid will soon be made for business and enterprise college status by Parklands high school.

That school serves two of the poorest 100 wards in the country, and was created from the ashes of two poorly performing schools. Last year—its first year—only 5 per cent. of pupils got five or more A to C grades at GCSE. This year, that went up to 12.5 per cent; next year, the target is 20 per cent. This year, Ofsted described the school as "very effective". Parklands' pursuit of specialist status is not an attempt to attract the privileged, but is a way of focusing its genuine efforts to raise standards for those who, too often in the past, have lost out.

In the Bill, the Government emphasise the importance of innovation and autonomy, on which there is much to learn from the experience of the two education action zones in my Wythenshawe and Sale, East constituency. The education action zones are business-led and, despite considerable recent press comment about EAZs, I can tell the House that Wythenshawe's education action zones have received about £3 million in sponsorship from the private sector.

Many initiatives have been undertaken to improve the quality of teaching. We have eight quality development teachers working alongside classroom teachers, 75 mentors helping children to improve their literacy, and a new programme of work-based learning for some year 10 and 11 pupils, who spend three days a week in school, one day a week in a post-16 institution and one day a week at a workplace. That is designed to re-engage pupils who, in the past, effectively left school when they reached 14, rather than being engaged in learning.

Resources are important in education action zones, but the partnership that develops is worth far more. The private sector involvement adds respect and credibility to the important work that teachers are doing, but the big spin-off is that schools in the EAZs are co-operating in a way that they did not before. They are working together, instead of competing with each other.

My final point relates to teacher morale. Before the general election, I visited a primary school in my constituency where I had a frank exchange of views with the staff in the staff room. I suggested that there were three conclusions to be drawn from our discussion: first, that the school had more money than it had ever had; secondly, that the teachers had achieved better results than ever before; but thirdly, that they were all quite fed up. It seemed to me that what made them feel fed up was pressure from the centre, which prevented them from taking the credit for the work that they were doing.

The day before the general election, my right hon. Friend's predecessor as Secretary of State was quoted in *The Guardian* as saying:

> "In trying to do things as quickly as possible you don't always take people with you. I regret that I haven't been able to raise teachers' morale".

No one is perfect, not even the present Home Secretary. I am sure that the Bill, with its emphasis on autonomy and innovation, together with the experience of the Secretary of State and her team, will succeed in engaging teachers in a way that enables them to take more of the glory and to develop a renewed sense of pride in the vital work that they do.

7.32 pm

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): As the House would expect, I shall focus my comments on Wales. I agree with the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) that Wales has received scant regard in comments hitherto. The Bill is an extremely important piece of education legislation for Wales, and we would have expected a passing reference to Wales from the Secretary of State.

The absence of any such reference raises wider concerns about the confused nature of the devolution settlement, whereby the political leadership resides in the National Assembly, but the machinery of law-making remains at Westminster. This is the only Parliament that we still have. I regret that. A moment ago, I requested from the Vote Office a copy of "The Learning Country", which is the equivalent of the White Paper containing the

[Adam Price]

education proposals for Wales. The fact that the document is not available raises concern about the devolution settlement.

Unlike the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central—who, I am glad to see, is back in his seat—I do not have dual citizenship, as it were, so I have no problem in welcoming broadly the proposals for Wales, while condemning some of the principles that underlie the proposals for England. The Bill marks a major step forward by providing a distinctively Welsh education policy. That is greatly to be welcomed. "The Learning Country" has been described by the teaching unions as a visionary alternative to the dry and arid thinking that pervades the Government's policy in England. I echo that.

Privatisation has been ruled out as a matter of policy in Wales, as have specialist selective schools. Clause 66, which refers to the private sector being involved in the management of schools, applies only to England. That is greatly to be welcomed, probably not only on our Benches. The thinking reflected in "The Learning Country" has steered us in Wales away from the market-driven, competition-inspired thinking that unfortunately was a characteristic element of education policy at Westminster over successive Governments.

The document is based on a communitarian ethos that is widely shared across the parties. That is reflected in our communities, where 90 per cent. of pupils go to their local community school. Our basic aspiration as a society in Wales is to create for all children excellent local comprehensive schools embedded in their communities. I see those principles as underlying the proposals in "The Learning Country", and I welcome them.

The Bill affords the Assembly a large number of discretionary powers; again, we welcome that. Clause 13, for example, enables the Assembly

> "to give financial assistance for purposes related to education or childcare".

That is a wide ranging discretionary power—a so-called Henry VIII clause, I am led to believe by constitutional experts.

Echoing the comments of the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central, I welcome the completion of the development of a genuinely distinctive national curriculum for Wales. The Bill contains exciting proposals for the Welsh baccalaureate and other detailed proposals—for example, for the creation of a special educational needs tribunal, and new measures for better transition between primary and secondary education. I am sure that the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central is glad to see that the Welsh Joint Education Committee is to be put on a firm legal footing. It has other legal matters on its mind, but its constitutional basis is assured.

The Bill, perhaps reflecting the complexity and confusion of the devolution settlement, has an unclear and complex format, especially for Welsh Members. There is a separate part on the curriculum for Wales, but in the other parts one has to trawl through the references to the Secretary of State to see whether the National Assembly is mentioned. One of the worst examples is in clauses 128 to 137, which deal with teacher qualifications. One must read on to clause 141 to discover that those matters are devolved to the National Assembly. Clause 141 states that

> "a reference to the Secretary of State shall be taken as a reference to the National Assembly for Wales"

and that

> "a reference to the General Teaching Council for England shall be taken as a reference to the General Teaching Council for Wales".

That reminds me—I see one of Wales's great historians, the hon. Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis) in his seat—of the famous reference in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "For Wales, see England". The Bill does not have the same brevity or succinctness, unfortunately. An ideal solution, from our perspective as a party, is for primary law-making powers over education to be devolved to the National Assembly. If that is where the political leadership and the political accountability reside, surely the machinery of government and of law-making should also be devolved there. If that is not possible for political reasons, may we at least have, as other hon. Members have requested, separate legislation for Wales, which would allow us, while representing Wales in the House, to have sufficient time to dedicate ourselves to specific measures affecting Wales?

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: If that is to occur, the hon. Gentleman and other members of his party must do more than quote the bits of the Bill that they like. Has he anything to say about the amount of money that goes directly to schools in Wales and is in the schools budget, compared with England? Those figures do not look favourable in Wales's case and suggest that the threat, if not the implementation, of ring fencing has a purpose.

Adam Price: I listened with interest to the point that the hon. Gentleman made earlier. There is a case throughout the United Kingdom for considering the evidential basis for different means of disbursement in education. I would be more than happy to continue a discussion with him on that point, but I am sure that he will agree that a distinctive and separate measure would greatly facilitate our ability to represent our constituents not only on this issue, but on the other issues that he raised earlier. If we are to have what could be called a cut and shut in respect of a Welsh and an English Bill, may we at the very least have a clearly formatted Bill so that we do not have to trawl through the provisions in order to find out whether we are reading clauses that refer to Wales?

I want to raise two issues that are not devolved. First, from my reading of this very complex Bill, it does not seem that there has been any devolution of power in respect of teachers' pay and conditions. That is greatly to be regretted, because such power has been used very effectively in Scotland, to which it was devolved, not least by the new First Minister in his previous incarnation. In creating a distinctive education policy that meets the needs of Wales, devolution of that power would be very welcome.

Secondly, clause 10 deals with a power for schools to form companies or to subcontract school services, and with the creation of an open market for those services. Again, it is not clear whether these powers have been devolved to Wales or whether the National Assembly for Wales has a right of approval that operates alongside the local education authority right of approval in England. I know from a question asked in the Assembly that the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning herself is not clear on this very point. That raises a question about the level of discussion that has been undertaken in the joint ministerial committees. I would greatly welcome some indication from the Minister about the position of Wales in relation to this very wide-ranging power.

We welcome greatly the fact that Wales is beginning to chart its own course in terms of education policy. Education has always been at the core of our political thinking in Wales. It has been very important to disadvantaged communities and has always been seen as the core of social and economic development. The fact that we are now seeing greater devolution of powers is to be welcomed. I saw that *The Guardian* referred to Wales the other day as a left-wing teachers' utopia. For some hon. Members adjacent to me, I am sure that that is a very graphic description of hell. We may not be building utopia in Wales, but we are building a better Wales. I ask the Minister for greater devolution of power even than hitherto, so that we can at least begin to use the available tools to create the basis for a better society in future.

7.43 pm

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): The Bill is intended to build on the success of the past four years—and a lot of success there has been. When I was reading the White Paper on which the Bill is predicated, I noted that chapter 6 goes into great detail about how successful the Government's policies have been on the basis of using the system that we have at the moment. Local education authorities and schools are succeeding and will be encouraged to continue that success. Of course, solutions vary and we do not have a one-size-fits-all solution for every situation. Partnership is very much emphasised, as well as intervention where necessary, positive support and funding.

I must say, as I am sure many other hon. Members have, that that approach has worked very well in my constituency. Stoke-on-Trent has three beacon schools. As my hon. Friend the Minister will know, all three—Adderly Green infants, Western Coyney primary and Sandon high school—are situated in my constituency. Not so many years ago, all three had great difficulties, which shows the progress that can be made and is being made under the current system.

The proposals to raise standards for all and to ensure that every child is best equipped for work, the wider economy and society are extremely welcome. The progress that has been made is significant and ranges from teachers' pay, training and status to capital improvements. My hon. Friend the Minister will know that three new primary schools are being built in my constituency as we speak. The construction of a fourth primary school starts early next year. If someone had told me five years ago that I would seeing four new primary schools in my constituency within four years, I would have laughed them out of court. The schools are a very tangible example of the success of Government policy, which has been reflected in the classroom in pupil achievement. It is a success that is based on a background of promoting innovation, identifying weaknesses, giving positive support based on partnership and intervening when necessary.

That leads me, however, to a significant concern. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is aware of my anxiety, because I wrote to him at some length when the White Paper was published. The progress to which I have referred has been based on supporting, promoting and encouraging innovation and success, as well as on identifying weaknesses and taking positive measures to provide support and encouragement, and intervening where necessary to ensure that those weaknesses are dealt with. I believe that that policy has had a considerable amount of success, but I am concerned that the Bill appears to reverse it. The Government appear to be saying that they will let the so-called better schools float by opting out of national pay scales and the national curriculum.

That most significant issue is at the heart of the Bill. It is a major concern to me and, no doubt, many of my colleagues. It seems that we are moving from a policy that is based on utilising success and that uses raising standards as its bedrock to one of opting out in the name of diversity and choice. I am not against diversity and choice—indeed, I think that they have been a great success—but I am very worried that the policy of diversity and choice as it is manifested in the Bill will not lead to more diversity, but could certainly lead to more fragmentation. The Government need to give a lot more thought to that issue.

I found the language that is used in the White Paper very interesting. Many of my colleagues, if not all of them, will have read the document, in which I did not see the word "comprehensive" at all. If it is in there, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will point it out, but I could not find it. I did find a reference, however, to stale and outdated arguments about diversity on the one hand and uniformity on the other. I wonder whether the word "uniformity" has replaced the word "comprehensive". I readily accept that many hon. Members have far more experience than I have in education, but my experience, such as it is, has led me to conclude that I have seen good schools and schools that are not so good, and I have witnessed enormous progress, but I have never seen a school that is uniform. I have never seen separate schools that are exactly the same. I have experienced a different ethos in different schools; I have seen good head teachers and those who were not so good; I have experienced spirit, innovation, excellence and even things that would make hair curl, but I have never witnessed uniformity. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will explain "uniformity" in the context of the Bill.

Diversity has played and will continue to play an important part in education, as it should. However, we should not be so eager to dispatch the comprehensive system, if that is the intention. When balanced with the pursuit of public good, diversity in education is an excellent concept, and the Government have shown that it can work. However, the public good must counterbalance the pursuit of diversity; otherwise fragmentation will ensue. I am worried that "uniformity" is somewhat misleading and may be a smokescreen to hide the undoubted successes of the comprehensive system.

I want to concentrate on one or two specific matters. The Bill provides that schools that are deemed successful should have the freedom to excel and innovate. That is fine, but why should such freedom apply only to schools that are deemed to be good? What are we saying to schools that are deemed to be unsuccessful, but are successful? I know from constituency experience that such schools exist. They may not be successful according to the arbitrary standard of the league tables, but their

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work is extremely innovative and they excel and make genuine progress. Why should freedom be available only to so-called better schools?

I have already referred to opt-outs from national pay and conditions and the national curriculum. The Bill promotes the idea of forming separate companies. Will my hon. Friend explain that in a little more detail? Will the companies be private? Will they make a profit? Who will manage them? Will they have to register at Companies House? The provision is alien to my view of what should constitute the way forward.

Faith schools have already been mentioned—an important but difficult subject. I understand the arguments: we have had faith schools—Roman Catholic and Church of England—in this country for centuries. It is therefore difficult to argue that we should discriminate against other faiths. However, I want to put on record the Secretary of State's comments to the General Synod on 14 November. She said that she intended to speak briefly on faith schools. She continued:

> "Of course the decision will be taken locally. It won't be a decision for me . . . They are local, they are there in the locality and most of the applications will be decided in that way."

If the provision for faith schools is to be extended, the decision should be made locally. It should not be a matter for the Secretary of State and I hope that my hon. Friend will confirm that.

The Bill refers to external partners; I have already commented briefly on my anxieties about them. There is nothing wrong with involving the private sector, other schools and organisations that can help and support. I was somewhat reassured when I read in the explanatory notes that the partners will advise, not take over. Again, I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister confirmed that.

The Bill has much to commend it. I have profound anxieties about some of the fundamental issues that the measure covers. I am more than happy to listen to my hon. Friend the Minister and see what happens as the Bill progresses through Parliament. We should try to build on success, to create diversity, not fragmentation and to promote ethos rather than ethnic background. I have many serious doubts, but I am happy to support the Secretary of State's comments in a recent press report when she said that her job and that of the Government is to ensure that all pupils have the best chance in our school system.

7.55 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I am pleased that the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has put diversity at the heart of her policy and of the White Paper that was published in the summer. I welcome that because a diverse system is likely to provide a greater challenge to staff and pupils. The needs of individual pupils will be matched more closely when a broader range of schools is on offer, and the schools will better be able to reflect the needs of the local community. Diverse and innovative schools will spur other schools in the same community.

Diversity appears in at least three guises in the Bill: specialist schools, faith schools and new schools. I want to comment briefly on those categories. In the White Paper, "Schools-achieving success", the Government set out the objective of a fivefold increase in specialist schools by 2005. It referred to such schools as

> "schools with a proven record of improving standards".

However, I am worried about whether there are sufficient resources to realise that laudable aim.

One of the schools in my constituency wants to specialise in languages. The vacancy rate for French teachers doubled between 1997 and 2001. It increased by 60 per cent. for German teachers and by two and a half times for teachers of other languages. Another school in my constituency wants to specialise in sport, but the rate of physical education vacancies has quadrupled between 1997 and 2001. There has been a fivefold increase in vacancies for science teaching. That also applies to maths teachers. Maths and computing are intended to be specialisms, yet the vacancy rate for computing has increased sevenfold since 1997.

This morning, in a debate in Westminster Hall on the state of the teaching profession, the Minister said that the Government would have to recruit 40 per cent. of maths graduates to meet the need for maths teachers in future. That shows the extent of the Government's problem in reaching their target of a fivefold increase in specialist schools. How can they believe that they will achieve that goal if they simply create vacancies that cannot be filled? Are the Government guilty of creating unrealistic expectations? What action will they take to solve the problem?

I referred to this morning's debate on the state of the teaching profession. I shall relate a conversation that took place after the debate. It demonstrates the recruitment problems in schools in my constituency. David Wilmot is the headmaster of Cams Hill school, a beacon school, which had its status renewed earlier this year. It is an Ofsted outstanding school, which is rated as highly effective by Hampshire county council. David Wilmot told me that, in response to the growing recruitment problem, he spends two days a week recruiting teachers this year. He has now devised an innovative plan to try to deal with the vacancies. He has demonstrated great initiative by deciding to man a stall in Sainsbury's on Thursday and Friday this week. That is a tribute to his resourcefulness and enterprise but a sad indictment of the predicament in which the Government have left the teaching profession.

The Government will be able to achieve their goal to increase the number of specialised secondary schools only if they can sort out the problem of teacher recruitment and retention, which they have so far failed to address and which is causing teachers and heads so many problems. If they want more specialist schools, the Government must consider how best they are going to cope with the demand for more specialist teachers—a demand that they have so far failed to meet.

Faith schools have been an important issue since 11 September. I must declare a personal interest here, because I attended Catholic schools in the state sector in Durham throughout my schooling. I have, therefore, seen at first hand the benefits of state schools from the perspective of a pupil and, now, as part of a community sponsoring such schools. The White Paper calls for inclusive faith schools. That would make a great headline, "Inclusive faith schools". However, when we look at the detail, we see that the White Paper was particularly vague about what it meant by that apparent oxymoron.

My concern was that it meant that the admissions policy of current and future faith schools would in some way be influenced to ensure that pupils of all faiths and none had a right to attend such schools. One of the foundations of the success of the school that I attended was that it comprised many people who subscribed to the values of the school. For the ethos of a school to work, I believe that that is right. Active membership of the faith supporting the school is a major factor in ensuring that people subscribe to its values.

I do not mean that Anglican or Catholic schools—or faith schools of any other denomination—should be attended wholly and exclusively by people of those denominations, but, equally, we should not be forcing admissions policies to look for predetermined proportions of children of other faiths or none to attend the school.

Some of my concerns have been allayed by the evidence given by the Secretary of State to the Select Committee when she was questioned by the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor). She said:

> "There are more ways of making schools mutually inclusive than actually having a quota of meeting 10 per cent. of Muslims. I do not want to move along those lines."

I should be grateful, however, if the Minister would confirm that schools organisation committees and admissions forums will not be given the power to amend the admissions policy of faith schools and that quotas are not on the Government's agenda. Such an assurance would be valued enormously by many who support faith schools.

We also need to reflect on the fact that schools can become exclusive by means other than religion. Many schools have strictly defined catchment areas, which means that their intake is drawn from particular social groups because that is where they live and where the school is based. My school was more socially inclusive than the local comprehensive because its catchment area covered the former coal-mining communities around the city of Durham, whereas the local comprehensive school drew its pupils from the mainly middle-class areas surrounding it.

So, non-faith schools can be as exclusive as faith schools, if not more so, but in different ways. A non-faith school in an inner-city area could be just as exclusive as a faith school meeting the needs of the local Muslim or Hindu population. The difference would be that in a faith school, the religion being taught would be put in the context of the faiths of others, where genuine differences could be highlighted, rather than engaging in some of the deep theological debates referred to by some Labour Members, which could be used as a vehicle for religious hatred instead of providing a greater understanding of the tolerance that faiths should show one another.

As I made clear to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), I do not believe that the opportunity to be educated in a faith school should be limited to Anglicans, Catholics or Jews. It should be extended to cover people of other faiths as well. On Saturday night, I met members of the Wessex Jamaat, which is based in my constituency. They expressed their desire to have a faith school, but they also recognised the need to build bridges with other parts of the community and with other faith schools. I welcome their views on that process and on how it can be developed in future.

The case of Holy Cross primary school in Belfast has been mentioned by several Labour Members. If their arguments about the divisiveness of church schools is correct, why are there not similar demonstrations outside every church school in the country? There are not; what happens in the local community beyond the school walls is much more important in creating isolation and segregation than what happens in the schools.

I support the Government's plans to introduce new schools, and to introduce the diversity that will be created by bringing in other providers. In Hampshire, we have had no new secondary schools for a number of years. Now that we are facing ever-increasing house numbers as a result of increased house-building targets, will the Minister consider the proposal that, rather than forcing children of secondary school age into expanding existing schools, a requirement should be placed on local authorities to accommodate those pupils in new schools? Those new schools could put out requests for proposals by voluntary groups, private bodies or charities to support them.

By going beyond the measures in the Bill, which are a timid response to the need to increase diversity in the state school sector by encouraging additional providers, and by taking a much more robust response, the Secretary of State would be much more likely to achieve her objective of increasing the diversity of schools. The measures in the Bill are timid, and the Secretary of State should consider making it a requirement that new proposals should be sought, and only if those proposals are seen to be inappropriate or unacceptable should the local education authority be allowed to put forward its own proposals for a new school. In that way, we would achieve an improvement in the diversity of schools. I welcome the fact that the Government are embracing that goal, but they need to be much more rigorous in trying to achieve it, as that would be to the benefit of children throughout the country, whatever school they go to.

8.7 pm

Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole): I want to make a few comments on how the education system will develop as a result of the actions that the Government have already taken, and as a result of the Bill. I want to put those comments into the context of a Government who have delivered solidly in their first term in office, in terms of not only funding, on which most people would agree, but rising standards and capital spend, which has been a major achievement in my constituency and in many others.

I am indebted—as are all hon. Members from time to time—to the excellent research carried out by the House of Commons Library, which provides the figures that help to stop us shouting and bawling at one another about accuracy. My constituency is served by two local education authorities. In North Lincolnshire, the amount being spent on education in 1997 was £61 million; at the end of the last financial year, that had risen to £74 million. In the East Riding of Yorkshire, the corresponding figures were £109 million rising to £140 million. That is an impressive growth in one term of office.

To put those figures in the context of total education spending throughout the country, figures from the Library—set at 2000 prices, so that we can make fair comparisons—show the total spent on education rose from £30 billion in 1979 to £39 billion in 1997. From £39 billion in 1997, the figure has risen to £53 billion at the end of the current spending round. That represents an increase of £9 billion over the 18 years to 1997, compared

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with £14 billion in only six years. In other words, we have achieved 50 per cent. more in one third of the time. The Government deserve great praise for having put their money where their mouth is when it came to "education, education, education".

The Bill needs to build on that foundation. The hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) spoke earlier about the investment that needs to be made in rural schools. I represent an enormously rural constituency, as I am reminded every time I ride round the 50 parish councils that I represent. They have derived enormous benefit from the Labour Government's first term, particularly in respect of meeting the class size pledge. I have so many villages with new classrooms and new buildings that I am embarrassed to list them. What is more, I have only 12 minutes and I always forget a school, so someone writes to me to say, "Why didn't you mention us?" Take it from me, many have benefited. For example, there is a new school in the village of Rawcliffe, which I shamelessly plug tonight in the hope that the Minister for School Standards will open it shortly.

Those are the foundations and the Bill is an opportunity to ensure that such education improvements are available to all children, wherever they are in Britain. I totally welcome the move to achieve diversity through schools being able to innovate more for themselves, but I hope that the Minister says more about the checks and balances that will be put in place. The Prime Minister has said that a good head teacher can make an almost immeasurable difference to a school, because of the effect on motivation and the changed ethos of the school. Every Member knows of such an example in their own constituency—a good head teacher can make an enormous difference.

Of course, it is equally true that a poor head teacher can make a school suffer, so it is important that whatever apparatus we put in place deals with that. I shall give a brief constituency example that illustrates the point well. The head teacher of a large rural junior school decided to put his 20 brightest pupils into one class and the rest made up a class of 46. As hon. Members can imagine, there was great outrage, especially among the parents of children in the large class, but the teachers and local councillors were also unhappy. They sent a delegation to see me, and I went to see the local director of education, but we found that nothing could be done, because, if the governors are happy with the head's actions, that is all there is to it.

Some governors were unhappy, but not many on a governing body—I have served on six—will stand up to a strong head who insists that what he is doing is right. It was a strange situation in which there seemed to be no accountability to anybody. Good heads being able to innovate is one thing, but the checks and balances must be in place, because, at some point and preferably locally, there must be accountability so that the concerns of parents and others can be expressed other than by the governing body. My experience, and that is only one of several, shows that that is not the case. I hope that the Minister deals with that point.

Many Members have mentioned faith and specialist schools. I want to refer briefly to specialist schools. I was fairly sceptical when they were introduced, particularly about allowing the selection of 10 per cent. of pupils by aptitude. Only one school in my constituency put itself forward, and it wanted to become a performing arts specialist school. I went to see the head and the chair of governors. I said that I had no problem in general terms with them going for that status or with their plans for spending the funding should they get it, but I was concerned about what would happen if all the budding thespians of north Lincolnshire headed there.

The school is in a rural area and it was already full, so if it took 10 per cent. of its pupils based on ability to act, 10 per cent. of local children would be displaced. There is another school two villages and about eight miles away, but it is full, so the pupils could not go there either. The next school is in the town of Scunthorpe, which is a long way away.

I do not want to labour the point, because the chair of governors and the head teacher made it perfectly clear that they had not the slightest intention to use that power. They wanted to get the specialist status to get the funding into the school to get the performing arts facilities, which would be a bonus to all the children, whether or not they had a great aptitude for the performing arts.

Moreover, the school would become a community facility in the evenings and at weekends, so that small rural town would gain a major facility. The school got the status, and that is exactly what has happened. I am happy with how the head and the chair of governors have dealt with the issue, but that does not remove the concerns about the way in which the system is structured—it could all have been very different.

We need to think about what difference specialist schools make. One argument in their favour is that they improve education and that results are better, but I am not sure how far that can be taken. The Minister may say, "The school in your constituency got excellent results." It did, but the point is that it always did, so is specialist status making schools good or are good schools becoming specialist? The jury is out on that one.

The Office for Standards in Education report said that the evidence shows that the rate of improvement is slightly higher than in non-specialist schools, but as specialist schools receive slightly more funding, does not that prove that if such funding were made available to all, the rate of improvement would also apply to all? If we think specialist schools are the way ahead and that they are what children need because they turn them on to education, even if certain schools do not provide particular specialisms, they should be available to all, not just a few. That is where the Government must expand their plans if they want to carry them through.

I think that Nye Bevan, whom I am almost certainly misquoting, said that there is no point having the freedom to choose if there is no power to choose. Labour Members certainly know that many people from many backgrounds go to a school because it is the only one that they can attend. If specialist schools will improve education, they must be extended to all.

On faith schools, I share a lot of the concerns expressed tonight, in particular by my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), so I urge caution on the ministerial team. There already appears to have been some backtracking. Statements have been made about admissions policy and the curriculum will include citizenship to ensure tolerance of other faiths and religions in school, but the Bill says that schools can opt out of parts of the curriculum. That is contradictory. Can the Minister tell us that no such opt out will be allowed in a faith school?

Everything I have experienced in education makes me believe that it is important to show tolerance and respect for others, and in a multicultural society we should learn about other people's backgrounds and religions. All schools should offer that; if the Bill is to proceed, they must do so. I was a governor of a Church of England school in Scunthorpe. Out of 500 schools in Humberside, it was the only one at which the ethnic minority made up the majority of the roll.

Ironically, that Church of England school was the first to use the powers of the Education Reform Act 1988 to opt out of the daily act of Christian worship, because it would have been inappropriate. That shows that many schools that historically have been faith schools are not completely hung up on the religion that they represent. They are interested in a tolerant, multicultural society, but I have doubts. Such historical legacies aside, will all the schools from all religions that are coming forward to be new faith schools take up that ethos?

I asked the Commons Library whether new faith schools would be required to teach their pupils about all faiths. The answer was, "No, they are not." The secondary comment was interesting, "And no, they don't." That is the point. If the Government are to push ahead with faith schools, they need to deal with that. We also need to do more to improve teacher morale. Every Bill that we pass in this place counts for nothing unless teachers are motivated to deliver it in the classrooms. They have gone through a lot, but they have produced remarkable results.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that she believes that the Bill will allow teachers to teach children as individuals. If we can achieve that, we can bring teachers on board and recruitment and retention will improve.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I see that several Members wish to speak. If speeches are brief, more Members may catch my eye.

8.19 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Before dealing with the specifics, I want to talk briefly about the background.

As the Minister will remember, in Westminster Hall this morning I identified a number of areas in which the teaching profession faces what can only be described as a mounting crisis in many parts of the country. Those words come not from me as a politician, but from any number of heads and other teachers to whom I have spoken in recent weeks. I pay tribute to them for continuing to deliver excellent results in extremely difficult circumstances.

At the heart of the problem lies the Government's determination to micro-manage, to interfere with and to centralise our education system. That is one of the fundamental weaknesses of the Bill. Heads tell me repeatedly that in schools, no one feels free to make their own decisions. That applies especially to classroom teachers. They tell me that they are inundated with unnecessary bureaucracy. I have seen some of that as a school governor, and I know that it is getting worse.

In a written answer two days ago, the Department told me that 20 initiatives requiring action had been sent to primary schools since 1 April, and 22 to secondary schools. A chair of governors told me last week that he will have another five or six to deal with by January. The consequence of that bureaucratic workload is that teachers are beginning to say, "Enough is enough". A head in my area told me recently that he had lost two good young teachers who were quitting "To get a life". One of my local union officials said that the

"majority of young colleagues leaving teaching cite the difficulty of having a life outside the job—and the workload associated with it."

I have spoken to a number of heads in recent days. One told me that the Government were over-interventionist, that children were over-measured and that there was initiative overload. According to her,

"the Government has taken the joy and inspiration out of teaching".

According to the Foundation and Voluntary Aided Schools' Association,

"Ministers need to recognise that morale in the profession is low and that this is derived at least partly from the sense of helplessness in the minds of staff that they have no control over their working life".

That cannot be right, and it cannot be good for our teachers.

In Westminster Hall, we talked about information coming from around the country about the morale crisis in too many schools. The Secretary of State, in the House, has given figures to deny its existence, but those who talk to head teachers will find that they tell a different story. Today, we heard stories from heads in Nottinghamshire, Hampshire and Somerset, as well as my own county of Surrey, all telling that same story.

Half the schools in Surrey contain people teaching subjects that they are not qualified to teach. Half the heads say that teachers in their schools have left the profession in the past 12 months. According to recent research by Liverpool university, the rate of resignation is rising fast. The age profile, meanwhile, is rising: far more teachers nowadays are in their forties rather than their twenties. The profession is not renewing itself. The main reason is the Government's repeated exacerbation of the workload placed on teachers' shoulders.

It is to the Secretary of State's discredit that the words "teachers' workload" did not pass her lips this evening, although the Minister told us this morning that the Department had commissioned a report on teachers' workload from PricewaterhouseCoopers, which he said would recommend changes. He said that it would tell the Department that the workload was too great. Why is there no reflection of that in the Bill?

Teachers refer to discipline issues. They say that they are suffering the disastrous consequences of the Government's exclusion policy, and that there is increasing antisocial behaviour in classrooms. In far too many cases, teachers are open to investigation on the whim of pupils; too often the word of a pupil is taken against that of a teacher. In such circumstances, teachers can be subjected to police investigation over the most minor incidents. Is it any wonder that so many teachers feel let down by the system? What does the Bill do to tackle those problems?

Of course the Bill has good points. I welcome the decision to reverse the Government's ill-thought-out policies on exclusion, and the proposals relating to student grants and teachers. But does it tackle bureaucracy, or teachers' workload? It provides for application for specialist school status, allowing for substantial

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consultation and complex processes for securing it. Will that reduce teachers' workload? It also provides for constitutional changes involving governing bodies. Will that make head teachers' jobs easier?

The Bill talks of new frameworks for determining teachers' pay and conditions, provisions for teacher appraisal and the extension of regulation governing nursery education. What does any of that do to address the real problem of excessive workload? Apart from taking welcome steps on exclusion, what does the Bill do to address the problem of antisocial behaviour? What extra safeguards does it give heads to enable them to maintain order?

As we have heard tonight, others are not impressed by the Bill. The National Governors Council has referred to a common theme in discussions and responses to the consultation paper: why bother to do all this? It considers that some of the proposals have merit, but they are not aimed at solving major problems. That is exactly my point.

As for the situation in pre-schools and nurseries, I deeply regret the Government's creeping regulation of that sector. In the past few weeks, I have visited a number of pre-school playgroups in my constituency, and have been horrified by the bureaucracy there. There are teaching manuals several inches thick, and certification courses that last more than a year—for mothers working a couple of mornings a week.

Caroline Flint: If people want to run a two-hour playgroup, that is fine. If they want to engage in nursery education, however, they must be able to apply the standards that we would expect for all our children in nursery schools. Surely those who do not want to do that need not make such provision.

Chris Grayling: It is right that we set standards for our playgroups but when we go seriously over the top and prescribe, in detailed minutiae, what we expect from playgroups we place a ridiculously onerous burden on those who run them, and drive them out of existence. That is what is happening and it will continue to happen.

The Bill has both good points and bad ones. However, it is still the wrong Bill to deal with the problems facing our education system. I therefore conclude by offering some suggestions to the Government. Let us have a 12-month moratorium on new initiatives for the teaching profession and give teachers a chance to deal with the initiative overload that is already on their desks. Let us permanently reduce the number of reports and consultations; we cannot continue to expect our school heads and governors to deal with such a weight of paperwork. Let us stop trying to micro-manage school funding and give heads some freedom to take decisions according to the needs of their schools. Let us also give teachers protection against false allegations. I also ask the Government to stop over-regulating our pre-school groups. Above all, I ask them to listen to head teachers, not statistics.

On various occasions this year, one of my local union officials wrote to the Minister to highlight the problems in Surrey. He concluded by saying:

> "We look to the Government to do something to restore teacher morale and make a start to address the underlying causes of our current staffing crisis".

The Bill palpably fails to deal with that problem at all.

8.29 pm

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): I praise the Government and congratulate the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on again demonstrating—this time, in the Education Bill—education's place at the heart of our social policy. I shall first speak to clauses 1 to 4, then comment on clauses 10 and 11, and finish by speaking in some detail about the concept of faith schools, especially as it is dealt with in clause 66.

I am delighted by the Bill's general thrust in introducing innovation in schools, which is particularly evident in clauses 1 to 4. The talent, ability and initiative of individual schools, head teachers, department heads and indeed pupils should be given free rein to foster innovation that improves educational standards and performance. Innovation can occur in many ways: the adoption of new teaching methods; seeking to develop subjects in collaboration with other educational providers and other bodies that may be able materially to assist and enhance the learning process; collaboration with neighbouring schools and colleges; and seeking to make schools a part of the wider community and thereby creating in the classroom a vibrant mix between education and the wider issues of citizenship, and ensuring that a dynamic learning environment is nurtured.

Clauses 10 and 11 will enable governing bodies to form or invest in companies to provide or purchase specific services. I welcome that provision. Many local authorities and other non-governmental organisations have found that the ability to form companies limited by guarantee is a great boon to their work. In the spheres of community development and capacity building, for example, improvement companies have been an invaluable vehicle in regenerating our towns and cities. Additionally, local councils' economic development work has been enhanced by the formation of companies to invest in local innovation in technology transfer and research and development.

The ability to use a similar vehicle to invest in, for example, a new state-of-the-art science facility is a welcome addition to the powers available to governing bodies. Of course there will have to be safeguards and a provision that such companies cannot be formed without the local education authority's express permission. I would therefore welcome a strengthening of the general safeguards by the designation of an "accountable body" and a "prescribed person" to administer them. I also believe that the prescribed person will have to be someone local, such as the LEA chief officer or section 151 officer, and not someone from the Department for Education and Skills.

I largely agreed with the comments that my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) made on clause 66, which would allow any LEA in England, with the approval of the Secretary of State, to invite "other people" to make provision for the establishment of a new maintained school. Although the clause is deliberately vague on who those "other people" may be, briefing material that I have seen makes it clear that the sponsors may include faith groups.

I should like to sound a warning on the issue. I believe that we need to think deep and hard about deliberately increasing the number of faith schools. As many hon.

Members have said, faith schools have been with us since the Elementary Education Act 1870, which was amended in 1902. However, the landscape in which faiths are promoted and the nature of faiths themselves have altered dramatically since the days of Gladstone, Disraeli, Churchill and Chamberlain. We live now in a multicultural society that embraces many different races and nationalities.

I myself was brought up in the Hindu and Sikh faiths, and I regularly go to the mandir and the gurdwara. I respect all faiths, but I consider myself a humanist. I went through the state education system and I enjoyed it, not least because it helped me to value debate, argument and inquiry without religious indoctrination, and because it did not place education into the straitjacket of a narrow sectarian way of thinking.

We should recall how that form of education evolved from a historical perspective. The 1870 Act's purpose was to prepare the way for a whole new network of state elementary schools designed to ensure that the nation was best able to train its young people to meet the technical and vocational challenges of late Victorian Britain. It was seen by many as an attack on the Churches and met with fierce opposition from many clergymen, the Church of England, the Free Churches and the Roman Catholic faith. Equally, many others, including the great radical philosopher Jeremy Bentham—who argued for the freeing of education from the narrow confines of the church and the chapel—saw that the great advances in scientific and cultural discovery occurring at that time had to be discussed and studied in our classrooms. They were concerned that the narrow dogmatism that characterised many religious institutions would be apt to inhibit those intellectual discoveries.

In true British fashion, the result was a compromise. Faith schools, styled as voluntary schools, were allowed to remain in being, but they were overshadowed by a network of state schools run, at that time, by local school boards. The settlement was that those state schools would be obliged to offer Christian instruction of a vaguely non-partisan kind and that has broadly lasted to the present day. Some 22 per cent. of all pupils in England are in mainstream faith schools, with 12 per cent. at Church of England schools and 10 per cent. at Roman Catholic schools.

Both Churches have, over the years, become absorbed into the mainstream educational network. Indeed, apart from the notice boards outside many of our voluntary aided schools there is little to distinguish many of those schools from their LEA neighbours. Most treat religious education as part of a wider multicultural curriculum, and most do not force feed faith to their pupils. However, that may not be the case with future faith schools. That change was foreshadowed by the Education Act 1988, introduced by the previous Conservative Government, which made worship "of a Christian character" compulsory, and provided that religious education has

"to take account of the principal religions".

It also has to reflect

"the main religious tradition of this country".

The 1988 Act was followed by the Green Paper introduced by the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment this February. That promised to introduce new state-funded schools managed by religious interests from, among others, the Christian, Muslim, Sikh and Greek Orthodox Churches. That declaration has been paralleled by the increasing interest in educational policy from institutions and individuals representing religious interests that are outside the mainstream faiths. As well as general policy, there is now a specific interest in sponsoring new schools.

I agree with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) that there is a great danger that well-endowed Christian evangelical groups could seek an opening into our classrooms through the promise of lavish funds. We have seen that occur in the United States and in Africa. There is a similar danger that groups and sects in other religions could seek to set up schools with an added agenda that promotes ideas and beliefs that implicitly challenge the concepts of multiculturalism and diversity of belief. Such schools would seek to stifle the pursuit of knowledge about other faiths and races.

Those possibilities are obvious here-and-now dangers, but there are other, more theoretical, but real concerns about faith schools. Can the teaching of a specific religious belief in an institutional setting be seen as an attempt to indoctrinate a child? Does not such teaching take away the autonomy of a child who attends such a school? Indoctrination is a strong word, but I use it because I believe that the teaching of a child about a specific religion without reference or parallel to other faiths is simply that—indoctrination. The purpose of such tuition is to ensure that a pupil comes to accept a religious belief as true, not as a concept that can be tested against other concepts. It is no accident perhaps that many religious leaders and educationists speak not of religious education, but religious instruction. The loss of autonomy is a strong accusation, but I believe that it is seriously wrong to force a child to accept tuition based on one set of religious tenets and possibly to use the powers of reprimand if those tenets are not accepted. That is coercion at the worst, and a loss of autonomy at the least. It certainly takes away a child's right to self-determination of the relevance and righteousness of a religious creed.

I believe that the House should seek a wider debate about faith schools, and their role and purpose in the modern multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-faith society. I seriously hope that this matter will be debated far more widely in Standing Committee and in another place.

8.40 pm

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): The Bill is a testament to the Government's extraordinary belief that constant change is synonymous with progress, and that any problem can be cracked with more legislation. Above all, the Bill rests firmly on the premise that every problem in our schools could be solved if only the Secretary of State had more power to impose a solution from her office in Whitehall.

However, the Government's rhetoric in recent months has been more encouraging, especially for those exhausted head teachers and teachers worn down by the ceaseless flow of centrally generated initiatives, directives and policy changes. It would appear that the legion of Labour spin doctors has got the message that teachers and heads alike are fed up, cheesed off and walking out—even if the policy makers have not grasped it. The mood music from the Government since the election, therefore, has been about empowering head teachers, devolving power

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to schools and reducing the administrative burden on heads, teachers and governors—a theme, indeed, that was recurrent in the Conservative party's election manifesto.

Measures to liberate teachers were keenly anticipated, and many people hoped that this Education Bill would at last herald a true sea change in the Government's willingness to trust teaching professions. Many in the teaching profession hoped that this Labour Government had finally woken up and smelt the coffee. Unfortunately, it now appears that the Secretary of State has not merely smelt the coffee, but has downed enough full-on, super-caffeine-boosted educational espressos to induce a frenzy of new centralising measures, initiatives and diktats.

After all the talk and hype about empowering heads and teachers, the Bill turned out—surprise, surprise—to contain sweeping new powers for the Secretary of State, and to do nothing to give real freedom to those who deliver results in the classroom. Instead, the Secretary of State is to preside in glory like Elizabeth I—the virgin queen, Gloriana—over a court of suitors and favourites, who will come to her in Whitehall seeking educational favour and indulgence for their pet schemes in the shires. The Secretary of State may have many qualities, but the virgin queen she is not.

The Bill will weaken local education authorities. That is not a bad idea in itself but, whereas a Conservative Government would have devolved power properly to the schools, this Bill will send that power straight up the line to the Secretary of State. Key decisions will be taken even further away from the classroom. Local accountability will be further undermined.

However, in terms of practical measures, the Bill will do nothing to assist children in Pevensey bay in my constituency. This winter, they face a daily walk of more than five miles to and from school along a busy, out-of-town main road and then across unmade tracks. They will be out in all weathers from the age of eight, while a school bus carrying their younger siblings drives past with empty seats.

The Bill will do nothing for the overcrowding that those same children face once they get to school. At Pevensey and Westham primary school, 10 out of 12 classes contain more than 30 children.

The Bill will do nothing to address the chronic problems of overcrowding in schools right across East Sussex, particularly in my constituency. It will do nothing for the 40 per cent. of primary schools in my constituency which have one class or more with 35 or more children. It will do nothing for the 25 per cent. of primary schools that have two or more classes with more than 35 pupils. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members ask what LEA we are in. East Sussex, unfortunately, which suffered under Lib-Lab control until June this year.

The Bill will do nothing to address the two classes of 38 children in year 5 at Battle and Langton primary school. It is a new school, built in 1987, under the last Conservative Government. Now, five years into a Labour Administration, it is swamped and under-resourced. The Bill will do nothing to address the cramped and uncomfortable condition of children at Battle and Langton who are being taught in poor temporary accommodation, mouldy in winter and baking hot in summer.

I am constantly amazed at the way in which teachers manage to cope with these large forms in such small classrooms, extracting the best from our children in a truly miserable environment. I have nothing but admiration for the way in which they manage to impose discipline in classes that take inclusion to an extreme but where exclusions are almost impossible.

At King Offa primary school in Bexhill, four classes in key stage 2 all exceed 35 pupils. That is largely because of a mandatory requirement to reduce class sizes to below 30 for the younger children, which has cost the head a whole class. With more than 35 children, classes are becoming unmanageable. Fast-growing kids are crammed into classrooms built for 30. Group work or project work that requires elbow room or extra space is all but impossible. Youngsters with excess energy to blow off spend their days in cramped classrooms, where just walking around can be disruptive to other pupils. Will anything in the Bill allow the headmistress of King Offa school to manage her way out of this predicament? Absolutely not. I invite the Minister to tell us in the winding-up speech what provisions will ease the chronic overcrowding in East Sussex.

The Bill will do nothing to address the farce of non-existent parental choice in my constituency, where children are lucky to get into their local school, let alone successfully express a preference for another.

The Bill will do nothing to address chronic teacher shortages. St. Richard's Catholic college, one of the best secondary schools in East Sussex, is advertising for a vice principal. Ten years ago, the governors had more than 80 applicants for the job; now the school will be lucky to get 10.

Elsewhere in my constituency, another first-class deputy head has resigned and returned to the classroom because he found the bureaucratic burden intolerable. Fortunately, the school in question retains his teaching skills, unlike two of his teaching colleagues, who last year left the profession altogether, driven out by the dead weight of bureaucracy and a total lack of professional independence for teachers.

Such is the overcrowding and undercapacity in schools in my constituency that the notion of parental choice is little more than a joke. Appeals are at record levels, yet still children find themselves with problems in getting into their local schools. Stonecross is just one of many primary schools that, because of the constraints of overcrowding, constantly turns away parents who live only a short walk away.

The Bill will do nothing to address the issue of a badly needed new village school in Ticehurst. The school, its governors and the community have worked tirelessly to obtain a new site and a funded development plan, yet the project languishes, bogged down in bureaucracy and officialdom.

There appears to be a perverse logic prevailing within Whitehall; it endeavours to run our education system along more businesslike lines, mimicking practices that it perceives in the private sector. However, successful businesses today abhor centralisation and go out of their way to devolve management responsibility to the lowest possible level. Senior management in the most successful large companies are there to set goals, pick the right individuals and then let them get on with the job without constantly second guessing them from above. Those managers reward good performance, but swiftly remove those who are unable to deliver.

The reverse seems to prevail in Labour's education regime. The Government seem more and more determined to try to micro-manage schools from the centre, but that will only make it more and more difficult for heads to recruit or retain good individuals while making it almost impossible to get rid of those who do not perform.

One of the commonest complaints that I hear during my numerous visits to schools is that on the rare occasions when heads find that a staff member is not performing well it can take years to tackle the problem effectively. The long-drawn out process just to get rid of one individual can be especially corrosive in a small school. We must be prepared to treat teachers like the professionals they are—allowing them far greater self-regulation, while freeing heads to handle staff as they see fit.

As I said earlier, the Bill represents a missed opportunity. It offered the chance to draw a line under the debilitating trend to centralisation, the initiative overload and the mass exodus of excellent teachers from the profession. On both sides of the House, we want the best for our children, but the clear divide between our approach to teaching and that of Labour Ministers is writ large in the Bill: Conservatives trust teachers—Labour do not.

8.51 pm

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I am pleased to speak in support of the general principles underlying the Bill, especially the encouragement of greater innovation and flexibility and the reduction of bureaucracy. We must accept the legitimate criticisms about bureaucracy made by teachers and head teachers in recent years—not just in the past four years.

The spokesmen from the two Opposition parties criticised the Bill from different perspectives. The Conservatives attacked the Bill for being too centralist, while the Liberal Democrats attacked it for introducing more decentralisation than even the Conservatives were prepared to undertake. I thus conclude that the balance between intervention and decentralisation is probably about right. The Government's approach of intervention in proportion to the degree of success is the right way forward. Although I sympathise with some of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), for whom I have great respect, his idea that a struggling school should simply be let loose to do what it wants is completely ludicrous.

The Bill performs an important function in tidying up some of the loose ends in previous legislation. I especially welcome the provisions to extend the inspection regime to private schools. That has been a huge gap in our education system for many years. I welcome the reconsideration of the role of the learning and skills councils in the planning of post-16 education, and their powers to approve the establishment of new sixth forms, to change existing sixth forms and to close inadequate ones.

I want to draw the House's attention to part of the Bill that has not really been discussed: the provisions relating to the responsibilities of governing bodies. I want to introduce a note of caution about the decentralising tendency as regards the autonomy of head teachers. Although it is right as a general principle that management should be allowed to manage and that decentralised management structures are more effective, such decentralisation must take place in a framework of accountability. As the son of a head teacher I am especially conscious of that argument.

The comparison between what we are doing in the education service and what we are doing in the health service is odd: although we are starting—at long last—to constrain in the health service the excessive influence of the dominant producer interests in the form of consultants, in the education service we are pursuing the opposite course and are strengthening the powers of the dominant producer interest—the head teachers. A balance has to be struck somewhere, and we have to consider what replaces the line of accountability to central Government when head teachers are given carte blanche to operate their schools as they think fit—albeit only for three years, with the possibility of extension for a further three years—and that comes down to the governing bodies.

I shall briefly raise a local issue to exemplify some of the dangers of that approach. At one school in my constituency—I shall not name names, although which it is will be obvious to my constituents—parents accused the head teacher of intervening inappropriately in the conduct of key stage 2 tests, on the evidence provided by children at the school. That led to an inquiry by the chairman of the governing body, who felt it necessary to refer the case to the governing body's dismissals committee, which consulted the local authority's personnel department, which produced a report on the allegations. I am not aware of what the report says, but on the basis of the allegations that my constituents have made, which I have seen, the evidence is pretty damning. The governing body decided to take no action against the head teacher, following the consideration of the local authority's report, but it was not prepared to publish that report. That raises several important issues.

First, is it right that the governing bodies of small schools—I am talking about a primary school—should have that enormous burden of responsibility placed on them? A very complicated series of allegations was made about a complex series of incidents and there are serious consequences for the school and the head teacher. Can we reasonably expect volunteers, who give up their spare time, to take on those important personnel responsibilities, especially as they may involve dismissal or serious disciplinary action?

Secondly, is it right for the inquiry carried out when such allegations are made to be kept secret? That is a matter of crucial public importance; it reflects on the school's reputation and that of the head teacher and on the integrity of the key stage 2 tests, so it ought to be in the public domain as a matter of course.

Thirdly, if it were the case that the inquiry had led to criticisms involving gross misconduct by the head teacher, should that automatically be a case for dismissal, or would it be reasonable for that head teacher to return to his post?

I ask those questions purely to emphasise the crucial issue of the accountability of local head teachers and the necessity of having a strong framework of accountability. I am not sure whether the existing powers of governing bodies, nor the changes to those powers proposed in the Bill, are sufficiently strong to hold the actions of all head teachers to account. I am certainly not sure whether the

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existing powers of local authorities are sufficiently strong to do that. So to whom will head teachers be accountable if the provisions on opting out of the various legal requirements are accepted?

I am concerned about others things in the Bill. Several hon. Members have raised the issue of faith and specialist schools. I have no fixed views on faith or specialist schools—I am open-minded about their roles and their achievements. I tend to think that specialist schools are an interesting concept, but any major expansion of faith or specialist schools has to be done on the basis of the available evidence. It concerns me a little that the move to faith schools has been driven not necessarily by the evidence, but by assumption.

It is certainly true that the figures on the GCSE performance of faith schools that I saw recently showed that, on average, faith schools performed better than non-faith schools to the tune of 7.5 per cent. for five A to C GCSEs. However, it is equally true that, in Anglican schools, the proportion of youngsters on free school meals is significantly lower than it is for non-faith schools and it is also true that, in Catholic schools, the proportion of youngsters with statements is significantly lower than it is in non-faith schools.

If we are to consider the raw figures for attainment at GCSE, we have to set them in the context of the intake of existing faith schools. I do not think that we can draw any easy conclusions. However, reflecting the comments of some of my hon. Friends, I believe that we need a much more detailed debate than we have had so far about the evidence available on faith schools.

The same point applies to specialist schools. My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) referred to the recent Ofsted report on specialist schools. It said that, across the board, such schools performed slightly better than non-specialist schools in terms of the trend of improvement. However, it is a very slight difference. I have read the report line by line, and I would urge all hon. Members to do so. It makes some damning allegations and is very inconclusive about the performance of the existing specialist schools.

Again, I ask whether we are forming policy based on evidence or based on gut reaction and assumption. As with faith schools, we need a much more considered debate about the record of the existing specialist schools. We need to set all the performance indicators in context.

Although the controversy in recent weeks has focused on the debate about faith and specialist schools, they are not mentioned in the Bill. It is interesting that some of the most profound structural changes to the secondary education system are not touched on by the Bill at all. That may be normal and acceptable, and it is true that we do not need to legislate for everything. If we do not need primary legislation, why have it?

With the onset of more faith schools and perhaps more specialist schools, secondary education is going through profound structural change, but we have not considered the other aspect of the system that dominates the levels of achievements of thousands of young people. I refer to the continued existence of selection. Again, it is not mentioned in the Bill, and it has hardly been mentioned at all in the public debate in recent weeks. However, the existence of explicit selection by means of the 11-plus in 36 local authorities in England—almost a quarter of all local education authorities—must be confronted sooner or later.

One or two hon. Members have referred to Kent and to the overall level of achievement there. They have also referred to the number of schools with serious weaknesses in Kent, but the fact is that, in such an area, it is impossible for the majority of schools to achieve at the level of the best. The structure prevents that.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

9.4 pm

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): This is a long and mixed Bill, but I wish to start by welcoming certain elements of it. In particular, I welcome the support for faith schools. It is a pity that the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) is no longer present, because I would have liked to reassure him on several points.

I am the governor of a single sex denominational school that has its own sixth form—it does not therefore endear itself to the local authority—and it does not select any of its pupils according to the financial status of the parents. It is important that the faith is held not just by the parents, but by the pupils as well. The school adds to the choice and diversity of education in the neighbourhood. It is oversubscribed to the extent that it could probably fill its places several times over every year, and I believe that its existence is justified on the ground of demand alone.

I have heard nothing but respect for other faiths in the school. It has the utmost respect for other people and for citizenship, and it encourages the height of good manners among its pupils. When I was at prize giving a couple of weeks ago, two students with statements of special educational needs received certificates for five GCSE grades A to C, which establishes its credentials as a truly comprehensive school.

I also welcome the extension of specialist schools. It is difficult for me to do that because this afternoon I received a telephone call from the head teacher of the other school for which I am a governor, which is a mixed comprehensive, to tell me that our second attempt to achieve specialist school status had been refused. We are bitterly disappointed. An enormous amount of time and effort went into preparing the bids. We were given to understand that the first attempt only just failed and we were encouraged by the Department to try again. Yet more time, energy and resources were put into preparing the second bid, which we were led to believe would succeed. Although it did not, the ethos of the school is such that we will not give up, and I support specialist schools.

I also welcome the repayment of student loans for newly qualified teachers, which is an excellent move. Only six out of 10 newly qualified teachers go into the profession; the other four seek employment elsewhere. If we repay their student loans, it may encourage all 10 to come into the profession, and they are badly needed.

There are, however, two deficiencies. One is the missed opportunity to deal more robustly with the problem of retention and recruitment of teachers. There are 5,000 vacancies at a time when 61 per cent. of our established working teachers are aged over 40. The problem will get worse rather than better.

A delegation of teachers from Upminster, which is an extremely pleasant place to live, with good schools, had to go Australia recently to do block interviewing and recruitment because of the difficulty of recruiting in this country. However talented those Australian teachers may be, it does not bode well for continuity in schools and for long-term stability in the staff room. It is difficult to recruit teachers because the status of teaching has reached an all-time low. Teachers are overburdened with bureaucracy, initiatives and directives, which take up too much professional, pupil-contact teaching time. They did not train to do that; they trained to impart knowledge and to inspire and prepare pupils for adult life. However, much of their time is devoted to office work.

The problem of maintaining discipline in the classroom and how to deal with disaffected pupils is an important consideration when people decide whether to go into teaching. The balance of power has sprung too far towards pupils, away from the control of teachers and head teachers. In the Select Committee on Home Affairs this morning, we heard the interesting statistic that the female prison population is rising alarmingly and that half of those women did not attend school beyond the age of 13. We need to give that serious consideration and ensure that disaffected pupils who are not attending school are provided with specialist help. They have special needs, and I use the term advisedly, just like children with physical disabilities. We have to address those needs before they are drawn into a life of drug-taking and crime.

I want to illustrate my point about too much power lying with pupils by relating two anecdotes. The first I was told at the weekend by a teacher from outside my constituency, and it concerns a pupil who refused to conform in school or to obey any of the school rules. He would not wear uniform; he smoked; he swore at teachers; and he physically attacked, and stole from, pupils and staff. The police were involved and there was irrefutable evidence of his behaviour, yet the head teacher's decision to exclude him was not supported by the governors. That was not because the governors disputed the evidence or thought that the pupil did not deserve to be excluded, but because there is pressure on schools and governors not to exclude pupils. We need to find other means of dealing with disaffected pupils so that they receive what they need to return to education without disadvantaging other pupils and staff.

The other anecdote is more serious. It concerns a teacher of many years' standing who lost not only his job but his reputation, his home and his position as a foster parent and a scout leader because of a pupil's malicious, unfounded accusation against him. He has fostered so many children over the decades that they are now bringing their own children to visit him. It has taken six years for that man to be exonerated, and his life is ruined. Because he lost his job, and it took two years for the case to come to court, he lost his income and therefore his home.

We know that people may be vilified in the local press and their reputations lost because it is thought that there is no smoke without fire, so even when that teacher was found not guilty, it did him no good at all. It was a further two years before the local education authority approved him as a supply teacher. Every time he got a job in a school, with the head teacher's full knowledge of the history, one of the parents would find out about it, the gossip would begin and he would have to leave. That man is now lost to the profession—an innocent, good man who dedicated his whole life to youth work. We need to consider seriously how we can preserve the reputations of teachers, rather than always assuming that the pupil is telling the truth. The pupil must not always be believed, because sometimes accusations are malicious.

Throughout the country, many teachers nearing their retirement are looking to that time as a welcome light at the end of the tunnel because their job has changed so much over the years. The scales have tipped too far towards disaffected pupils, and that allows resentment to build up and morale to be lost. In many cases teachers are powerless to do anything about that. Their vulnerability is unacceptable, and we need to reintroduce balance and common sense in dealing with these cases.

The Bill is deficient on special educational needs. I know that we recently passed an Act introducing a code of practice on special needs, and I looked carefully in that code for a reference to special schools, but I found none. This Bill mentions special needs only in reference to Wales. I have a real fear, which is shared by professional people in special schools, that there is a long-term plan to bring about the demise of such schools within the spectrum of special needs provision by slowly starving them of pupils. If fewer and fewer children are referred to the schools, they will lose their viability. I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure me on that point when he responds to the debate.

There is a special needs nursery unit in my constituency which had no children referred to it this September. It has consistently had 20 children, but this term there are none. The LEA told me that there were no suitable children to be referred to that unit. I am deeply suspicious about that and hope that it is not an indication of things to come. I am also concerned about federations of schools in which one member is a special school and the other a mainstream school. There may be a loss of special needs expertise and experience on the joint governing bodies, so I hope that that will be looked at.

Many of the Bill's provisions will be considered without coming before the House. I hope that special attention will be given to the points that I have made, particularly the future of special schools and the protection of teachers when malicious accusations are made.

9.15 pm

Dr. Hywel Francis (Aberavon): I wish to declare an interest as vice president of NIACE—the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education—which is the adult learners body for England and Wales. I warmly welcome the Second Reading of the Bill and wish to focus on two aspects that relate specifically to Wales and another, more general, aspect.

The Bill has many origins, principally, but not exclusively, the White Papers for England, "Schools—achieving success", and for Wales, "The Learning Country". The significance of the Bill, and the significance of "The Learning Country" in the context of devolution, was summed up on 27 November by Jane Davidson, the Education and Lifelong Learning Minister in the National Assembly for Wales. She said:

> "The Learning Country is both the first comprehensive strategic statement on education and lifelong learning in Wales and the first policy document for the primary and secondary legislation in that field from the Assembly".

[Dr. Hywel Francis]

She concluded:

> "The National Assembly can take great satisfaction with what appears on the face of the Bill. This clearly shows how devolution is working to ensure that our distinctive systems of education and training can be delivered with robust confidence and pre-eminently for the benefit of learners in every part of our Learning Country, now and for the future."

The Bill is significant because it is based on the vision of devolution. Indeed, it is thoroughly appropriate, with its echoes of Raymond Williams' "Border Country", that the title "The Learning Country" comes from the adult learners body in Wales, NIACE Cymru—now NIACE Dysgu Cymru—whose 1997 general election manifesto was entitled "Wales, the Learning Country". Its principles of equity, social justice, active citizenship and lifelong learning underpin the spirit of the Bill, particularly its Welsh clauses.

I now come specifically to clauses 185 to 189, which relate to special educational needs in Wales. They will ensure regional provision for children with more complex needs and difficulties and will establish a special educational needs tribunal for Wales. It is thoroughly appropriate and heartwarming that we should discuss those clauses the day after the first ever educational conference organised by the Disability Rights Commission, which was addressed by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, was held on the European Day for Disabled People.

The Bill requires greater regional collaboration across Wales. It is with some pride that I draw the House's attention to the achievements in Wales in this field. As a carer of a child with special needs for 16 years, I know of the great efforts made by local educational authorities, often in times of adversity such as the 1980s and early 1990s, when there were public expenditure cuts. The spirit of regional and local collaboration has manifested itself in many parts of Wales and the proposals build on the best practice of several LEAs.

In my own authority of Neath Port Talbot, we have the excellent Ysgol Hendre residential special school, which includes a deaf-blind centre serving children with multi-sensory impairment. The centre has an international reputation, and specialists from India and the Philippines trained there last year. It serves the needs of children from most of the education authorities in south Wales, from Pembrokeshire in the west to Rhondda Cynon Taff in the east.

This week, in the European week of awareness raising for disability rights, the Secretary of State for Wales will open the Shaw Trust disability action centre at Llandarcy in my constituency. It is the first of its kind in Wales and, we believe, is unique in bringing together independent living services and employment services. Again, the centre serves a number of neighbouring authorities.

Much still needs to be done, but the Bill, underpinned by the spirit of partnership and social inclusion, builds on the best practice that already exists across Wales. We now have a national framework to progress equitably.

I end with a more general point. Today, the TUC organised a lobby of Parliament to celebrate the hard work and commitment of public servants and to support the public service ethos. The Bill, particularly in the clauses relating to the special educational needs of children in Wales, recognises and strengthens that public ethos—a public ethos that is best represented by teachers, ancillary staff, governors and parents, for the benefit of all learners, whatever their needs and their aspirations.

9.20 pm

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): As an Arsenal fan who has been sitting in the Chamber while we have been playing possibly the most important European game in our career, I am especially grateful to be called to speak in the debate.

I have sat through two education debates, and I am still no clearer about the official Opposition's policy on schools. Last night the shadow Chancellor failed to say whether he would rule out charging for hospitals. This afternoon the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) did not say whether he supports his leader's policy of vouchers for schools. Neither would say whether he supports his leader's position of cutting public spending as a share of gross domestic product.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): What on earth has that got to do with the Bill?

James Purnell: I was about to go on to that. The Opposition's policy is unclear, so I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Ashford said that it will take him months and possibly years before he comes up with a policy.

The Opposition's main argument seems to be that there is too much interference in our schools. I remind them that the main restriction on our schools is the national curriculum, which was introduced by the Conservatives. Indeed, Margaret Thatcher states in her biography:

> "I never envisaged that we would end up with the bureaucracy and the thicket of prescriptive measures which eventually emerged."

Through the Bill, Labour is starting finally to roll back that tide of prescription. Now that we have good measures of what schools can achieve, we no longer need to tell them in so much detail how to achieve it.

I welcome the Bill not just because of its detail, but because of the big picture that it represents. It represents a Government who are committed to creating a meritocracy not only through their measures on education, but through their commitment to ending child poverty. We believe that the two go hand in hand.

Four tests will allow us to meet that vision, the first of which is funding. The Government are putting in the funding necessary to raise standards in our schools. In the previous debate on the subject, the Opposition tried to deny that the amount of money going into education as a proportion of national income was going up. In fact, it has gone up from 4.7 per cent. to 5 per cent.

My second test is teachers. I declare an interest: my grandparents and my mother were teachers. They did, indeed, read *The Guardian*, although my grandparents eat porridge rather than Alpen and wear sensible shoes rather than sandals. I have often had to defend the description in *The Guardian* of what the Government have been doing in the past four years. More has been done for teachers in that time than under any other Government in recent memory, including last year the biggest rise in teachers' income that they have had for almost a decade.

The third test is diversity. I support specialist schools. I have no problem with offering a wide range of choice to children in our schools. For too long, children at the top and at the bottom of the ability range have not been tested enough. Children of low ability have been branded as failures because the school did not allow them to develop their skills.

My fourth test is real choice in schools. In an earlier contribution, Nye Bevan was quoted. I thoroughly endorse the view that there is no point in choice if it is the schools that are choosing the pupils, rather than the pupils who are choosing the school. That is why I welcome the provisions to increase the ability of the LEA to intervene in schools that are failing and to intervene earlier.

I welcome in particular the commitment of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to ensuring that we can create more schools in our system. I also welcome greatly the provisions to allow governors to form federations and to bring new schools into the system. I hope that, if the tests that I have mentioned can be met before this Parliament comes to an end, we will have seen significant improvements in all our schools to match those achieved in primary schools. I hope also that, after the period of months or even years that will be involved, the Opposition will finally have a policy on education.

9.25 pm

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) was commendably brief, but perhaps he will decide on reflection that, on balance, he would have been better off watching the Arsenal match. I am sure that his predecessor was doing precisely that.

We have had a wide-ranging debate. Perhaps it is inevitable when a Bill contains so little detail and such wide-ranging and sweeping powers that debate on it should also range so widely. None the less, we have heard some very good contributions, and the hon. Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis) rightly paid tribute to the work of the Shaw Trust in his constituency. We started off with a very strong attack from the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on faith schools, including both proposed and existing ones.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis)—he and I look forward to having, in the coming weeks, many exchanges of the sort that we have had on education Bills in the past—demonstrated once again that he failed to appreciate the difference between parents choosing grant-maintained status and what the Secretary of State now wants to do to schools and LEAs on a whim and at her own discretion. He also shared with us a depressing vision of monolithic and undifferentiated schools. I am pleased to join the Government in so far as they go in seeking a more exciting and innovative vision.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) spoke about special needs in rural areas and the problems of special educational needs teachers who have to travel on long and time-consuming journeys. He argued that that matter was not addressed in the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), who made an important contribution, said that the main reason for teachers leaving the profession was disruption by pupils. He spoke especially about the importance and effectiveness of zero tolerance in the classroom. He also pointed out the philosophical difference between the Government and the Opposition and spoke about the fact that we believe in real freedom for schools, while they believe in devolution that is subject only to the approval of every detail by the Secretary of State. The importance of setting out clear criteria for the judgment of successful schools was also one of his key points.

The hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins), my parliamentary neighbour, made an excellent speech. He will be distressed to hear that I agreed with most of his remarks. He rightly said that poverty must not be an excuse for under-achievement. However, he also welcomed the admissions forum being put on to a statutory basis. It may be a cause of concern to grammar schools that somebody who is such a strong opponent of the selective system welcomes that new arrangement. He went on to make a measured defence of faith schools, on which we are again at one. Indeed, we agree also on the value of specialist schools within a selective framework as elsewhere, however much we may differ about the selective framework itself.

The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) is opposed to specialist schools, privatisation and selection. He welcomed the devolved powers for Wales, although he regretted the Bill's failure to devolve powers in respect of pay and conditions. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) was worried about the Bill leading not to diversity, but to fragmentation. He saw in the Bill an attempt to "dispatch" the comprehensive system, as he put it. He also rightly wondered why innovation could be good only for successful schools and asked whether it might be a way of improving schools that are not so successful at present. I look forward to his contributions in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) spoke strongly in favour of diversity and the importance of specialist schools, faith schools and new schools. He asked whether resources would be available to achieve the Government's targets for specialist schools. That is an important question. He flagged up the fact that there are not enough teachers who specialise in languages or enough sports teachers to staff specialist schools. He spoke tellingly of the head teacher in his constituency who manned a stall in Sainsbury's in a desperate effort to recruit teachers.

Several hon. Members spoke in the debate and made excellent contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) made an important speech. He spoke of the mounting crisis in teaching, resulting especially from micro-management and interference. Teachers feel that they cannot make decisions and that they have no control over their working lives. He asked why the Bill was silent about teachers' workload and made some sensible proposals for tackling that.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar) called for head teachers and teachers to have free rein. He must be disappointed with the Bill, which imposes so many restrictions on the circumstances in which schools can expect any genuine freedom to innovate. Like many hon. Members, especially Labour Members, he sounded a warning about a deliberate policy of extending faith schools. He called for a wider debate in Committee and in another place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) drew attention to the gap between the rhetoric of freedom and the practice of central control in

[Mr. Graham Brady]

the Government's proposals. The hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor), who is not in his place, initiated an interesting discussion on the role of governing bodies. He also doubted the evidence for the success of faith schools and specialist schools.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) supported faith schools and spoke about the crisis in teacher recruitment and retention and the problems of classroom discipline. She expressed special anxiety for the future of special schools.

At the beginning of the debate, the Secretary of State said that the Bill provided for new ways of tackling failure. She must acknowledge that the measure is a response to the Government's failures over the past four and a half years. She and I remember the Government's second education measure, the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. She knows that many provisions of the current Bill turn the approach that was taken in the earlier measure on its head. Indeed, in introducing innovation only in successful schools, she has taken the opposite approach to that of only four years ago, when the Government sought to introduce it in failing schools. She claims that she will grant the power to free schools, but only for a pilot period. If innovation is going to work, why limit it to three years?

The Secretary of State also said that a consultation paper would be published on education for 14 to 19-year-olds in the new year. I hope that the Minister will guarantee publication before the Committee has reached clauses 81 and 82. I hope that he will give that assurance now or when he responds to the debate in a few moments.

The Secretary of State's only defence of the sweeping Henry VIII clauses and powers—those to control LEA budgets and for suspension and exemption from all education legislation—seemed to be that they will be used sparingly. To coin a phrase, she is legislating for the few, not the many.

We need time to debate such a far-reaching Bill. Debate has been curtailed today because the measure was scheduled for Second Reading on the same day as a major, predictable statement on local government finance as well as an important ten-minute Bill. It is essential for the usual channels to ensure a decent interval between Second Reading and the Committee stage so that outside bodies can make representations, and a suitable period in Committee for exploring concerns.

That view is expressed particularly strongly in the comments on the Bill made by the Royal National Institute for the Blind. It states:

> "Having recently passed a new Code of Practice on SEN and new disability rights legislation for education it would be a huge shame if the new Bill were to inadvertently jeopardise any of these gains. We hope that Parliament will devote considerable time to considering the effects of the Bill on the educational opportunities and entitlements of disabled children and children with SEN so we can be absolutely certain the reforms will deliver for them."

Mr. Andrew Turner: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Bill does indeed jeopardise those gains, because it will enable the Secretary of State to set them aside?

Mr. Brady: The difficulty with the Bill is that it enables the Secretary of State to set absolutely everything aside. That is the point that the RNIB is concerned about. It is keen that we should be able to explore precisely what Ministers want to achieve and what their intentions are.

The RNIB goes on to say that

> "since much of the 'meat' is not in the Bill but will be contained in regulations, this heightens the need to have a full debate on SEN and disability issues, or key issues could be missed amidst a deluge of regulations and statutory instruments."

That is an indictment of the Government's whole approach to legislation. Insufficient detail is put in the Bill, and we risk instead a

> "deluge of regulations and statutory instruments"

with inadequate parliamentary scrutiny, leading to real concerns for important bodies outside the House. I hope that Ministers will listen to those concerns.

The RNIB is not alone in expressing concern that the Government's increasingly centralised and autocratic approach will lead to insufficient scrutiny and insufficient democratic control. The National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers has commented:

> "The various proposals on disapplying national statutory provisions, some of which are controversial in themselves, are to be implemented not by primary legislation but through ministerial order. Questions of proper parliamentary scrutiny are inevitably raised."

Much of the detail in the Bill will need to be examined. One example is the use of schedule 18 to extend the powers of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in three significant ways. Paragraph 1 of schedule 18 gives the power to rationalise vocational qualifications. Paragraph 2(3) allows for conditions to be imposed retrospectively on accreditation of qualifications. Paragraph 2(4) extends the right of the QCA to enter an examining board's property into new areas. I would be happy to give way to the Minister now if he can explain the reasoning behind those provisions; otherwise, I hope that he will explain precisely what the measures are intended to achieve, either in his wind-up speech or in a longer debate in Committee.

There are also questions of principle relating to, for example, the establishment of private companies. The power for schools to set up private companies may be welcome, although it is potentially much more far-reaching than *The Times Educational Supplement*'s suggestion that village schools might run post offices. Ministers must answer serious questions about whether liabilities will lie with the governors, with the school's forum, or with the LEA—which could be in the odd position of picking up legal responsibility even when it had no involvement in running a school or a company. Or would liability lie where all decision-making power will lie—with the Secretary of State?

Earned autonomy is a fine concept, but the Bill gives little hope to most good schools that they will be able to enjoy the freedom and autonomy that they think they have earned. As the Secondary Heads Association stated:

> "The Bill does not provide the autonomy wanted—and needed—by most schools, which will continue to be constrained by excessive regulation."

The National Association of Head Teachers has pointed out:

> "Greater autonomy for successful schools is all spin and no substance. The idea that heads have to prove success to the Secretary of State is highly prescriptive and over-bureaucratic."

The maximum autonomy should surely be available to all schools that meet objective standards, but claims for autonomy or innovation are meaningless if the Secretary of State has to oversee every detail herself.

Six months ago, the Government spoke about the key role of LEAs; now they are legislating to strip LEAs of their funds, removing their powers on school forums, and shifting their functions to private companies. For four years, the Government have failed to inject private sector ideas into failing schools; now they are shifting their attention to successful schools instead. The Bill is not about standards; it is about structures. It contains 211 clauses and 22 schedules, nearly all of which are about structures and not about standards.

The NAS/UWT holds the view that:

> "Generally, the Bill . . . seems preoccupied with structures. The Bill seems ill focused on tackling the greatest problem in education at the moment, namely, recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of high-calibre staff."

The Bill is a catalogue of missed opportunities from a Government who have lost the plot on education. It claims to deregulate; in fact, it will centralise. It purports to be about innovation; the truth is that it will regulate and control. A few months ago, the Government talked of radical solutions for public services. Once again, they fall back on intervention, interference and regulation. They have ignored the real challenges of education and the Bill, like its predecessors in the last Parliament, is destined to fail. I commend the amendment to the House.

9.40 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): I agree with the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) that we have had a good debate. We covered a lot of important ground, but the ambition encapsulated in the Bill is for a modern and effective comprehensive system that commands the confidence of every community in the country.

Today's Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report shows how much progress we have made, but it is no secret that a great deal remains to be done, in particular at secondary school level. Data for 1998 show Britain with a lower proportion of 17-year-olds in education than any OECD country except Turkey, Mexico and Greece, so we must do a great deal better. We have our sights set on this target: by 2010, 50 per cent. of 18 to 30-year-olds should have had the chance to participate in higher education.

It is not too difficult to understand some of what went wrong. In 1960, Britain spent a higher proportion of gross domestic product on education than did most other countries. By 1988, an OECD 24-country study showed that our education spending was less as a proportion of GDP than that of any other country. The share of GDP spent on education fell from 6.5 per cent. in the mid-1970s to 4.7 per cent. when we were elected. Howard Glennerster has commented on the significance of the fact that

> "No such previous reduction in education's share of the nation's resources had occurred this century . . . it is not to be found in the experience of any other leading nation."

That is a large part of what went wrong.

Mr. Brady: When the Labour Government came to office in 1997, why did they reduce rather than increase the share of GDP being spent on education?

Mr. Timms: The figure was 4.7 per cent. when we were elected; it is now 5 per cent. and rising. Education spending has risen faster in the UK than in any other major European country, and it will be 5.3 per cent. at the end of the current spending review. We are committing unprecedentedly large additional sums to education this year, next year and the year after. Schools and heads can see the difference.

The hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger), who is not in his place, made points about the need for additional investment in the fabric of rural schools, but there has been an enormous increase. My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) made that point. Of course there is a long backlog after the years of neglect, but we are making great progress and investment in schools has more than trebled since 1997. It will rise further in the next couple of years.

The Bill is important in setting out how we shall achieve the step-change improvement in secondary education, given the increased investment now available and building on the huge improvements in primary education that teachers have achieved over the past four years. My hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins) tellingly made the point about the importance and dramatic character of those changes, which are inspiring. That is true in particular of the changes in the most disadvantaged parts of the country, to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) claimed that the joy and inspiration has gone from education, but I assure him that that is most certainly not the case.

Chris Grayling: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: No. I must underline the importance of the changes achieved through the committed work of primary school teachers over the past four years and the literacy and numeracy strategies. The test scores for children leaving primary schools have dramatically improved, but I rebut the suggestion of a conflict between good test scores and good quality education.

Since June, I have consistently heard from secondary school teachers that what is important is that youngsters arriving in secondary schools from primaries not only have better test scores, but can read and write better, are more articulate, more confident and much better equipped to gain the full benefit of a secondary education. That is a remarkable achievement by the teaching profession, and one of immense significance for Britain's future. It proves that we can change things for the better in our schools. We have done so most effectively in the most disadvantaged areas; now we need to build on that at secondary level, and the Bill will enable us to do so. It focuses particularly on the value of a diverse secondary-school system, and on creating a system characterised by partnership and innovation.

We want schools and heads to be able to pull whatever levers will enable them to raise standards. That may be done by schools working with other schools, by successful

[Mr. Timms]

schools supporting schools with problems, or by schools working with further education colleges. My hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean) favoured that option. If expertise and resources are available in the voluntary or the private sector, it would be wrong to block collaboration with either simply because it is not the maintained sector. The Bill will remove such impediments.

Chris Grayling: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: No.

There are innumerable examples of collaboration between institutions that have not generally worked together before, but are now giving new opportunities to young people in creative and imaginative ways. We shall need more such collaborations in the future, and the Bill will make it easier to establish them—for example, through the power to form companies, which has been widely welcomed.

Local education authorities will have an important role, especially in school improvement. The Conservative amendment makes a welcome reference to local democratic control of schools—interestingly, as that is not an issue that the Conservatives have raised in the past. Indeed, until September almost the only school policy that they talked about was free schools, the freedom in question being the abolition of local democratic control. In a pleasing U-turn, they seem to advocate it now. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Burton I look forward to hearing exactly what the Conservative party's policy is now.

Innovation is central to the Bill. We now have a highly developed accountability framework for education, with clear targets set throughout the system. Everyone knows what their school is aiming for. That is what provides an opportunity for the Bill to be used to free the system, and increase trust in teachers' informed professional judgment. We know that there are many good ideas in schools. We want it to be possible for them to be put into practice, and for schools to lead the next wave of educational reform. The power to innovate—which, incidentally, is not available only to successful schools—and earned autonomy, which is, obviously, earned, are enshrined in the Bill with the aim of creating such an opportunity.

The procedure that we propose is not centralising; it is the opposite. Those such as the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) who say that every successful school will have to undergo an application process to gain each flexibility are wrong. The Bill makes it clear, in regard to earned autonomy, that the Secretary of State will have a duty to grant autonomy but that the process will be essentially automatic once the criteria are met.

Mr. Andrew Turner: It was the Minister's party that abolished grant-maintained status, which gave schools autonomy. Will the Minister publish the criteria according to which the Secretary of State intends to judge applications before we reach that stage in Committee?

Mr. Timms: Of course the criteria will be published, and we shall ensure that the Committee is given the information that it needs to make a judgment.

Chris Grayling *rose—*

Mr. Brady *rose—*

Mr. Timms: I will not give way for the moment. I must make progress.

It is because of our wish to support innovation and partnership that we are giving schools the power—with the agreement of their LEAs—to form companies with other schools. I am pleased with the wide welcome given to that proposal today. Reflecting on what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson), however, I submit that diversity is the route to a genuine comprehensive system catering for the multiplicity of talents and aspirations of all children in the country. Children are different, situations are different, teachers are different, and different things work in different places. We want schools to be able to develop further their own individual character and ethos, to be able to play to their strengths.

There has been much discussion today about specialist schools, some of the benefits of which were very well spelled out by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole. Modernising the comprehensive principle does not mean abandoning it; quite the reverse, it means strengthening it. Specialist status is not taking away from a school but adding to it. As the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) said, a rural school's adoption of a language specialism will not weaken its physical education provision. We must grasp that very important point about the specialist model. It is not about narrowing, but about adding a centre of excellence, a mission to develop and share good practice in the specialism, and a requirement and funding to work with the wider community.

Far from a two-tier system, specialist status—with the process of professional reflection and collective endeavour that it entails—is a powerful lever to improve standards in every part of the secondary system across the country. It is one of the most powerful levers that we have, and we are determined to use it to the greatest possible effect.

There was some discussion in the debate—particularly in the speeches of the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones)—about the provisions for Wales. I was pleased to hear the support of the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr for the education proposals of the National Assembly for Wales. There are of course differences between England and Wales. Wales has, for example, a much higher proportion of rural schools and much smaller LEAs. Those and other differences have led to differences in the legislative approach. However, devolution exists precisely to make such an approach possible.

Therefore, we are, for example, separating out in the legislation for the first time the national curriculum for Wales, so that treatment of the Welsh language and other matters can be dealt with in legislation by the National Assembly. Many of the Bill's powers are in common; I think that 150 of the clauses apply to both England and Wales. The power to innovate, for example, is available in both England and Wales. The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr asked about the power to form companies. However, that power is subject to agreement by the LEA and is not a matter for the decision of the Secretary of State for Education and Skills or the National Assembly for Wales.

Chris Grayling: Given the Minister's comments today on the PricewaterhouseCoopers report on teachers' workload, will he assure us that that report will be published or made available to Standing Committee members before they conclude their review, to ensure that they have the full picture of the situation in our schools?

Mr. Timms: It will of course be published. I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman the precise timing of publication, but it will be published. I shall deal with that point in a moment.

I want to address the issue of faith schools as it has taken up a significant chunk of this debate.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Earlier I cited an example in which the evidence showed that the English system was working rather better than the Welsh one. Is the Minister prepared to take into account future examples in which the evidence shows that the Welsh system is working better than the English one?

Mr. Timms: We shall consider all the evidence, from wherever it comes, as we always do.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) spoke at the beginning of the debate with some feeling on the issue of faith-based schools, as did some other hon. Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East also made some very important points on the issue. Those who study the Bill will see that it is not about imposing faith schools on communities. If there is no broad demand, there will not be a school.

The current position must be the starting point for the debate. We have a tradition of faith-based education, with more than 7,000 faith-based schools. They are doing a good job and they command strong support from parents. However, the overwhelming majority of those schools are Church of England or Roman Catholic. I do not think that any hon. Member could argue that, in our multicultural society, it is a defensible position to offer faith-based schools only to those of one major faith and to deny the opportunity of such an education to those of other faiths.

The principle is simply equality. Where there is clear local agreement we will welcome faith schools into the maintained sector. It would surely, in any case, reduce rather than increase segregation to bring such schools from the independent system into the state system, where they would be subject to the national curriculum, national testing and Ofsted inspection, rather than leaving them outside the system to fend for themselves. That is the best response to the fears expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar).

We do not want any school to contribute to segregation or isolation. That is why we have included citizenship in the national curriculum and why we will send out new guidance to school organisation committees after Christmas. Every proposed new faith school will need to show that it will contribute to the inclusiveness of the system by taking pupils from outside its own faith or by working in partnership with schools of a different faith or of no faith. My hon. Friend the Member for Burton raised the possibility of a multi-faith school. I can tell her that last week I received a deputation comprising Rabbi Julia Neuberger, the Bishop of Oxford and Dr. Zaki Badawi of the Muslim Council, who want to do exactly what my hon. Friend advocates. It is a proposal of some merit in which several people are interested. We want to see equality between the faiths; inclusion, not isolation; local decisions, and faith schools playing their full part in building inclusion and preparing young people for a full part in diverse modern Britain.

Mr. Willis: What is the Government's justification for allowing a faith school to deny access to children of other faiths or children with no faith?

Mr. Timms: I have described the changes that we want to make in guidance to ensure that new faith schools contribute to the inclusiveness of the state system, but of course the arrangement that the hon. Gentleman describes has been in place since the settlement that he praised in the 1944 legislation. We cannot go back and undo all that, but we will set out how we propose to move forward.

What is really divisive is persistent under-achievement in some communities and the disadvantage that arises from that. That is what the Bill addresses. It is nonsense to suggest, as some hon. Members have done in the debate, that the Bill has no contribution to make to recruitment and retention. We have today the best teaching force we have ever had, and that is the verdict of Ofsted. It is also the biggest teaching force that we have had for many years, but we need more teachers still. So, as a new incentive, the Bill will allow us to pay off the student loans of new shortage-subject teachers.

We need teachers to stay in the profession. That is not just about pay. Teacher workload needs to be more manageable and we need to allow teachers to concentrate where their skills are most needed—on teaching. So we need a modernised school work force, where other staff and technology can be deployed more effectively in supporting teachers. The Bill creates the framework for that modernisation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out our vision when she addressed the Social Market Foundation last month. It was a clear statement that teachers are key professionals, whose time is precious, and they should receive the support they need to concentrate on their vital tasks.

We need also to make progress on behaviour. That is why clause 49 is in the Bill. Let no one doubt our support for schools that exclude violent pupils.

Several important points have been made in this debate and I have sought to address a number of them. We shall return to them and others in Committee.

Mr. Brady: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: No. I do not have time.

The Bill will promote higher standards through greater autonomy for schools and new partnerships between schools. Its starting point is that schools themselves can lead change. It sets out a clear role for local authorities and government in support. The Bill is about removing the limits to ambition in our secondary schools, and giving them the freedom to improve and excel.

If our top priority is, as it must be, that every single child should have the opportunity to succeed through education and if we are committed, as we must be, to a modern and effective comprehensive system commanding the confidence of every community, we must be able to call on the skills and expertise of all the institutions that can help. The Bill will enable us to do precisely that.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 188, Noes 325.

Division No. 99] **[10 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth

Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelso[illegible] Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 323, Noes 188.

Division No. 100] [10.15 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)

Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles
(Norwich S)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put,

That, at this day's sitting, the Motion in the name of Mr. Robin Cook relating to Business of the House may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

The House divided: Ayes 305, Noes 190.

Division No. 101] **[10.28 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet

Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*

Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian

Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis

Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair

Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian

Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

EDUCATION BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Education Bill:

Standing Committee

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Programming of proceedings

2. All proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further message from the Lords) shall be programmed.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

3. Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on 24th January 2002.

4. The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet.

Consideration and Third Reading

5. Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced, or, if that day is a Thursday, at Six o'clock on that day.

6. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.

7. Sessional Order B (programming committees) made by the House on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

The House divided: Ayes 349, Noes 136.

Division No. 102] **[10.39 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*

Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

EDUCATION BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52 (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Education Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(1) any sums required by the Secretary of State for the purpose of providing financial assistance under the Act,

(2) any other expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State by virtue of the Act, and

(3) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums which by virtue of any other Act are payable out of money provided by Parliament.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

EDUCATION BILL [*WAYS AND MEANS*]

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52 (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Education Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the charging by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England or Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales of fees in respect of the inspection of independent schools, and

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CIVIL AVIATION

That the draft Carriage by Air Acts (Implementation of the Montreal Convention 1999) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 16th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CIVIL AVIATION

That the draft Carriage by Air Acts (Application of Provisions) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 16th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Question agreed to.

Business of the House

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It relates to the motion and I have notified your Clerks of it. First, I wonder whether you would be willing to reconsider your decision not to select either of the amendments that were tabled. I ask you to do that because—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not need a reason because I shall not reconsider the matter.

Simon Hughes: In that case, Mr. Speaker, I shall move to the second point. The motion sets out a timetable for various stages of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill. It appears to be linked to a timetable for the House of Lords to complete its consideration. Will you confirm that we are free to decide our timetable, and that any timetable that the House of Lords has in mind after it has completed its consideration is irrelevant to the motion and our decision? Will you confirm that we are entirely independent? There have been suggestions that we are bound by consideration in the House of Lords and that some agreement may have been reached on dovetailing its timetable and ours. Surely we are independent.

Mr. Speaker: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are entirely independent on the matter.

10.53 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): I beg to move,

That,

(1) At the sittings on Tuesday 11th, Wednesday 12th and Thursday 13th December, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any Lords Messages relating to the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill have been received; and

(2) At the sitting on Thursday 13th December, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until he shall have reported the Royal Assent to any Act agreed upon by both Houses.

The motion makes several fairly standard provisions. It ensures that on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday next week, the House will not adjourn until any messages from the Lords have been received, to allow discussion in both Houses on the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill to take place in an orderly manner. If the Lords amendments are received on Tuesday, we intend to take them on Wednesday so that the House can consider a printed version.

Under the motion, the House will not adjourn on Thursday until any disagreement between the Houses has been resolved and until Royal Assent to any Acts agreed upon by both Houses has been reported by the Speaker.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that it is the Government's intention, come what may, to secure Royal Assent to the Bill by Thursday 13 December, and that that is the purpose of paragraph (2) of the business motion?

Mr. Twigg: That is clearly a matter for the House to determine, but the Government have been very clear in setting out their intention to achieve this emergency legislation before we rise for the recess. That was made clear by Home Office and other Ministers during the passage of the Bill through the House.

Mr. Hogg: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House why the Bill has to clear this House by 13 December, and not by the following week, when the House will still be sitting?

Mr. Twigg: This is emergency legislation, and the case for this provision was clearly set out when the Bill was before the House in recent weeks. This is simply an opportunity to enable it to progress smoothly next week.

Searching the Journals of the House shows that many similar motions have been tabled in the past. There was at least one in almost every Session of the Parliament of 1992 to 1997, when the right hon. and learned Gentleman was a Minister. If Royal Assent cannot be signified during the House's normal sitting hours, the motion provides that the sitting should be suspended until the appropriate time.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): The hon. Gentleman has been most helpful, particularly in pointing out that we shall have a printed copy of the changes. That will be extremely helpful. However, the one thing that we do not have is an assurance from the Government that there will be plenty of time to discuss these issues, because many of us—in contradistinction to our party, even—are concerned about a number of matters, and we need to have enough time to discuss them in extenso.

Mr. Twigg: I am aware of the concerns that the right hon. Gentleman expressed as the Bill proceeded through the House. Clearly, the Bill is still before the other place, and we do not know, at this stage, what the number of amendments will be. However, there will be a supplementary programme motion, and I think that his points should be borne in mind when it is tabled.

Mr. Hogg: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We have been told that we are to have a programme motion, which will govern the progress of the Bill that we are discussing under this motion. Is it not appropriate that the supplementary programme motion should be laid before we discuss this business, otherwise, we shall not know the timetable.

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter for the Government, not for the Chair.

Mr. Twigg: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Simon Hughes: Will the Minister say whether there is, anywhere on the record, any statement by Ministers made before today about why the Bill must complete all its stages by next Thursday, as opposed to by the end of the parliamentary term the following week? If there is no such statement, why do the Government insist that it must be completed by next Thursday, rather than giving the possibility of a further four days for proper consideration by one or both Houses of Parliament?

Mr. Twigg: The purpose of this provision is to enable any secondary legislation that might follow from the passage of the Bill to be placed before the House during the following week. I believe that that has been referred to at various stages of our deliberations on the legislation.

Simon Hughes: I am grateful to the Minister. That is much more helpful than many of the answers that come from those on the Government Benches. As I understand it, however, that will not preclude us from continuing to debate the Bill until the Monday or Tuesday of the following week. That would still allow secondary legislation to come before the House on the Wednesday, which I hear on the grapevine is an idea that the Government may have in mind.

Mr. Twigg: I think that we are starting to argue about how many angels we can get on to the head of a pin. There is not a big difference between the Monday and the previous Thursday.

I am sure that other hon. Members wish to speak to the motion, so I shall draw my remarks to a close, although I shall, of course, respond to the debate at the end. I hope that the House will agree to this motion, which is essential to ensure the orderly conduct of business, and the speedy enactment of what is clearly important emergency legislation. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I raise a matter of some substance? Is it in order for an Officer of the House, for such Elizabeth Filkin is, to ask the press to accept copies of a letter, supposedly to you, so that they could peruse it at 5 o'clock this evening?

Mr. Speaker: I would deeply regret it if any Officer of the House issued copies of private correspondence sent to me. I shall certainly look into the matter.

10.59 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I share the Minister's desire for what he described as smooth progress into law for what I hope will be a substantially amended version of the Home Secretary's Bill. We are discussing not whether it should pass into law, but the timetable. I am not sure that I completely understood the import of the Minister's statement, so I encourage him to intervene to clarify the matter. Did he say that if, as it happens, the House and the Lords are not in entire agreement by the normal end of our sitting on Thursday 13 December, the House will move into a continuous sitting, subject to such suspensions as the Speaker may determine, between then and such time as we reach full agreement? Is that the import of his statement?

Mr. Stephen Twigg: That certainly is not the intention, but clearly the House cannot absolutely determine whether there will be agreement between it and the other place. There are many precedents for such a motion, which provides that, because this Chamber and the other place work to slightly different time scales each day, we shall await messages from there on that day.

Mr. Letwin: May I press the Minister further? We may not be at odds with one another at any point, but if we are, would the House continue to sit as if the day were still Thursday 13 December until such time as agreement was reached? Is he willing to answer that question?

Mr. Twigg: The hon. Gentleman tempts me to discuss a hypothetical situation. At this stage, we do not know how many amendments there will be, but the intention is clear in our proposal. We seek to resolve those matters on that day.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to the Minister, who is a great deal more circumspect than I usually am.

Mr. Hogg: Does not what the Minister said make it plain that the Government seek to coerce the House and the other place so that the Bill clears Parliament by Thursday 13 December? Does not my hon. Friend think that deeply offensive to both Houses?

Mr. Letwin: The honest answer to my right hon. and learned Friend is that I am still not quite sure. The Government may hope to coerce the House or they may hope, on the contrary, simply to make us work extremely hard between 13 December and such date as we and the Lords agree.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Judging from my hon. Friend's experience of the conduct of proceedings on the Bill in the House, which of the two hypotheses proposed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) does he think more likely? I dare say that he need not think long about that.

Mr. Letwin: I must tell my hon. and learned Friend that our experience on Second Reading, in Committee and on Report and Third Reading suggests an attempt to coerce and limit time, but the Government may not have succeeded in achieving that, if it is their aim. I think that what the Minister told the House means that, if we have not reached entire agreement by Thursday 13 December, the House will sit thereafter, subject to suspensions determined by the Speaker, and continue to be able to debate matters between the House and the Lords under the heading of Thursday 13 December ad infinitum. If so, we face an interesting situation, but as the Minister has so far been unwilling to confirm whether that would be the effect of the motion, I agree that an important element of doubt remains.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): It may well be true that we could be debating these matters until a late hour. Does my hon. Friend gather that the Government would allow a vote to take place after 10 pm? I understand that, if the debate continued beyond that time, the Standing Orders would allow only a deferred Division, which would take place on the following Wednesday. Has he considered what that would do to the proposed timetable?

Mr. Letwin: I want to give the Minister as much opportunity as possible to clarify the position, and I will give way to him immediately if he signals that he is willing to do so. It would certainly assist the House if he did.

The only honest answer that I can give is that I do not know. First, I do not know whether this constitutes an attempt to curtail debate, or an attempt to enable us to

[Mr. Letwin]

prolong it. Secondly, I do not know why Thursday 13 December was chosen—a point raised by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) and others. Thirdly, I do not know whether we would be able to go on voting. The Minister does not seem willing to give us any of that important information.

The present state of affairs is clearly unsatisfactory. We need to ensure that, as far as possible, this House and the other place can reach agreement in an orderly fashion, and will have time to continue debate on both sides until such agreement can be reached. Until and unless the Minister can give us a much better explanation of what is meant by this apparently small but, I suspect, rather large proposal—in terms of its implications—I cannot possibly ask my hon. Friends to support it.

11.7 pm

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): We are grateful for the opportunity to debate this part of the proceedings, at least, because so much of the Bill has not been debated at all. I suppose that that is some consolation.

I remind the House that, subject to any as yet unannounced intervention by the Government, the debate could continue until Thursday of next week. It could therefore become otiose, because we might pass the end date specified in the motion. Some of us have had a little practice in at least testing such margins in the past.

I want to ask some serious questions about the process. I accept from the Minister that motions specifying dates by which consideration of amendments should be completed, and dates until which we must sit to allow the other place to send us its reasons, have been put before us on other occasions. I am not aware, however, that it is common practice for a date for Royal Assent to be set in such motions—certainly not a date so many days before the scheduled end of the parliamentary Session.

Mr. Hogg: Is it not also extraordinary that we should be given a terminal date for the Bill without knowing how many amendments will be received from the other place?

Simon Hughes: That is a strong argument for sensible timetabling of business, for which my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) and others have long argued. Surely one of the prerequisites is knowing what must be dealt with. One of our arguments in the past, when the Government have tabled timetable motions immediately after Second Readings, has been that no one could reasonably think about how much time was needed until they had had a chance to consider what had gone before.

Throughout our debates on the Bill, we have argued that its stages should be taken in turn. It must be the case that until Tuesday night, when the House of Lords ends its consideration, we cannot know what amendments there will be—not least because in the Lords the Bill can be amended on Third Reading as well as on Report. There may therefore be amendments of which we shall not be aware until Tuesday night, and which we cannot possibly consider until Wednesday.

It seems that there is not only a political but an administrative reason for suggesting that the motion is inappropriate, and that Parliament needs more time. The other day, we had the nonsense of there being no time at all between the end of our consideration of the Bill in Committee and the start of debate on Third Reading. Not only did hon. Members have no time to debate the proposals on Report, but there was certainly no time for us to discuss those proposals with people outside the House.

It really must be for Parliament to say to any Government and in relation to any Bill that, politically and administratively, the common-sense way of proceeding is to allow time between each stage. If the Lords finish their consideration of the Bill on Tuesday, we should have at least one clear day before we consider their proposals. Subsequently, if our views differ from those of the other place, the other place should have some time to consider our views, especially as there would still be several days left before the recess.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Is there not yet another argument for the course of action being proposed by my hon. Friend? If compromise between the two House is being sought, is it not quite likely that the other place will suggest amendments in lieu of the proposals that are sent to them by this place? A form of judicial review of the detention provisions, for example, is precisely the type of matter for which amendments in lieu might be appropriate. However, surely such amendments will have to be discussed with people outside the House to determine whether they deal with the concerns that have been expressed.

Simon Hughes: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. However, in the two Houses, we have already had intra-party discussions, inter-party discussions and Opposition-Government discussions. After those latter discussions, the Government have always said that they have to talk to civil servants, for example, to check the drafting. Let us therefore put aside the Bill's serious purpose for a moment and consider the serious practical objections to the motion in its current form.

Whose convenience is the motion supposed to serve? Badly drafted legislation that has been rushed and cobbled together is clearly not for the country's convenience, and asking Parliament perhaps to sit through the night on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday to consider proposals from the other place is clearly not for hon. Members' convenience. We must therefore conclude that the motion is entirely for the Executive's convenience. Governments should not propose and insist on such motions so early in a Session simply for their own convenience and without a backstop deadline of the end of a Session.

On Saturday, the Minister and I spoke in a debate on how to make Parliament more acceptable to the public and how to encourage public support for it, and we agreed on what needs to be done. He therefore knows well that Parliament must agree laws, and that ultimately it is Parliament that should seek to determine timetables. It is of course for the Government to propose, but it is for Parliament to dispose. That applies above all to important legislation such as the Bill.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman remarked on working through the night. If we were able to work through the night we might have time to discuss the issues that are before us. The motion, however, promises no such thing. Does he agree that the serious issue is whether we shall have time to discuss the proposals that will be before us, although we do not know what those might be as we have not yet had time to discuss the gravamen of the legislation?

Simon Hughes: The right hon. Gentleman is correct on the procedural point that the motion allows the House technically to remain sitting—not to adjourn—although we may not actually be in the Chamber. However, we are essentially blindly considering the motion, which gives no details on a timetable. It is a series of illogicalities. We do not know what we shall have to do, because the other place has not yet completed its work. We also do not know how long it will take us to do that work, or how long the Government will suggest that we should have to do it. Yet we are now being asked to agree that Parliament should hang around waiting for three nights in a row regardless of the merit of the argument, the possibility of agreement between the two Houses or the seriousness of the proposals that we might be asked to consider next week.

Mr. Hogg: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would also be enormously helpful if we could have sight of the secondary legislation that we are told is about to be laid, before we are asked to approve this motion?

Simon Hughes: That is certainly right. I suggested to the Minister earlier that it is more than a rumour that the Government intend to introduce secondary legislation in the last week of term, and the Minister confirmed that that follows. If that is true, and it is logical in that the Bill contains provision for secondary legislation, Parliament should know what is coming and be allowed to consider how much time it wishes to spend on it. It would be better, if there is general agreement at the end of the debate across both sides of the House—I exclude the Government Front Bench—if the Government pulled the motion so that the parties could have a proper debate and reach an agreement about how to proceed next week. Instead it was tabled and objected to last night, and—on the first opportunity and with no chance of amendment—tabled as a "take it or leave it, but we will get this Bill through next week" option.

Mr. Letwin: The hon. Gentleman talked about the final backstop. Does he believe that paragraph 2 provides for a final backstop, or does it provide for indefinite debate under the heading Thursday 13 December?

Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman raised that point in his speech. I share his view. If there is still work to be done, we can—as we have done before in this notional, upside-down world we live in sometimes—ensure that the day remains Thursday even if it is Friday. In fact, it can stay Thursday whether it is Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday or Tuesday. As my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) pointed out, the only time that it might stop being Thursday is when Christmas day comes, by which time people might decide that they have had enough. However, that is not a very satisfactory outcome. I am aware that European Union business often stops the clock to meet a deadline and so does this House. The hon. Gentleman is right that the backstop is in theory next Thursday but it could in practice be much later than that.

Mr. Beith: The backstop point is important, because the wording of paragraph 2 places a burden on the Speaker, but not much thought appears to have been given to that point. The Speaker, at some point, has to decide whether any Act will be

"agreed upon by both Houses."

At what point can the Speaker go back to Glasgow for Christmas? At what point can he say, "No Act has been agreed by both Houses and it seems increasingly unlikely that it will be so I'm off, thank you very much."? The motion is not only indefinite in the sense that the debate could go on for ever, but there is no end point if agreement has not been reached between the two Houses.

Simon Hughes: My right hon. Friend is longer serving and more experienced than I am and he raises a good point that I had not thought of. The argument for not rushing matters is based on many practical considerations that seem not to have been thought about at all during the course of the Bill. In a moment—or an hour or so—I shall give the House some illustrations of the failings of the procedure.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman has made the fair point that Thursday 13 December may roll on indefinitely, in the course of which time the other place may come forward with compromise amendments. The outside lobbyists will not be able to express their views on those amendments because we will be in continuous sitting, being asked to deal with the issues as they pass to and fro between the Houses. Is not that outrageous?

Simon Hughes: That is outrageous and extremely unhelpful. Many organisations have a real interest in the Bill and have written to hon. Members, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Refugee Council, the Confederation of British Industry, representatives of legal organisations, colleagues from the European Parliament and the faith groups. It is a huge Bill and there is huge interest in it outside the House. The thought that we will have to come to some agreement without any chance to discuss the issues with other organisations is nonsense. That is apart from the effect on any other legislation that might properly be timetabled for next week or the week after and will fall out, or be debated at a different time. People will not be able to make arrangements, either for their personal or their political considerations.

Mr. Letwin: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the debate has reached the point where it begins to become clear that the Government intend to create a hothouse atmosphere in what may prove to be the closing days before the recess? I believe that they hope to apply pressure on Opposition parties, so that they can argue that those Opposition parties had failed to reach agreement in the Lords and that they were therefore obstructing the whole of Government business. If that is the intention, is not it quite wrong?

Simon Hughes: I absolutely agree. Today's *Financial Times* suggested that the Government were not minded to make any significant concession to the views of the House of Lords if any substantial amendments were tabled. The article argued that the Government would perceive any such concession to be a concession to terrorists. The suggestion is that only the Bill as drafted by the Government is adequate to meet the needs of the moment.

[Simon Hughes]

I share with the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) the view that the Government are not entitled to argue that both Houses of Parliament do not have a right to amend the Bill as they see fit. If Parliament judges that the Bill should have a particular form, that is the proper decision. It is not for the Government to say what the Bill should be when proceedings on it are complete. It is for them to introduce it, and accept the will of Parliament.

In this case, the end of the Session is not near, and the Bill has been introduced only in this Session. That means that the Parliament Act cannot apply, so the Government will have to accept the Bill that Parliament wants. They will not be able to force through a Bill that Parliament does not want.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Would not it be especially absurd for the Government to try to spin the notion that the Opposition parties were causing difficulty, given that substantial misgivings about the Bill have been expressed by people in their own ranks, and in both Houses?

Simon Hughes: My hon. Friend may not be aware that there was a significant debate yesterday, the third Committee day in the House of Lords, on the matter of the European third pillar. The proposal is that home affairs and justice legislation should be allowed to be dealt with in secondary legislation. Not one speaker in the other place supported the Government. Hour after hour went by, and no one supported the Government line. Opposition to the Bill is not confined to the major Opposition parties. I know that colleagues from Northern Ireland to whom I spoke earlier are still unhappy, as are Cross-Benchers and Members of the Bench of Bishops.

It would be better if the Government tried to secure some consensus. They could then get general agreement for the Bill now, and return to other matters later.

Mr. Gummer: Will the hon. Gentleman apply himself to the remark that everything in the Bill must be about terrorism, and that we would be in some way supporting terrorism if we did not pass it in its entirety? How can it be supporting terrorism to object to that part of the Bill that suggests that I cannot say about the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) what is absolutely true, and that he cannot say about the Pope what is absolutely untrue?

Simon Hughes: The right hon. Gentleman asks a question to which there is an obvious answer, and reminds us that those issues predated 11 September. I have heard such comments from him, the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) and others for years before that date. There is nothing new or terrorist-related in that part of the Bill. That is true too about the part relating to the European third pillar, and the Minister in the other place was very much on the back foot in yesterday's debate.

Mr. Garnier: I do not want to interrupt a private discussion, but I suspect that my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) meant the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) and not the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady).

Simon Hughes: The hon. and learned Gentleman is right. It is important that we tell the truth when we mean to, and that we do not tell untruths when we do not mean to. His correction is gratefully received.

I have another suspicion to present to the hon. Member for West Dorset. I think that the Government have another motive in moving this business motion, in addition to the one that he has adduced.

I think that the Prime Minister wants to go to the European Council meeting at Laeken in Belgium at the end of next week waving a piece of legislation at his European colleagues, none of whom has thought it necessary to derogate from the European convention on human rights or human rights legislation and say, "Look how tough I am. Look what I can get through my Parliament. Now you must do the same." That has nothing to do with the merit or logic of the Bill or with the duty for Parliament to make the decision. It is simply a timetable that the Minister has not yet mentioned, determined by the fact that there is a meeting for Heads of Government at the end of next week and the Prime Minister wants this business cleared by then so that he can say, "Oh what a clever boy am I."

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I am loth to interrupt the hon. Gentleman in a rare bout of Liberal Euroscepticism, which is entirely welcome and healthy. Will he, however, apply himself to the point about deferred votes? If on Thursday 13 December—the long bad Thursday—any vote is deferred, it would seem impossible for the Speaker to report to the House that any Bill could have received Royal Assent. Surely it would be literally impossible.

Simon Hughes: There may be two answers to that question. It might be, but I can also think of a reason why it might not. There is certainly a secondary consideration. If more secondary legislation were to come down the tracks and we went on until some days later, that also might be precluded by the fact that this is an expandable Thursday which might take up a lot of extra time.

If ever we are critical of anything to do with the European Union, the word is not Eurosceptic but Eurocritical. I hope that that helps the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) get the language right. Other people can be Eurosceptics—we are occasionally Eurocritics.

What are the Government trying to avoid by putting this motion before the House? I think that it is all about trying to minimise the change to a Bill that, as colleagues have said, is in an entirely, or substantially, unacceptable form.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Labour Members have not had much say so far. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the motion might have quite an opposite effect in indicating a strong desire to compromise in terms of Lords amendments? That could be one way of reading this kind of preparedness to foreclose on the business.

Simon Hughes: I do not know what the hon. Gentleman is seeking to do because he, too, has concerns about the Bill. I hope that it is not unfair to remind the House of that.

I hope that the Government are prepared significantly to compromise. There have been small offers to do so in the form of two Government amendments before the Bill left this House and one other suggested area of compromise in the other place. That is about setting up a Committee of Privy Councillors to consider the Bill as a whole and report back after 15 months as an alternative to the sunset clause proposals that have been tabled in this House and the other place, supported on both sides and from the Cross Benches.

I hope that the Government will be more willing to compromise, particularly if they see the strength of feeling that exists. I believe that over the next few days they will see the strength of feeling that exists in the House of Lords. I say, not with any sense of triumphalism, that I expect the Lords to amend several significant parts of the Bill on Report and Third Reading.

The Government appear to want to take the approach that the Bill would then no longer be in line with what public opinion expects and wants. I do not think that the amendments are likely to have that effect—instead, they will have the opposite effect. Let me explain why.

There is a very important issue about judicial review. I do not think that the public have ever signed up to the removal of the right of the courts to oversee the Executive in a way that has been part of our history for centuries. If colleagues have not read it, I refer them to the estimable speech of my noble Friend Earl Russell. He is a constitutional historian and referred to that in his speech the other day. I do not think that the public have ever signed up to the idea that we should, under this Bill, allow the transfer of significant amounts of information about the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter), me and everybody else from one agency of the state to another for any reason to do with any possible, as well as actual, investigation in this country or abroad.

I do not think that the public have ever signed up to the idea that the Bill or international circumstances justify the state in retaining data as proposed in part 2. When opinion polls were taken, the British public never said that they wanted that. I do not think that the British public have ever signed up to the fact that we are expecting to give the police powers to stop people in the street and to order them to remove face coverings—for any reason—when they have not even been arrested or charged with a criminal offence.

I certainly do not think that the British public have signed up to the idea—indeed, they would be strongly against it—that we pass in this place decisions taken by the European Council of Ministers behind closed doors, and that have never been given the approval of the European Parliament nor been introduced as primary legislation in the UK Parliament.

I am sure that the British public want us to be able to legislate on those matters. There is no justification for the argument that our amendments would not be doing the will of the British public: on the contrary, they certainly would.

Mr. Garnier: To develop the point that the hon. Gentleman is making, for centuries we have been protected by the common law and by the judiciary against the Executive and their high-handed acts; we were told by the Government that they were bringing human rights home; we introduced the Human Rights Act 1998 and domesticated the European convention on human rights, but what did the Government do within seconds? They removed us from its provisions. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we are now exposing the true nature of this pretence of a Government?

Simon Hughes: The hon. and learned Gentleman makes an extremely important point. I and my party strongly applauded the Human Rights Act. The measure did not meet with universal applause—colleagues in his party did not support it, for reasons that I understand. However, the Government certainly claimed that the measure was an important incorporation of human rights into domestic law—it was bringing rights home.

It seems to us anomalous and contradictory that within 13 months we sent human rights away again—certainly in one respect—the more so because we argued, and tried to persuade the Government, that we should debate the issue after we had debated the Bill to see whether it was necessary at all. That would have been a more logical way to proceed.

There are two further points that the timetable could prevent us from debating. The first has been discussed by the hon. Member for West Dorset, myself and others and proved controversial in both Houses. It is important that we try to include the best definition of terrorism in the measure. That is not an easy matter. We tried to do it in the Terrorism Act 2000, when various recommendations and advice were offered, as well as a proposal from the European Union. Such a definition cannot be arrived at overnight, and we should not try to achieve consensus in both Houses.

It is certainly true that on the really controversial issue, on which the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead rightly signalled his concern—whether there should be a new crime of incitement to religious hatred—we want to try to get the law right. It is foolish to rush into something that may not have been thought through, that may not produce the right result and might actually antagonise rather than pacify community relations.

Our Scottish colleagues—Labour and Liberal Democrat—obtained the agreement of the Scottish Parliament that such provisions should be removed from the Bill. They agreed to take wider advice and to return to the matter, separately from the terrorism debate, at some time in the new year. It is much more sensible to proceed in that way, and I hope that, next week, the House of Lords takes that view and that the provision is removed from the Bill, lock, stock and barrel, so that we can consider those difficult matters properly.

I have a few more points to make before all my colleagues make their speeches. To pick up a point made implicitly by the Conservative spokesman, I hope that,

[Simon Hughes]

later this week or next week, we do not hear the Government having a go at the House of Lords. Their lordships have been trying to do what we have not been allowed to do. Until today, we have had a total of three days debate—one day on Second Reading; only one complete day in Committee; and then almost a second complete day in Committee, with one hour on Report and Third Reading. The House of Lords has given itself eight days in total to try to make up for the fact that much of the Bill has not been debated in this House.

The House of Lords is trying to do the job of scrutiny that it is meant to do, but let the Government not be critical if the House of Lords has the power and authority to overturn the view of the Government in the Bill for two reasons. First, as the Minister well knows, the Government have a majority in the House, but they did not achieve a majority of votes at the last election; they are a minority Government in the proper sense of the word. Of those who voted, only four out of 10 voted Labour and fewer people voted Labour than previously, so the Government do not have the moral mandate to say that the country was behind them—in the words of a former leader of my party, we are all minorities now.

Secondly, more than in any other Parliament, the other place is the creation of the Government. The other place has been modified in its content and structure—

Bob Russell (Colchester): Genetically modified.

Simon Hughes: My hon. Friend is right; it has been genetically modified to make it a creature of the Labour manifesto at the last general election. I have checked the figures, and of the 711 Members of the other place, 245 have been created life peers by the Prime Minister. The Government have determined the entire composition of the House of Lords, so I hope that they will not try to criticise it at all.

Mr. Hogg: I cannot remember whether the hon. Gentleman was present this afternoon during questions to the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, but if he was not here, his colleagues will remind him that the Parliamentary Secretary justified the presence in the other place of the Law Lords and others with judicial experience on the ground that their experience was relevant to legislation of precisely this kind.

Simon Hughes: As it happens, I was not here then—I was trying to negotiate some amendments to the Bill outside the Chamber—although I discussed that issue afterwards, and it is exactly the reason why the Law Lords—not just Lord Donaldson, who has made his views public, but others—have been keen to ensure that they participate. When the Government briefed the Opposition parties, they invited Lord Ackner—an extremely eminent lawyer—who also asked significant questions. So the right hon. and learned Gentleman's intervention is absolutely pertinent.

The last substantive reason that I want to adduce as to why we should not go down the road of this unnecessarily rushed procedure next week is that, every day, there is more evidence of the need for us to do our job carefully to discover the flaws in legislation. I want to give three examples. First, yesterday, when Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean sought to justify the European third pillar proposals, all sorts of arguments were put to her to show how flawed that proposal was.

At almost the same time, I was attending European Standing Committee B, which was considering the European arrest warrant. That Committee has not yet finished its work. We thought that it might sit for only an hour or two, but it is sitting for rather longer than we expected because its Chairman had to adjourn the sitting when it became apparent that the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), was working from a different draft of the document from the rest of the Committee. That only came to light because we had a chance to question him about the document. We would never had discovered that fact if we had not had chance to question him. That is a very good argument for proceeding carefully and ensuring that we all know what we are doing, especially on a hugely important matter, such as whether people accused of an offence in France or Germany can be arrested in this country even though what they had done was not an offence here.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) mentioned the third example to me a little earlier. It arose during debates on the Proceeds of Crime Bill in Committee, where he and my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) and other hon. Members have been labouring for many hours today, as on other Tuesdays and Thursdays, and where more unforeseen and unexpected implications turn up each day in relation to a complicated Bill, which has been given proper time for debate in Committee. All those examples demonstrate the need for us to proceed carefully and to take our time.

The Minister is always a reasonable man, so I hope that he will convey a warning to his elders and seniors, if not his betters.

Mr. Hogg: Where are they?

Simon Hughes: That is a very good question.

We want to send a warning about what will happen if the Government persist in being absolutist about the timetable and the Bill. The more that the Government push for a foreshortened timetable and the less time we have for the negotiation that my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) suggested would be sensible, the firmer will be the resolve of colleagues on the Liberal Democrat and Conservative Benches and elsewhere in the House. The more the Government insist on timetabling debate out of the Bill, the more we will insist on changing it. The more that the Government insist on not allowing proper consideration, the firmer is the probability that the Bill will last for a short time indeed. We will insist on sunset clauses that will ensure that it returns as new legislation in a short time from now.

Issues of whether the courts should have the right to oversee the Executive or whether the British Government and Parliament should breach its duties under United Nations conventions, such as that on refugees, should not be taken lightly or inappropriately. We will not be pushed over and we will not be told what we should legislate. Parliament will decide what should be in the Bill and if the Executive insist that our scrutiny of it should finish by next Thursday, they may well not get the Bill that they intended to have or the one that they want. It will be their fault if that is the case, because they cannot say that they have not been warned.

11.41 pm

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Interestingly, this is the one occasion when we have all the time in the world to debate anything to do with the Bill. If the Government had allocated proper time on other occasions, this debate might have been curtailed. Although I shall be careful to keep within the terms of the motion, it is not unreasonable to emphasise the fact to the Government that many Opposition Members are present not because this motion is immensely attractive but because we have had so little chance to discuss something that is fundamental to the rights of people in this country and elsewhere.

Norman Baker (Lewes): Will the right hon. Gentleman reflect on the fact that this rather obscure debate has already occupied as much time as we were allowed for Third Reading and Report put together?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I suspect that a number of other records will be broken as we continue the debate.

Mr. Garnier: Thanks to the Government condescending to debate this motion we have a lot of time available to us. However, we cannot have a vote at the end of our discussion. Any Division that takes place on the motion will take place on Wednesday. [HON. MEMBERS: "Next Wednesday."] That is another matter. Any Division will take place on a Wednesday, when we will be required to tick a pink piece of paper. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best way for Parliament to reach a conclusion is to have a vote immediately after the end of the debate?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. and learned Friend fails to recognise why we will not have a vote at the end of this debate. If we were going to vote, the Government Benches would be filled, or at least Government Members would be somewhere in the House. They would have to vote and might even have to listen to the realities of the issues under discussion. Perhaps they might be persuaded by the argument.

I perfectly understand why the Minister does not want Labour Members to be here. The most interesting thing about the Bill is that no organ of the press has supported it in its entirety or even most of it. The truth is that people outside the House have deep concerns about the Bill, so the motion should be discussed in detail.

Simon Hughes: Following the intervention of the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), does the right hon. Gentleman accept that a vote could take place in two circumstances? First, we could vote on an amendment, had one been selected. Secondly, if our proceedings go on long enough, we could vote on closure. I do not understand how the debate will end otherwise.

Mr. Gummer: It is no part of my intention to make the second possible. The Speaker made the first impossible and has decided not to reconsider it. We have to consider the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

I want to explain to the Minister why I have doubts about the motion. It does not tell us anything about what we are going to do. There are, of course, things that it cannot tell us. The Government have no idea what will happen in the other place, so it is right that the motion is flexible. However, it is not sensible for the Government not to tell us that we will have proper time to debate whatever they will bring before the House when Members of the other place have completed their discussions.

The Government have been universally condemned outside the House. I do not know whether members of the Government read the newspapers, watch television or concern themselves with critics elsewhere, but there has been no dissent in the media, in any circumstances, about the fact that the Government have not given proper time for discussion of the Bill. They might therefore think that they have made a mistake. It is possible that in a Napoleonic way the Government alone are right and the rest of us are wrong, but if they had any humility—I know that the Minister does, but I am not sure about the rest of the Government—this would be the moment for them to think again and give time for debate. That is why I asked whether we will have time to debate our concerns on any of those variegated days in which life will continue for as long as the Government wish it to.

I am happy to hang around for as long as the Government want to debate the most important subject that we have discussed since I had the enormous pleasure of voting for entry into the European Union. It is a crucial debate and I want to represent my constituents when we discuss some of the basic reasons why we are in Parliament.

The Government have handled the debate in a frivolous way. They are unbelievably uncomprehending of the seriousness of the matter, and that concerns me.

Mr. Hogg: I am sorry to distress my right hon. Friend, but does he agree that the Government do not intend to give him or the House an opportunity properly to discuss the Lords amendments? Did he hear that in all probability the messages will come on Wednesday? As he knows, Labour Back Benchers like to be away at 7 o'clock on Thursdays. If we are extremely lucky, we will have three or four hours to indulge in a bit of ping-pong. Does my right hon. Friend think that that is a proper way to deal with a matter of such gravity?

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. and learned Friend knows that I am a man of charity and I hope that the most likely outcome does not come about. I am trying to encourage the Minister, for whom I have considerable respect, to at least go back to those who decide such matters—if not to Mr. Campbell, then to others—and let them know that this issue is of such importance that we should have enough time to debate it.

We have had this argument before, but the world has changed since then because every single commentator has condemned the Government for the timetable that they have placed on this Bill. When everybody suggests that this is wrong, it is difficult for the Government to argue that we have to accept every part of the Bill because everybody believes in it and wants it. It is a very curious situation. We should be concerned because the parts of the Bill about which commentators have expressed concern are not passing issues; they are crucial to the

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freedom of the individual in this nation. I hope, first, that we will have some assurance about the time that we will have to debate these issues.

I am concerned also that the Government have so far given no indication that they are considering dropping those parts of the Bill that are manifestly not urgent. If they were to propose doing so, most Conservative Members would be happy for them to have the timetable that they have requested for next week. After all, the objection to what the Minister said about finishing the business next week, when there will still be another week to go, stands only if the Government continue to press parts of the Bill that are clearly not urgent. If they are concerned merely with those parts that it is acceptable to view as urgent, if contentious, I should have thought that the House would be prepared to go along with them.

Simon Hughes: Will the right hon. Gentleman reflect on the fact that another important condition for facilitating the earlier passage of the Bill might be that the terrorist-related matters, which form the core of the Bill, should have a limited life, about which we could negotiate, rather than an indefinite time in statute, because there has not been time properly to debate the Bill in both Houses?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that I entirely share his views on that. It is a matter not only for this Bill but for all Bills passed as the result of an emergency. I have long wished to introduce a Bill that says that any such legislation should automatically fall after two years and have to be reintroduced. We know that the legislation that followed BSE, the Marchioness disaster, the dangerous dogs issue and Dunblane was deeply flawed. It would be much better for us to have replaced that legislation very soon afterwards and debated it in the comparative calm that follows after 12 or 24 months.

Mr. Hogg: Is there not another troubling aspect to the Bill? My right hon. Friend makes the point that not all parts are urgent, but the Government have never tried to prioritise within the Bill. Indeed, they have sought to assert from time to time that all parts are connected with terrorism, when manifestly that is not the case.

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right, and I hope to move on to that point in a moment.

I have a real concern about the Government's bona fides. It seems to me deeply offensive for them to come to the House and say, "We are defending national security and are fundamentally concerned with the protection of the people of Britain, so we need emergency legislation," and then to attach to that a whole series of measures that they know perfectly well would never be passed, and would never win the support of their own Back Benchers, if they were presented in the normal way of things—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that not only is he verging on what might be regarded as Second Reading territory, but he is doing so for the second time.

Mr. Gummer: You are perfectly right to call me to order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but you will understand that temptation arises when the House is not given proper time at the proper time, which embarrasses the Chair as much as those of us debating these matters.

I shall therefore address the next issue—the problem of timing for people outside the House. One difficulty with the motion is that it will provide no time for Conservative Members and, I suspect, many Government Members to discuss these issues with those outside who have a crucial interest in them. For example, on Second Reading and in Committee, I raised the issue of religious incitement, which is crucial to the question of freedom. I do not wish to trespass on the patience of the House by reminding it why that is so, except to say that at the heart of British freedom is the right to uphold and disagree with religious views. We choose our religious views; we do not choose our race. We choose what we believe in; we do not choose the colour of our skin. Those are different issues, but the Government have confused them.

Out there are many people who will wish to discuss whatever the Lords do to the Bill. They are of all races and all creeds and they need to be heard by Members of Parliament. All of us who care about the matter will want to talk to them about whatever compromise or decision is made in another place.

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend made the point that he and his parliamentary colleagues will want to talk to outside lobbyists. Should he not make the even more important point that they will want to talk to us? Unless they have ample time in which to do so, they will not be in a position to make representations.

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. and learned Friend makes an important point, which goes to the heart of the issue. When the House legislates on the freedom of the individual, people must feel that they have had a proper role in its decisions. If we make decisions about whether rat catchers should be called rodent operatives or whether we should go in for one of the peculiar politically correct phrases that seem to be in vogue, that does not matter much. However, if we are talking about what men and women may say, how they express their deepest beliefs and how they purport to present their being in our society, that matters deeply, and they must feel that they have had an input.

Rather like you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in my constituency I have a number of rather extreme religious sects, with whom I have little in common. However, we share one thing; a belief in their right to say what they think about the Bill before I speak and vote on it in the House. I cannot see how the timetable will allow any of those people, whether they are Jehovah's Witnesses or strict Plymouth Brethren, to express those views.

Simon Hughes: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that our experience of the Bill shows that individuals and groups have wanted to take part in the debate and have changed their views? I shall cite one example; the Muslim Council of Britain took a certain view at the beginning but, having listened to some of the debate, it changed its view. It might well be minded to express a different view if it knew that a different proposal was on the table. There is not a fixed view out there; it is responsive to what we say and do in the House.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman must take that further. There are many people outside whose views have been presented to the House and to another place, but whose views have changed. There is a great need to make sure that we know what those organisations now think about the Bill. That is one of the reasons why it is so crucial for us to have the time that we need to debate the Bill properly. For that to happen, those organisations must have the time to tell us. That is why I find the timetable extremely difficult to accept.

The Parliamentary Secretary made a serious statement suggesting that secondary legislation would be introduced. I do not know whether he meant to tell us about that, had it not been for my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes). Between them, they coaxed out of him, elegantly as ever, a willingness to tell us about secondary legislation.

Norman Baker: Would not it be helpful if the Minister, who has been quiet for some time, intervened to explain what secondary legislation is anticipated, and when it will be available for hon. Members to see?

Mr. Gummer: That would be extremely helpful, but it may not be likely at this moment.

Mr. Stephen Twigg *indicated assent.*

Mr. Gummer: I understand from the nods and, if I dare say so, winks, that it may well happen later.

We ought to have known before about possible secondary legislation. That is what is so wrong about what is happening in this Parliament. Why does Parliament allow the Executive to present to the House such a piffling motion, which does not contain anything that any sane person in any other assembly would insist on in the minutes delivered before a meeting? Can it be true that any board of any company, private or public, any institution, or any Government institution would allow such an issue to be discussed without full details?

Mr. Hogg: I hate to interrupt the elegance of my right hon. Friend's speech, but he and I know full well that secondary legislation is probably drafted some time in advance. Does he agree that in all probability a draft of the secondary legislation is now available? If the Parliamentary Secretary chose, he could tell us about its detail and present it in the Library tomorrow.

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. and learned Friend is right. He makes the comparison that I made even more true. If the chairman of a public company had such information in his back pocket and did not reveal it when he presented the board with a decision like the one facing us, he would have committed an offence. The Government seem to believe that they have committed no offence in presenting such a pathetic motion to the House, yet the House is to blame, because too many Labour Members do not stand up for the rights of the House of Commons, as they are afraid that they might lose their own rights in the Labour party.

We are debating a serious issue, and the fact that only two Labour Back Benchers are present proves my point. We are discussing the most serious assault on freedom that has taken place in the House for the past 25 years, and the Labour party has managed to bring together two Back Benchers.

Andy King (Rugby and Kenilworth): It is the quality that counts.

Mr. Gummer: The quality may well count, and both hon. Members are, of course, charming, but the fact remains that their number is surprising.

There is a serious issue with regard to the fact that we have been presented with an inadequate motion. For such a motion to be adequate, it would have to set out what secondary legislation we might expect and what time would be afforded if considerable change is made by another place.

There is another reason why the motion is unacceptable. It was mentioned by one of my hon. Friends and supported by one of the Liberal Democrats. I refer to the pressure of the hothouse. I think that that is a real issue. As usual, the House is hotter than it needs to be and would benefit environmentally from a reduction in heat. The fact is that the Government are determined to do a number of things that have nothing to do with the Bill. They need to create a false sense of urgency around the whole Bill in order to get it through. That is what the motion is about: ensuring that we in this House will feel it necessary to pass this stuff because a sort of pressure has been built up, suggesting that if we do not do so, we will be in league with Mr. bin Laden in some way. That is the aim.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that perhaps the most insidious part of the Government's approach is the attempt to make an assault on the patriotism of Opposition Members for daring to stand up against necessary and desirable legislation? Does he agree that that is very offensive to Opposition Members?

Mr. Gummer: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. What could be more ludicrous than to attack Opposition Members on the basis of their patriotism, given the history of a whole range of Bills? I do not want to re-emphasise this point, but I should say that some of us have been blown up by the IRA and do not feel very soft towards terrorists. Some of us have clearly taken a very strong, tough and anti-terrorist position. That is not universally true of the Labour party. Therefore, to be put in the position—

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): Outrageous.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Lady may say that from a sedentary position, but she has not been in the House when large numbers of Labour Members have voted against a Bill night in, night out, so she should not be telling us that. Neither should people who have brought terrorists into the House and who are members of the Labour party make such suggestions. The hon. Lady does not like conversation—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand that the right hon. Gentleman may have been provoked—alas, it was by a sedentary comment—but I think that I must direct him back to the terms of the motion.

Mr. Gummer: I offer my sincere apologies to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will understand that if one has

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had the experience that some of us have had, those who have brought into the House people who were responsible and who do not understand the seriousness of their actions, do not easily get past one's temper.

I return to the hothouse issue. Are we really to believe seriously that this House should be asked to accept an open-ended commitment that does not give it an opportunity to debate? That is what is fundamentally wrong about the motion. It means that we are to make ourselves available to the Government without being assured of our right to speak. It is a sort of prostitution that I find intolerable. We must hang about; they will not tell us whether we shall be allowed to perform.

The motion cannot be accepted lightly. I listened to the Parliamentary Secretary's elegant introduction. He rightly spoke not about the Bill but about the timetable that is likely to be used. However, timetables relate to Bills and their contents dictate the timetable—or used to dictate it. The Bill's content is so serious that it is remarkable that it appears to have no effect on the offered timetable. We have been given a timetable that would be more suitable for altering the terms of housing tenancies in the north-east of England. We might have been able to fit that subject into it.

The proposals are therefore unacceptable. If the Parliamentary Secretary is unable to tell us how much time we will have to speak, debate and talk to those outside the House, and what opportunity they will have to put to us their deeply held views about the vital issues, we should not support the motion. It is a scandal that we cannot vote on it tonight and it is wrong that the Labour party is represented by only two Back Benchers. I note that three extra Members have been pushed into the Chamber by the Whips since I raised the matter. Doubtless more of those who have not gone home will be brought in from various holes and corners.

The three extra Members means that five Labour Back Benchers are now present; they have more than doubled their number. That shows that we still have some power. When we speak, something happens, even if it is only collecting people from the highways and byways and forcing them into the Chamber.

The Bill constitutes an assault on the liberty of the people of Britain. It needs sufficient time and proper consideration. The proposal provides neither. The Government should not be given the powers to proceed in that way; they are not necessary or justified. Above all, they are intolerable, as history will show. When people look back on our debates, it is not those of us who rebelled against our party and voted against the Government who will be found wanting, but those who rely on the strength of the law to protect them and are not prepared to extend that protection to others.

12.13 am

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): It is a great pleasure to support the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). Like him and other hon. Members, such as my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), I find the motion offensive.

We should begin by identifying exactly what we are being asked to do. We are being asked to ensure that the Bill clears the House of Commons by Thursday 13 December. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey made the ingenious point that Thursday 13 December will be an extending date and that discussion will continue late that night. He may be right. However, my bet is that the Government will do their best to ensure that the business closes at 7 o'clock because Government Back Benchers want to be away by that time. They will exert enormous pressure on the Government in the same way as they exert it in the Modernisation Committee to curtail debate generally in the House. We can be fairly sure that when the Government say that the Bill is to be enacted by Thursday 13 December, what they actually mean is by 7 o'clock on Thursday 13 December. We are, therefore, entitled to ask whether that gives us enough time to debate the Bill.

That point is reinforced by the thought that, in all probability, the House will not receive Lords messages until Wednesday 12 December, and that, as that is likely to be a fairly busy day—with statements, Prime Minister's questions and this and that—we shall probably not embark on our consideration of Lords amendments until 5 or 6 o'clock that afternoon. We shall in all probability finish by 10 o'clock, which will leave us only the remaining hours—and few of them, at that—on the Thursday. Even on the Government's own timetable, therefore, we are dealing with very few hours.

Simon Hughes: To add to what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has said, I think that I am right in saying that, in the provisional business announced for that week, a full day's debate is scheduled for the Wednesday. The current plan would mean that we should begin to consider any business from the Lords only after 10 o'clock, and that we should therefore have less than 24 hours in which to complete all the rest of the Bill's stages in both Houses, however many times we might be called on.

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because I had not spotted that. That raises another point of gross impropriety, on which the House needs to focus. He suggested that the substantial debate on the Lords messages will be taking place after 10 o'clock on the Wednesday, and rolling into the Thursday. Yet we have been told time and again by the Government—and by their Back Benchers, in particular—that the House should not, and cannot, properly discuss matters of major importance late at night.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making his point, because the House will be starting to debate matters of fundamental liberty at 10 o'clock at night. We shall be debating matters of fundamental importance in the early hours of the morning, although it is the common view on the Government Benches that the House is incapable of discussing matters of importance properly at that time. That shows a contempt and disregard for liberty that I would find truly extraordinary, if I did not know this Government.

Mr. Gummer: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the matter goes further than that? There is plenty of time to discuss these issues during the hours that the Labour party considers sensible—"family friendly" is, I think, the phrase that is used. The Government could, therefore, provide for that if they wished. However, on this occasion, they appear to have decided to be politically incorrect, although this would be the very occasion on which political correctness might possibly be excused.

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend makes a sound point, and he will have noted the contempt that the Leader of the House showed for this provision. My right hon. Friend and I both noticed that the Leader of the House was present during the opening speech from the Government Benches, and that he quickly left the Chamber afterwards and has not been present for any of the subsequent speeches. That is a scandal. Where is he? The answer is that he cannot be bothered with the views of parliamentarians. So unconcerned is he with their views that he proposes to hold the debate at 10 o'clock on a Wednesday, when almost no one other than people like ourselves will be present.

Mr. Garnier: I am surprised that my right hon. and learned Friend is surprised that the Leader of the House is not here. My right hon. and learned Friend may recall that, during our brief debate during the Committee stage of the Bill that we are now considering, the timetable motion was moved by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Beverley Hughes)—a veritable beacon of debating excellence—whereas the Home Secretary and the Leader of the House did not find it convenient to grace us with their presence.

Mr. Hogg: In a sense—

Andy King: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hogg: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall deal with the point made by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), and then I shall of course give way.

In a sense, it is not in the least surprising that the Home Secretary and the Leader of the House are not here, because, of course, the House has not debated the Bill in any great detail. It has 125 clauses and 118 pages, and large sections remain wholly undiscussed. The Leader of the House and the Home Secretary knew that that would be the case, so they no doubt said to themselves, "Why should we be here? The Bill will not be discussed anyway."

Andy King *rose*—

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Someone has switched him on.

Andy King: I like it.

To achieve balance, surely the right hon. and learned Gentleman should reflect on why the shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), disappeared almost at the outset, when Conservative Members began to speak.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman must grasp the point that the Leader of the House, not his shadow, is responsible for the conduct of business in this place. The point goes further. The Leader of the House is not only a Minister; he is meant, according to history and tradition, also to be a custodian of the traditions of the House of Commons. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal has been a Member of the House for longer than me, but even when I was first elected, timetable motions, in the generality of cases, were moved by the Leader of the House or the Secretary of State with charge of a Bill.

I do not want to be discourteous to the Parliamentary Secretary, who is a nice chap. He has done his best, although he is but the monkey. I am sorry about that—he is a perfectly pleasant monkey—but the truth is that important motions have been downgraded. Therefore, we are entitled to say that the absence of the Leader of the House is a scandal, because it is his business to know what the House thinks and to listen to the opinions of parliamentarians. If he cannot be bothered, that tells us something about him, albeit that we know it already.

Mr. Letwin: My right hon. and learned Friend will have noticed that, on these Benches at least, those with responsibility for conducting proceedings on the Bill are present. Does not the real scandal reside in the fact that the Leader of the House, in this instance, is merely following the bidding of the Home Secretary, who wants to engender circumstances in which he can accuse Opposition Members of attempting to derail a necessary Bill simply by creating the hothouse atmosphere to which he himself has alluded?

Mr. Hogg: That is probably true, but it is certainly true that it is deeply offensive to me and my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal, who have been Members of the House for many years and who were responsible for law and practice as regards terrorism, to be accused of being soft on terrorism. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In this case, it is particularly important to note that the Bill is only in part about terrorism, and only a small part at that. My right hon. Friend was entirely right to say that the Home Office has attached to the Bill many proposals that it knows full well would not get through the House had they not been attached to legislation that is said to carry a degree of urgency. That is a scandal too.

Mr. Letwin: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the point is that the Opposition parties, and our party in particular, have never sought to delay or disrupt those provisions that relate to terrorism? We have given them a fair wind throughout, and our only aim is to restrict the Bill to terrorism.

Mr. Hogg: There are mixed views. My hon. Friend has done exactly what he says he has done, but I am bound to say that my opposition to the Bill is more robust, partly because I am against the process of enactment in this case—I do not think that the Bill should have been rushed through as it has been—but partly because I am a strong defender of civil rights, and am very cautious about responding to crises with legislation. I am also very cautious in regard to slipping standards.

In 1939, when the second world war began, the country as a whole was very opposed to the bombing of cities. By the end of the war, we had bombed Dresden. My point is that standards slip, and I fear that if we start chipping away at civil rights in the face of a crisis, a national tragedy or an international crime, we will soon abandon all the protections that our fellow citizens have a right to

[Mr. Hogg]

expect from us. I therefore feel that the House should be very cautious about relaxing any of our traditional protections.

Mr. Gummer: Would my right hon. and learned Friend care to repeat what he has just said for the benefit of the Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary, the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Fitzsimons), who has talked throughout, listened to nothing, spoken from a sedentary position, and giggled?

Mr. Hogg: I think that you might protest, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I were to repeat in detail what I have already said. The hon. Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Fitzsimons) can always read my speech—but in any event I have rather more to say, and she will have an opportunity to listen to that.

Simon Hughes: Was it not demonstrated—intentionally or inadvertently—that the Government were not taking this seriously at the end of the first day of the Committee stage of the Bill, when the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), said this to a Member who wished to intervene?

> "I do not have time. I have only two minutes to answer some of the questions that have been raised . . . I will not give way . . . If Opposition Members had not spent so much time talking and voting, we would have had the time".—[*Official Report*, 21 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 423.]

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that the least we are expected to do is raise the issues and then vote on them? If the Government do not think even that can be done by Opposition Members, we may as well all go home. Parliament clearly has no role in their eyes.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. What the Government were really doing on that occasion was grumbling about democracy. They were saying that the democratic processes were standing in the way, albeit marginally, of their getting their way. I am sorry that we were so discourteous to them as to debate the matter before the House—

Simon Hughes: And to vote.

Mr. Hogg: And to vote. I remind Ministers, however, that that is actually our duty.

Mr. Tyler: Is it not precisely that function of Parliament that we are defending against terrorism? That is the irony of this dreadful situation.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is right—and another irony is that literally scores of clauses passed through the House without being discussed in any detail. Indeed, they were not even reached. That is not the example that we should set to other countries.

We were talking about detention without trial. What do Members suppose the Government are saying to the Israeli Government at this very moment? They are urging on that Government the undesirability of detaining people outside the judicial process. Yet Ministers are asking us to do exactly the same, while not giving us an opportunity to discuss it properly.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Will my right hon. and learned Friend contrast the way in which the House is being invited to agree to the motion with the extensive consideration given, inside and outside Parliament, to the Bill that became the Terrorism Act 2000? Parliament had the advantage of a detailed report from Lord Lloyd of Berwick and a White Paper, but the Bill still required considerable debate and rewriting as a consequence of the parliamentary scrutiny. Does that not reinforce the case for adequate parliamentary scrutiny now?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend has made a very important point. However, he will forgive me if I make a point in response, on decaying standards, which was the point that I was making when the Parliamentary Secretary was not listening. Once we start to chip away at those protections, our standards decay. Suddenly, having gone through the proper process with the 2000 Act, we are abandoning all those processes and are leaping quickly and without proper consideration to deeply oppressive legislation.

Mr. Gummer: Would my right hon. and learned Friend like to advise Labour Members on how they should reply to middle east dictators who are accustomed to passing laws without their Parliaments—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Some latitude has been allowed, but that is very wide of the scope of this motion.

Mr. Gummer: Madam Deputy Speaker, I think that I am speaking precisely to the motion. Would my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) like to advise Ministers on what to say to middle east dictators who tell us—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already ruled on that point.

Mr. Hogg: I think that I can properly say in reply to what I think was in the mind of my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal—although you and I can only guess what was in his mind, Madam Deputy Speaker, as you intervened at that point—that middle east dictators are very quick to use draconian ways of truncating discussion. I have a feeling that they might look to allies on the Treasury Bench who are doing precisely the same thing.

Mr. Garnier: We do not have to go as far as the middle east. In the east midlands, which my right hon. and learned Friend and I represent, we can find huge disgust at the Government's conduct in curtailing debate not only on the Bill's remaining stages but on its earlier ones. He would therefore be on fertile ground if he confined his remarks to the reaction of people in the United Kingdom; he does not need to go overseas.

Mr. Hogg: As you have not intervened, Madam Deputy Speaker, I take it that I have your implied agreement to agree with my hon. and learned Friend.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps I should put the right hon. and learned Gentleman right: I remind him again of the narrowness of the motion.

Mr. Hogg: It is with that in mind that I move to my next two points, which were foreshadowed by the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal. As those comments built on observations made by Labour Members, I can feel sure that by replying to them I shall be properly in order.

I should like first to tell the Parliamentary Secretary how grateful we are to him for telling us that secondary legislation will be forthcoming. I also welcome the fact that we now have eight Labour Back Benchers in the Chamber, which is encouraging progress. I imagine that the Government Whips are now looking in all the bars of the House of Commons and crying out, "Throwing out time—come into the Chamber." Here we have them, and what a pleasure it is to see them.

Andy King: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hogg: Of course I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman. He has been in the Chamber for the debate and has not been into the bar to the best of my knowledge.

Andy King: I simply wanted to say that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has done a grand job of emptying the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friends too can read my speech—but they have heard me before, and they will surely hear me again.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal knows full well that, whatever the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions would have us believe, secondary legislation is not drafted a day or two before it is laid; it is drafted some time in advance. There is no secret that there will be a draft of the secondary legislation to which the Parliamentary Secretary referred, and that it will be printed. It is probably on his desk—*[Interruption.]* For aught I know, it might even be in his back pocket. It is available to him. However, if it is available to him, why is it not available to us?

Norman Baker: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is right. However, the Minister said from a sedentary position that he intended to give us more information when he replied to the debate. Would it not be more helpful if he gave us that information now?

Mr. Hogg: I tell the hon. Gentleman not to be fooled. The Parliamentary Secretary says that he will give us information, but will he give us the text? No, he will not.

He is going to give us the benefit of a few snippets—a general precis of what might be in the Bill—but he will not give us the text. However, the text will be available to him. If we had the text, we would be in a clearer position to judge whether we want to have more time than will be provided to consider the Lords' amendments. In the absence of the text, we cannot make a proper judgment.

Mr. Gummer: Is not my right hon. and learned Friend being unfair to the Parliamentary Secretary? Should not he explain to the Parliamentary Secretary that all he needs to do is to ask the Box to provide him with the text? He can then cross out the word "draft", which will be on the top—my right hon. and learned Friend and I know well what it will look like—and place it in the Library immediately. If the Parliamentary Secretary is told that, he will have no excuse for not doing it.

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend makes a helpful and constructive suggestion and I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary is finding this debate a useful lesson in basic parliamentary procedure. Incidentally, may I say how nice it is to see two more Labour Members in their places?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. No, the right hon. and learned Gentleman may not say that.

Mr. Hogg: It is nice to see them. Could a closure motion be approaching, by any chance?

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I do not know whether the right hon. and learned Gentleman is aware that when the Bill was discussed by the House, some 80 per cent. of it did not see the light of day? Does he agree that it is a travesty of justice that we can discuss matters such as internment—arresting suspects simply on the word of the Home Secretary—without a proper, full debate in the House? Does he also agree that it is time that the House saw all the details of the Bill and discussed properly its failings, especially for the sake of the Muslim community?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that interventions are meant to be brief.

Mr. Hogg: On occasion, my right hon. and hon. Friends and I have treated this debate with a degree of levity, but the hon. Gentleman has made a serious point. It is the fundamental point that all of us—the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey and my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset included—have sought to make. This is a fundamentally important Bill and it is profoundly wrong that it should be enacted in this way. The hon. Gentleman makes the point that scores of clauses went through to the other place without any discussion in this House. The fact that we are not going to see the secondary legislation, which is probably in the Parliamentary Secretary's back pocket, makes the hon. Gentleman's point even more robustly and that takes me to my next point.

Andy King: Is it your final point?

Mr. Hogg: Is that another hint that the closure motion is getting closer? We have been given two days, ending on 13 December at 7 o'clock, and there will be a timetable motion. We know that, because the Parliamentary Secretary has told us. However, we do not know what the parliamentary timetable will be, nor can the Government know, because they do not know what amendments will come from the other place. The Government will impose a timetable regardless of what comes up from the other place. In other words, the timetable will be applied to the business, instead of the business shaping the timetable. On any view, that is a scandal.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that the frustration is caused by the Government's attempts to put forward matters of principle as matters of policy, and those matters of

[Lembit Öpik]

principle deserve proper and substantial debate? What is causing such anger in the Chamber is the simple fact that we do not even get to the substantive fact because the Government are trying to force the legislation through without a proper assessment of the implications for civil liberties.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right and the points that he makes with such force are ones that we believe with equal conviction.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the Bill has to be galloped through the House because it does not bear examination? The more it is examined, the more people realise that this is a farcical procedure and inappropriate in connection with proposals to set aside habeus corpus, and all the rest. The Government need momentum.

Mr. Tyler: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether you can give guidance to the House. Many hon. Members are coming into the Chamber because the debate is so important that they want it to continue. Will you ensure that the House can continue the debate, and that the Chair will allow no early closure motion? I know that two hours is sometimes considered appropriate for unimportant matters, but will you assure the House that a minimum of three hours at least will be made available tonight, as many hon. Members clearly want to participate?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I cannot give that assurance. We will continue and see how things go.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) is right to say that the Government are trying to thrust the Bill through by momentum. He knows that the hostility to the Bill outside the House is building—in the legal profession, among those who care about civil liberties, and so forth. The Government want to ram the Bill through before that external opposition begins to seep through to Labour Members.

My point is that without knowing the timetable the House cannot judge whether Thursday 13 December will be an appropriate end date. We do not know what amendments will be tabled, and that also prevents us from forming a view.

Mr. Paul Marsden: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman think that sufficient time has been devoted to clauses 21 to 23? The explanatory notes to the Bill state that the clauses extend the application of existing detention powers under the Immigration Act 1971. The powers would allow the Secretary of State to remove a suspected international terrorist—or so-called terrorist—where removal is not currently possible. This is a serious issue, which takes away a basic civil liberty but which we have not had enough time to discuss.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is right. Under the procedure to which the hon. Gentleman refers, a person could be detained indefinitely if the Home Secretary suspected that he was an international terrorist and a threat to national security. In other words, a person could be detained indefinitely on a suspicion and a belief. I regard that as draconian, and it cannot be right. I suspect that many Labour Members agree with the doubts expressed by the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden).

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that some hon. Members find his protestations, and those of the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), somewhat synthetic? We remember that they were Ministers for many years and steamrollered through many items of legislation—including 16 orders to do with poll tax in one night, without any proper debate.

Mr. Hogg: I have three points to make in response. First, no one who has ever known or worked with my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal, or with me, can have any doubt as to our commitment to parliamentary freedoms, and the duties that we owe to our constituents.

Secondly, and more importantly, when in government we did not railroad through legislation in the manner that this Government have adopted. We never automatically timetabled motions, and it was a guiding principle of our Government always to allow up to about 100 hours in Standing Committee before a timetable motion was moved. The approach was fundamentally different.

Mr. Garnier: It occurs to me that the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) makes a better point than he imagines. The poll tax legislation had the majority of the House at the time to get it through but it did not have the consent of the public. If a Bill is passed without the consent of the public—*[Interruption.]* I am agreeing with the hon. Member for Burnley up to this point. If a Bill does not have the consent of the public for whatever reason—because it is wrong in principle or it is not properly discussed—it will fall into disrepute and lead to the collapse and destruction of the Government. We suffered from that—they will shortly.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. and learned Friend makes an important point. As I have said before in this kind of debate, there is an implied bargain between us and the electorate to the effect that where Bills are passed that impose obligations, we—the public's representatives—will properly and fully consider the legislation. When we do not do that, the bargain breaks down and one brings into disrepute the legislative functions of the House.

Mr. Gummer: Can my right hon. and learned Friend remember an occasion when a serious Bill was placed before the House with a timetable anything like as tight as this one, late-night votes were put off until the following Wednesday and the Committee stage was practically non-existent?

Mr. Hogg: I can certainly answer in the affirmative so far as the latter point is concerned, because we have not always had the deferred voting procedure. Were it not for the fact that we are no doubt about to have a closure motion, we could be quite sure that Labour Members would not be here at all to listen to the debate. The only good thing about a closure is that some Labour Members may go into the Lobby with their ministerial colleagues and have the opportunity to express real anxiety about the Bill. That would be a positive plus.

I want to move on, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I do not want to strain your patience unduly. In any case, I want my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough to catch your eye. I have already talked about the problems of the timetable and the fact that we do not know what the amendments will be. The problem is that the amendments will come from the other place at a rate, and at a time, when the external lobbies will not have an opportunity fully to form a view. Perhaps even more importantly, they will not have the opportunity to seek to inform us of their view, which is the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal.

That situation will become compounded if we enter into what is colloquially called the ping-pong session. The other place may have a compromise amendment which might, for aught I know, find favour on the Government Benches. If that happens, a compromise will be put together without external groups ever having the opportunity to express a view to right hon. and hon. Members. That cannot be right.

You will be extremely pleased to know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I am coming to a conclusion. *[Interruption.]* I did not expect my observations to be received with such gladness and am almost tempted to extend my remarks.

Matthew Green (Ludlow): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman expand on what might be a more suitable timetable for the Bill? I have less experience in the House than he has, and would be intrigued to know what he believes to be a more suitable length of time in which to deal with the Bill.

Mr. Hogg: That is the way I like to be treated—with real courtesy, my opinion sought, my experience praised, my impatience lauded. It is Mr. Toad himself.

The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. In the first place, I would not put the Bill through this procedure at all. *[Interruption.]* That is a sinister sight—the Whips seem to be consulting about the closure motion.

As I was saying, I would not have subjected the Bill to this emergency procedure. If I were to do so, I should strip out those parts that did not truly deal with the emergency—in fact the major part of the Bill. However, to answer the point directly, if we were to strip out the non-emergency parts of the Bill, there would be sufficient time to finish by the time the House rose for the Christmas recess, provided that the timetable during the two weeks was properly discussed—not just between Front-Bench Members, but more generally between interested parties. We know who is interested in the Bill, and we can discuss it sensibly.

12.51 am

Mr. Tyler: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologise to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, but it is time to put this matter to a vote. I beg to move, That the House sit in private.

Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 163 (Motion to sit in private):—

Question accordingly agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker accordingly ordered the withdrawal from the House of those other than Members or Officers.

The House sat in private.

The following record of the subsequent business is taken from the Votes and Proceedings:—

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the debate be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Hogg.]*

Motion made, and Question put, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question accordingly agreed to.

Adjourned at nineteen minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 5 December 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Good Friday Agreement

1. **Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield): If he will make a statement on the steps he has taken to secure the full implementation of the Good Friday agreement. [18092]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): The British Government remain wholly committed to the full implementation of the Belfast agreement. We must now build on the considerable progress that we have made in recent weeks and concentrate on stabilising the institutions and moving ahead with all the remaining aspects of the agreement.

Richard Burden: I welcome the achievements of recent weeks and my right hon. Friend's contribution to those achievements. Given that a number of paramilitary groups, including loyalist paramilitary groups, are still not on ceasefire, how realistic is it to aim to achieve full decommissioning by February? What can be done to ensure that General de Chastelain can continue his work so that we can keep in place the legal framework for decommissioning?

Dr. Reid: It is true, of course, that General de Chastelain, whom I met on Monday this week, has made a considerable contribution through his calm endurance. I am sure that the entire House would wish to thank him for his contribution. We welcome the progress that has been made, including the historic and significant step by the IRA, but my hon. Friend is right to say that there is a long way to go. Some loyalists have not started the process of decommissioning and are not even on ceasefire, so it is extremely unlikely that the process can be completed by February. Of course, the remit of General de Chastelain does not expire then. It is a continual remit, at the behest of the two Governments, but we need the legal framework that allows decommissioning to take place, and in the very near future we will bring before the House legislation to enable that to happen.

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley): The Secretary of State will be aware of the offence caused to many in the community in Northern Ireland by the decision to haul down the Union flag from police stations, the decision to remove the royal title and the crown insignia from the Royal Ulster Constabulary—the only constabulary in the United Kingdom that will not have the crown in its badge—and the proposal to remove the royal coat of arms from our courtrooms. The Secretary of State recently said that there was a danger that Northern Ireland would become a "cold house for Unionists". What does he propose to do about that?

Dr. Reid: As the hon. Gentleman supported the Belfast agreement, I take it that he read it before he agreed to it. It states:

> "All participants—

which I take to include him—

> "acknowledge the sensitivity of the use of symbols and emblems for public purposes, and the need in particular in creating the new institutions to ensure that such symbols and emblems are used in a manner which promotes mutual respect rather than division."

I take it that the hon. Gentleman still accepts the agreement. Nevertheless, I recognise and I have made plain that the matter must be treated with a degree of sensitivity and a recognition of the rights not only of the Catholics and those who feel culturally Irish in Northern Ireland, but of the Protestants and those who feel British.

I commend to the hon. Gentleman the leader in the *Belfast Newsletter* this morning, which comments:

> "If northern Catholics are treated as equal citizens, and their culture and identity are adequately recognised within 'the northern state'—in short, if they feel at home here—what good motive other than romantic aspiration could they have for embarking on the highly risky road towards a united Ireland?"

In other words, through mutual respect and sensitivity on the matter of symbols, we are trying to create the conditions that the hon. Gentleman wants to see created—a continuation in Northern Ireland on the basis of consent. I recognise the sensitivity that he highlights. I hope that he will try to recognise and reflect upon the points that I am making.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) on securing a good vote in his party on Saturday? Does my right hon. Friend recognise that the re-establishment of the political institutions in Northern Ireland, particularly the north-south consultation bodies, can offer tangible benefits to people in Northern Ireland on the economic, social and cultural fronts?

Dr. Reid: Yes, indeed. I think that my hon. Friend is right. Obviously, we congratulate the First Minister of Northern Ireland, the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, on the vote that he received at the weekend. It is in all our interests that we get a degree of stability in Northern Ireland. That stability has, to say the least, been somewhat lacking in the institutions in the past six to nine months. It is important not least because there is widespread support throughout the community for the good work that the Assembly and the Executive already have done and can do. Devolution of power is not only an essential part of the Belfast agreement, but the vehicle through which an all-Ireland dimension can be given with tangible benefits for the whole community. That includes both traditions and all citizens in Northern Ireland, and the recognition of that all-Ireland dimension, which is an essential part of the Belfast agreement.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): It will come as no surprise to the people of Northern Ireland that this decommissioning date is not going to be kept rigid and that it will probably be changed and changed again. That will not cause any ripples for the people of Northern Ireland, for they expected it to happen. As the Secretary of State has mentioned that he wants to see stability, can I ask him whether he has seen the campaign literature just issued by Sinn Fein against the Police Service of Northern Ireland, linking it with plastic bullets, shoot to kill, abuse of human rights, sectarian intimidation, collusion, obstruction of inquiries and torture? Will he condemn that sort of literature, which is put around the doors, but breaks the legislation on such literature, as it carries no printer's name or imprint?

Dr. Reid: Yes, I condemn that sort of literature absolutely. I have no doubt that, as in any other human organisation, there have been faults and mistakes and perhaps wrongs. I think that that happens in all police forces, but I have to say that, given the terrible conditions in which the RUC had to work—on many occasions, the Police Service of Northern Ireland still has to work in such conditions—the police have been stalwart defenders not only of law and order and peace in Northern Ireland, but, on many occasions, of the Catholic communities themselves. I hope that those who have been asking for many years for the right to participate fully in institutions and in the Police Service of Northern Ireland will, now that we have implemented Patten, face up to the responsibilities that always come with rights and participate as they should do, not least because all communities in Northern Ireland deserve a decent, good and effective police service.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): When military de-escalation takes place in Northern Ireland in response to the Provisional IRA starting to put arms beyond use—there may be more moves on the issue in future—what account will be taken of the growing threat that exists from the Real IRA and loyalist paramilitary groups?

Dr. Reid: Any moves that I make regarding the military presence in Northern Ireland are made with full consultation and on the advice of my security advisers, who include the Chief Constable and the General Officer Commanding, Northern Ireland. As my hon. Friend has pointed out, part of that consideration is, by imperative, the threat from the dissident republican groups. It is a great irony that that threat is one of the most major stumbling blocks to the removal of the presence that is manifested by the British Army, to which the nationalist and republican communities constantly object. They should look towards the real reason why we must have a more than normal military presence, which is not the will of this House, but the threat from the dissident republicans.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): Is it true, as the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor says in a magazine article today, that the Government are planning a new raft of concessions in Northern Ireland? The article refers to

> "an amnesty for former terrorists on the run . . . the dismantling of British security facilities . . . further inquiries into past British security 'misdeeds'"—

there is, of course, no mention of anybody else's misdeeds—

> "and further changes to the new police service, the successor to the RUC, on top of those reforms already agreed to make the police acceptable to nationalists and Republicans."

If there is any truth in that statement by the Secretary of State's predecessor, will he come clean to the House and say when he proposes to bring the measures before it and to explain their justification?

Dr. Reid: It is not true that new measures are being contemplated apart from those that have already been put before the public and the House in Weston Park. I would do my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) a disservice if I did not point out that he did not suggest that the measures were new. He said that they had already been undertaken.

Mr. Davies: The Secretary of State has obviously not read his colleague's article, which refers to new concessions. Will he learn lessons from the serious mistakes of his two predecessors in releasing all prisoners before the IRA had made any progress on decommissioning? Does he accept that, as I put it to him and the House on 24 October at column 305, it would be sensible to make no more concessions until it is clear what final package will be required to bring about full decommissioning?

Dr. Reid: First, I confess to the hon. Gentleman that *GQ* does not feature in my midnight reading. I commend him on finding the time to read such magazines; I hope that the rest of it is as interesting as the article to which he referred. My understanding is that my right hon. Friend referred to events that occurred after he was Secretary of State. I commend him on his performance as Secretary of State, but the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) asked today whether new measures would be taken. I replied no, other than those we have debated previously. *[Interruption.]* Well, the hon. Gentleman told me that he raised the point at the last Northern Ireland questions. He could hardly have done that if the matter had not been discussed in the Chamber. He referred to concessions. I repeat that I do not regard the extension of human rights, parity of esteem, and equality of all individuals as concessions.

Electoral Fraud

2. **Stephen Hesford** (Wirral, West): What steps are being taken by the Government to tackle electoral fraud; and if he will make a statement. [18093]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Desmond Browne): The Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill, will provide the chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland with additional powers to address the problem of electoral fraud there. The proposed measures will tackle electoral abuse effectively without disadvantaging honest voters.

Stephen Hesford: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. We are considering a key battle in the normalisation of civil society in the Province. Will my hon. Friend say a little more about multiple electoral registrations and what the Government are doing to make progress on that?

Mr. Browne: My hon. Friend is right to acknowledge the importance of combating electoral fraud in Northern Ireland to the stability of the political institutions there. On multiple registration, he will recollect that, on Third Reading, I undertook to consider whether there should be a requirement in Northern Ireland for those seeking to register to advise the chief electoral officer whether they were already registered or had tried to register at another address. I can now confirm that I intend to give the chief electoral officer powers to ask those questions during the canvass, starting in autumn 2002. Any person who knowingly gives a false answer to that question will be liable for a fine of up to £1,000.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Successive Governments have made a meal out of tackling electoral fraud. Has the Minister noticed that the Republic of Ireland is considering electronic voting in three counties to avoid fraud? Is not it time to deal with issues at that level, apart from pre-registration? Will he assure us that the chief electoral officer has full authority to change the method of voting?

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman has made consistent and important contributions to the debate, for which I thank him. He will recollect that, on Second Reading, there was a discussion about our aspiration to move towards electronic voting. However, all parties, including the Ulster Unionist party, agreed that the objective should be to put in place measures that would interdict the sort of fraud that had been identified and suspected. That is my priority, but it does not alter the fact that my long-term objective is to move towards electronic voting, which will help to tackle fraud.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's final point, he can rest assured that the chief electoral officer has all the powers, support and assistance that he needs to address this issue. In addition, I have started holding a series of regular meetings with him to ensure that I am kept up to date with progress on addressing the issue of electoral fraud.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): Does the Minister agree that the improvements contained in the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill will do much to eradicate electoral fraud in Northern Ireland? Does he also agree that the proliferation of electoral fraud could jeopardise the democratic process there? Above all, does he agree that one of the outstanding remaining ways of tackling such fraud would be to introduce proportional representation for elections in Northern Ireland? As the House knows, we use proportional representation for local government elections and European elections, so why not use it for the elections to this House?

Mr. Browne: I agree with two thirds of the hon. Gentleman's observations. First, he is perfectly correct to recognise the importance of the Bill as a measure for tackling electoral fraud. Secondly, it is important to reinforce the view that I expressed earlier that the stability of the political institutions of Northern Ireland is to a large degree dependent on the confidence that people have in their votes. The issue of proportional representation—other than in the circumstances in which it is already exercised in Northern Ireland—is reflected in a recommendation in the draft Bill of Rights by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should direct his contributions on that debate to the commission in the first instance.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): How can the Government's commitment to tackling electoral fraud in Northern Ireland be taken seriously when every party in the House but their own has argued for the inclusion of national insurance numbers on the electoral register?

Mr. Browne: I think that the hon. Gentleman was present for the final stages of the Bill, although he might not have been. He will, however, recollect that there was cross-party support for the use of national insurance numbers as an identifier. He will also recollect that I opposed those proposals because I considered that they were disproportionate, that they made unreasonable demands on voters, and that they were opposed by the chief electoral officer.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members are being very noisy. The House must come to order.

Mr. Browne: I also opposed the proposals because data protection implications were involved. The hon. Gentleman will also recollect that I undertook to reflect on the issue, and I have continued to do so. I continue to have discussions with the chief electoral officer, and I have had interesting discussions with the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) on these matters. I am still in reflective mode on them, but as soon as I come out of reflective mode, I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman gets to know of my decision.

Organised Crime

3. **Mr. John McFall** (Dumbarton): What recent initiatives the Government have taken to tackle organised crime in Northern Ireland. [18094]

5. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What recent progress has been made in the fight against organised crime in Northern Ireland. [18096]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): I chair the organised crime taskforce, which has been in operation for just over a year. There have been a number of successes: on 8 November this year, 42.5 million cigarettes were seized at Warrenpoint harbour—the largest ever such seizure in the United Kingdom. In September, 26,000 litres of illicit liquor were recovered in Coalisland. Only this morning, a series of multi-agency operations in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland has been carried out to tackle fuel smuggling, fuel laundering and associated money laundering. Customs, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and agencies in the Republic of Ireland have searched 31 premises, 10 people are assisting those agencies with their inquiries, and the investigation is on-going. This is exactly the type of multi-agency operation that the Government wish to see.

Mr. McFall: Alongside the welcome peace initiatives taking place in Northern Ireland lies an increase in criminal activities involving drugs, alcohol and counterfeit goods. As the Minister knows, the profits from those activities go to terrorist organisations as well as lining the pockets of criminals. What is the organised crime taskforce doing to eliminate such activities, particularly at this sensitive time around Christmas, when many people are out shopping, and organisations such as the Co-op and other retailers are very concerned about counterfeit goods?

Jane Kennedy: My hon. Friend, who is a long-time supporter of the co-operative movement, knows very well how the sale of counterfeit or adulterated goods undermines legitimate traders. Only last week Sir Reg Empey, the Northern Ireland Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and I went on a shopping trip in Belfast city centre as part of a joint effort to publicise the need to tackle the sale of counterfeit goods. That is a good and practical example of the way in which everyone can play a role in fighting organised crime.

My hon. Friend is right, and members of the public should take note of the message: do not line the pockets of criminals this Christmas.

Helen Jones: In the context of tobacco and alcohol smuggling, what is my hon. Friend doing to make people aware that when they think they are getting a cheap bargain on the doorstep, they are actually putting money straight into the coffers of criminals and terrorists? In particular, will she ensure that communities such as mine which have experienced terrorist attacks in the past are made clearly aware that they should not be funding those who want to perpetrate similar atrocities elsewhere?

Jane Kennedy: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Shoppers in Warrington ought to be aware of an element of organised crime in Northern Ireland that has direct links with paramilitary organisations. They ought to be aware that when they buy cheap cigarettes and alcohol, and other counterfeit goods, they are providing funds for organisations that go out of their way to seek to kill, to maim and to lay the bombs that we saw in Ealing and Birmingham very recently.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): Does the Minister accept that one reason for the difficulty in tackling organised crime is the rundown of police numbers in Northern Ireland? While the numbers are on the increase elsewhere, in Northern Ireland the number of regular police officers is being reduced. Will the Minister give an undertaking that the full-time reserve in Northern Ireland will be maintained? Will she also give an undertaking that measures aimed at demoralising the police will be reversed? I refer to the issue of the name, the symbols, and the flying of the Union flag at police stations.

Jane Kennedy: My overriding concern is to ensure that the Police Service has all the resources it needs, and that Government continue to be guided by the Chief Constable's assessment of his resourcing requirements. As the hon. Gentleman knows, decisions on the full-time reserve will be made next year, in the light of the security situation prevailing at the time. I can say no more at this stage.

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): Does the Minister agree that the best way to reduce organised crime in Northern Ireland is for all political parties to participate in the new policing board? That would replace vigilante activity with legitimate policing. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must be heard.

Mrs. Calton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, but I had finished. Would you like me to repeat the question?

Mr. Speaker: No, it is all right.

Jane Kennedy: I congratulate the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) on her appointment to the Liberal Democrats' Front Bench. It is a pleasure to be joined by another lady.

The hon. Lady asked about political support for the Police Service of Northern Ireland. She is absolutely right. It is important for the establishment of the service to be recognised for the watershed that it was. It was supported by the Catholic Church, the nationalist community and the Social Democratic and Labour party, and it marked an historic moment. The police deserve the support of everyone in the Northern Ireland community, as we take up the fight against organised crime and the associated links with paramilitary organisations.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): I commend the Minister on her public statements in support of the Northern Ireland police during recent civil disturbances, in which 800 police officers have been injured since June. May I press her, however, on the subject of the full-time reserve? Will she comment on the fact that the reserve supplies a significant proportion of the active police manpower in Northern Ireland, amounting in certain districts to a quarter of those available for active duty? Does she accept the view of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary that, in view of the situation, the full-time reserve needs to be retained in existence for at least the next three years?

Jane Kennedy: My right hon. Friend knows certainly better than I do the issues facing the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the enormous changes that it has been undergoing to win the support of all the community in Northern Ireland. I hope that he will be encouraged when I tell him that we have been able to recruit 66 per cent. more recruits than had been envisaged. We are making every effort, and we stay in constant touch with the Chief Constable to ensure that he has the resources that he needs to police Northern Ireland as we expect it to be done.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): What an extraordinary coincidence that, two weeks ago, six of the 27 questions tabled by Labour Back Benchers happened to be on organised crime and that, this morning, we had an announcement on a successful operation against organised crime. Although the Government lost the benefit of doubt on coincidence long ago, we must welcome that operational success. However, will the Minister take it from me, and confirm, that fuel smuggling in South Armagh is an industrial-scale racket that is worth hundreds of millions of pounds; and that, in an area where police cannot operate without Army protection, Customs and Excise must be able to operate with all the assistance of the Army and police in dealing with an appalling threat that provides funds to future terrorism in Northern Ireland?

Jane Kennedy: The hon. Gentleman has demeaned himself in the way in which he asked that question. The Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Customs and Excise officers who were involved even in today's operation daily risk their lives in the work that they undertake, and they deserve our full support.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [18122] **Dr. Ian Gibson** (Norwich, North): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 5 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further such meetings later today.

Dr. Gibson: My right hon. Friend will be aware that, although there are indeed good news stories in our health service, we have much to do to raise the morale of workers in that service. Will he ensure that the national health service remains just that—national; that it continues to deliver health care free at the point where it is needed; and that it is funded from our taxes and not according to ideas of private health insurance which have been described as aggressive and inequitable?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out the many achievements in the national health service, not least the new, 953-bed Norfolk and Norwich hospital in his constituency, which is part of the largest hospital-building programme since the national health service began. He is also absolutely right to say that we want to get more resources into the national health service, and that we want to retain and not abandon the principle of the national health service being free at the point of use—whereas Conservative Members want to abandon it.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): The very serious claims made by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards are rightly matters for the House to investigate. As leader of the largest party in the House, will the Prime Minister back our call for a full inquiry?

The Prime Minister: No, I think that the matter should be dealt with by the House in the proper way. I understand, Mr. Speaker, that you will make a statement on it at 3.30 pm. I think that it is best left to the House authorities.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Parliamentary Commissioner also makes some quite specific allegations to which I draw the Prime Minister's attention. She said that there were

"whispering campaigns and hostile press briefings . . . executed by named civil servants".

As civil servants are clearly a Government responsibility, will the Prime Minister perhaps undertake to investigate that specific allegation?

The Prime Minister: Of course if named civil servants were alleged to have done something improper it would be the Government's responsibility, and of course I would look into it, but I am not aware of any such specific, named allegations. If the right hon. Gentleman is aware of named individuals who have, it is suggested, briefed against the Commissioner in some way, perhaps he will now state who they are.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister is just as aware as I am from the letter that I am sure he has also seen. He knows very well, just as much as I do, that we all in this House have a responsibility to ensure that our proceedings and the way we behave are above reproach. I simply ask the Prime Minister to ensure that he investigates those elements for which he is responsible. Will he undertake to do that?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware that the letter names individual people. If it does, I will certainly look at it, but I thought that it did not. It is difficult to investigate allegations against unnamed people. My understanding is that the matter is dealt with by the House of Commons Commission, and it should be dealt with by the House of Commons Commission, which has on it some people from the right hon. Gentleman's party. If there are issues they want to raise, they should be raised in that way, but this is a matter for the House and the House has the absolute power to do whatever it wishes in respect of it.

Q2. [18123] **Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): Will the Prime Minister welcome and give details of this lunchtime's agreement in Bonn, which paves the way for future stable government in Afghanistan? Will he also outline the further measures he intends to take to take the process forward?

The Prime Minister: It is a remarkable achievement in Bonn. When we think that a few weeks ago, when we embarked on the action in Afghanistan, people worried whether that action would be successful militarily and whether what would take the place of the Taliban regime would be worse, or indifferent to, for example, the appalling oppression of women in Afghanistan, it is clear that what has happened today is remarkable in the sense that people have come together from all ethnic groupings in Afghanistan, agreed to the provisional Government and to a process that will increase dramatically the democracy, justice and basic representation of the people in Afghanistan. I hope that those people who had doubts about the wisdom of the action that we are undertaking will look at what has been achieved and see that the future is bright not simply for the war against international terrorism but—not before it is due—for the people of Afghanistan.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): To return to the issue of the national health service and the question that I raised with the Prime Minister this time last week, can he for once and all simply clarify for all of us whether it is the policy of his Government to raise NHS spending to the European Union average by 2005, or does that now become an aspiration in the broadest terms, as he sought to describe it on Sunday?

The Prime Minister: Not merely do we stand by that, but it is in our manifesto that we will raise spending to the EU average. With the greatest respect to the right hon. Gentleman, the real issue is whether the health service needs more money in it. We say yes. We also say that it should be provided to the NHS and I think that all other political parties that want to engage in this debate should now state what their position is.

Mr. Kennedy: The position is very clear and widely recognised by all parties. Of course, the health service requires more support, but how does the Prime Minister explain the evidence that the Chancellor's Treasury officials gave yesterday to the Treasury Select Committee? Since the Prime Minister is asking questions, I shall tell him what they said. First, they had no idea what the current level of health expenditure in the European Union is; secondly, they did not know what it would cost in 2005; and thirdly, they did not know how much it would cost to match it. If that is the case, should not the Prime Minister get the Chancellor and the Health Secretary together and give us a coherent policy to give the people the health service that they deserve, not a shambles?

The Prime Minister: First, the right hon. Gentleman is wrong. What cannot be predicted is what other countries spend on their health care system over the next few years; but what we do know is that the European Union average has remained roughly around 8 per cent. over the last decade. In fact, there is one major country in the world which is increasing public spending as a proportion of national income on both health and education, and that is Britain. We are able to do so because of the strength of our economy. If we had taken Liberal Democrat advice over the past few years on our spending plans, we would have interest rates through the roof, we would have national debt doubled again and the country would be in a mess.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Will the Prime Minister review this country's relationship with Iran, following its continued material and financial support for Hamas, which carried out the mass murder of so many Israelis on Saturday and Sunday in Jerusalem and Haifa? Does he consider that having good relations with a terrorist state is an objective with which the Government should not be associated?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to raise the issue of our relationship with countries such as Iran, and I shall tell her exactly what I think. I think it is important that we engage in a process of dialogue, but that dialogue should be based on one clear understanding—that, in the end, there can be no new relationship with countries which, for a variety of reasons, have had a very poor relationship with the western world over the past few years. We want matters to improve, but there can be no new relationship with those countries except on the basis that they cease supporting activities of terrorism.

Q3. [18124] **Mr. Michael Fallon** (Sevenoaks): Has the Prime Minister yet reviewed the ludicrous arrangement that means that nurses in the high-cost areas of Kent and Essex are not entitled to the cost-of-living supplement that applies in Hampshire or Wiltshire? As a result, our hospitals must meet the extra costs of paying for agency nurses and recruiting abroad. Is the right hon. Gentleman happy to have reduced the NHS to the point that hospitals have to fly nurses in, at exactly the same time as they are flying patients out?

The Prime Minister: Of course it is true that we have been able to introduce this new allowance only for people in certain areas. I well understand that people in other areas feel that they would like the same allowance, but I point out to the hon. Gentleman that, before this Government came to office, no additional financial help was available. It is true that we need to make more financial help available to nurses and others, but I am afraid that that once again returns us to the central difference between the Labour and Conservative parties. We believe in investing in the national health service, but the Conservative party's position—very apparent in the debate earlier this week—is to take that money out.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the Children's Society's decision to withdraw, without any consultation, from all its work in Wales, even though it is the largest provider of advocacy services for the most vulnerable children in Wales? Will he join me in condemning the society's action, and will he ask it to reconsider its decision?

The Prime Minister: I understand the concern raised by my hon. Friend. It is a disappointing decision, and I know that discussions are on-going about it. I hope that those discussions can reach a successful conclusion.

Q4. [18125] **Patrick Mercer** (Newark): Violent crime in Newark and Retford has increased disproportionately recently. Will the Prime Minister explain, therefore, why the funding for Nottinghamshire constabulary is to be cut in real terms by £3.1 million?

The Prime Minister: I shall tell the hon. Gentleman exactly the situation with regard to funding, but my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, who is sitting beside me, tells me that the situation described by the hon. Gentleman is not the case. No doubt there is a point there to be elucidated. In general terms, however, the Government have put substantial extra resources into police authorities up and down the country. I remind the hon. Gentleman that that was part of the last comprehensive spending review settlement. We outlined that settlement at the time and put in the extra resources, but the Conservative party called that dangerous and irresponsible.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): The latest league tables show that average performance in primary schools in my constituency has improved by 14 per cent. over the past three years. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating staff and pupils on that achievement? Does he share my view that the £1.9 million allocated to Warwickshire solely for literacy and numeracy will enable those schools to continue that progress in the future?

The Prime Minister: There is massive additional investment going into education. Perhaps one of the most important reports of recent times was the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report on educational standards and achievements across the world, which found British educational achievements to be among the highest anywhere in the world. The fact that we are very near the top of the table in areas such as literacy and numeracy is an enormous tribute to the hard work of teachers up and down the country. It also vindicates entirely the strategy of investment and reform in our education services. The Labour party will certainly continue that strategy in government.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Last week, as the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) said, the Prime Minister said that he had a commitment to spend at the European average of health spending. Over the weekend—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members are shouting down the Leader of the Opposition. That cannot be allowed.

Mr. Duncan Smith: On Sunday, the Prime Minister said that it was a broad aim; today he says that it is a commitment. If it is a commitment, he must know exactly how much it will cost. Will he please tell the House what the extra cost is?

The Prime Minister: It has come to something when the right hon. Gentleman has to recycle his questions from the Leader of the Liberal Democrat party. Yes, it is important that we meet the European average which, as I said a moment ago, over the past decade has remained at roughly 8 per cent. We are committed to raising our health service spending to that European average. I am committed to raising it to that European average which, as I have just said, has been about 8 per cent. over the past decade. Now perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will tell us whether he is committed to it.

Mr. Duncan Smith: People out there do not pay their tax as a percentage; they pay it in real money. Will the Prime Minister now tell the House—*[Interruption.]* Well, it is clear that the Prime Minister makes it up as he goes along. It is a commitment today, a possibility tomorrow, now a percentage; but people on low earnings have to pay for it. Will the Prime Minister please tell us exactly how much this commitment really is, or does he not know?

The Prime Minister: I have just said that we will reach the European average, which is 8 per cent. The difference between us is very clear—we believe that this money should be put into the national health service. Let me tell the House what the shadow Chancellor said about the national health service in a debate this week. He said:

> "The NHS is indeed a Stalinist creation."—*[Official Report*, 3 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 89.]

Conservative Members are all nodding their heads. I assume that it is not a compliment. Later he was asked whether he still guaranteed, as the Conservatives said in their manifesto, a fully comprehensive service, free at the point of use. He said "fully comprehensive" but refused to say that it would remain free at the point of use. We believe in the national health service, free at the point of use. Let the right hon. Gentleman tell us that he does.

Mr. Duncan Smith: We do not need any lectures from the Prime Minister. He is the leader of a party that introduced charging into the health service and he still has charging in the health service. The reality is that the Prime Minister and his Chancellor have spent their time rowing about this over the past week, and the Prime Minister does not have a clue. The Chancellor attacks the Secretary of State for Health when he calls for a hypothecated tax—the Chancellor says that it should not happen. Where does the Prime Minister stand? What is the Prime Minister's view? Will he tell us whether tax will go up, whether spending will go up and by precisely how much?

The Prime Minister: I am not writing the comprehensive spending review, but I can certainly say that it is important that we raise more money for health care in this country—

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): How much?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Bercow, be quiet.

The Prime Minister: That will be a difficult task, Mr. Speaker.

Of course we want extra money spent on the health service. The ludicrous thing about the right hon. Gentleman is that he says that he wants to look at other health care systems. He listed a whole lot of other health care systems in the article he wrote today—*[Interruption.]* This is directly on spending. He listed systems in the Netherlands, France, Germany, Sweden, Australia and New Zealand, all of which he was going to look at. They all have something in common—they make more public spending provision than this country. So if the right hon. Gentleman says that this is his vision of the future, presumably he agrees with us, but we know that he does not. We know that from the article in *The Times* today, written by the Conservative party think tank—advisers to the Conservative party. On the board of that think tank are the shadow Home Secretary, the shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and, yes, the shadow Chancellor. The article is entitled "Abandon the NHS"; they conclude that it will not work. As someone might say, "Ask a Tory question, get a Tory answer".

Phil Hope (Corby): My right hon. Friend will be aware that crime in Corby is coming down, but that the fear of crime—especially among older people and young people—is still too high. Although we are looking forward to measures for police reform and to extra cash for closed circuit television, does my right hon. Friend agree that better street lighting actually raises the confidence of people to go out at night and be confident that their streets will be safe and that they can live in a safer community?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. I think that the new crime and disorder partnerships that were introduced by the Government have made a big difference to fighting crime on the ground, but they need to be taken further. In my view, we also need further measures—especially against antisocial behaviour, which is probably the biggest problem in many of our constituencies up and down the country. For that reason, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will be introducing measures in the criminal justice Bill that will allow us to fight those problems much more effectively in the future.

Q5. [18126] **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): If the Prime Minister wants to increase funding for health, does he agree with his right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) that social insurance schemes should be considered, or does he agree with his Chancellor that they should not?

The Prime Minister: That is very simple. I agree with exactly what the Chancellor said: we want the money—done through general taxation. It is not merely me or the Government who have said that; it is also, for example, the British Medical Association in a report published in February this year, which stated specifically that, on grounds of equity and efficiency, we should have a national health service. With the greatest respect, I do not think the questions need be asked of this side as to where we stand: we stand for extra funding coming into the national health service, allied to reform—fundamental reform. We believe in a national health service free at the point of use. The hon. Gentleman does not need to preface his question by asking me if I am in favour of extra health service spending—I am. The question is: is he?

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): The Prime Minister will know that one of the great concerns that we all share is the low level of participation, especially of our young people, in our democratic process. At the last election, just four in 10 of our 18 to 25-year-olds voted. Will my right hon. Friend make that a priority and will he look at imaginative steps that we can take to try to re-engage our young people in the formal political process?

The Prime Minister: One of the reasons for the establishment of the Electoral Commission was precisely to try to look at how we can widen participation. This is an issue not just for this country, but for other countries. I also think that we need to make it easier for people to participate, but perhaps we all need to go out and explain to people—no matter how they vote—that politics is important and how political decisions affect their lives. We only need look around to see how—after the events of 11 September—political decisions taken by Governments around the world have had a dramatic impact on the lives of people in this country and elsewhere.

Q6. [18127] **Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford): Can the Prime Minister confirm that if any member of his Government is found guilty of doing a McLeish they will also lose their job?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman has any specific allegations, let him make them, rather than leaving a general smear hanging in the air.

Q7. [18128] **Mr. Neil Gerrard** (Walthamstow): Our Government played a very important part in setting up the global AIDS and health fund. Is the Prime Minister aware that so far only £1.5 billion has been pledged to that fund, compared with the £7 billion to £10 billion that Kofi Annan said was needed annually; and that some poor countries, such as Uganda, have actually made bigger contributions, relative to their wealth, than many richer countries? Will the Prime Minister consider, first, increasing our contribution; secondly, doing what he can to encourage other western Governments to contribute more; and, finally, encouraging major British companies to contribute in the same way that some big American companies have done?

The Prime Minister: We certainly want to encourage greater private sector influence and commitment; indeed, I have held meetings with private sector companies on this issue. We are committed—as Britain—to about $200 million for that global health fund. The overall fund is $1.8 billion. Obviously, it is true that at the moment we have not spent all that, but that is probably for good reasons as well as bad—in part to ensure that any money we spend actually goes to the people who need it and that it is properly used. I can assure my hon. Friend that our commitment is absolute; we have shown that, by having—in a sense—led the argument over the past few years. If we can do more, we will

Q8. [18129] **Miss Ann Widdecombe** (Maidstone and The Weald): I am aware that the Prime Minister has been asked this before, but there was so much noise that I did not happen to get the answer. How much will it cost him to achieve his ambition of reaching the European average on health expenditure by 2005? The question is how much, and the answer is . . . ?

The Prime Minister: The answer is as I gave a moment or two ago—*[Interruption.]* Yes, I am afraid it is. We will meet the European average, and we will do so because we believe in putting extra resources into the national health service. As I said, when the comprehensive spending review is published, the right hon. Lady will see that the Government are committed to putting more money into the health service, and it will be obvious that, whatever sums of money we put in, she and the Conservative party are committed to taking them out.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there are 22,700 pensioners in my constituency, many of whom have small occupational pensions and will be delighted with last week's announcement that their attempts to save throughout their lives will be rewarded rather than harmed; but will he and his colleagues make every effort to ensure that every pensioner in this country claims every single penny that they are entitled to, so that we can say goodbye to pensioner poverty for ever?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that pension measures—the minimum income guarantee, for example, helps the poorest pensioners—are there for all pensioners: the guarantees that were given by the Chancellor in his statement last week, the free TV licences for the over-75s and the winter allowance, which, of course, the Conservatives refused to introduce and still oppose. In respect of all those measures, we will help all pensioners and those who are poorest. The pension credit allows us also to help people who have modest savings but who often find that those savings do not actually help them to gain a proper income in retirement. It will allow us to do that and will benefit something like 5.5 million pensioners.

Q9. [18130] **Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Prime Minister will know that, since February of this year, the Strategic Rail Authority was instructed to put on hold the choosing of a franchisee for Welsh railways. We have had 10 months of damaging delay and services going down—10 months of damaging economic anxiety. Will the right hon. Gentleman please have a word with the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions; otherwise he will have to find somewhere else to bury some bad news?

The Prime Minister: Of course it is important that the decision is taken. I will certainly ensure that my right hon. Friend is aware of what the hon. Gentleman has said, but I cannot give him the date now.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): How easy, in the Prime Minister's view, will it be for Yasser Arafat to hunt down and hand over the terrorists responsible for the 25 brutal murders in Israel when he and his security infrastructure are being bombed by the Israelis, and the Americans are failing actively to call for restraint?

The Prime Minister: First, I should express sympathy—I know on behalf of the whole House—for the savage acts of terrorism that killed so many innocent Israelis just a short time ago. It is important in my view that the Palestinian Authority does everything it possibly can to ensure that those in the organisations responsible for those attacks are rounded up and put under proper lock and key. That is the very minimum that the international community needs to see from the Palestinian Authority. Although there may be difficulties in certain areas in the authority acting in that way, it is necessary that it does so, and it must show that it is doing everything possible to ensure that those responsible for those atrocities are withdrawn from their population and put, as I say, under proper lock and key.

Q10. [18131] **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): Does the Prime Minister recall that when he came to our local hospital during the recent election he made two predictions? First, he predicted that Labour would hold North-West Norfolk. Secondly, he predicted that, if Labour won, the health service would get better. Is he aware that that latter prediction has a very hollow ring for my constituent Mr. Andrew Gray of Ringstead, who, having waited in pain for 16 months for a hernia operation, has had it cancelled not once, not twice, but four times? Does not he owe an answer to Mr. Gray? Will he answer also the question posed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe)?

The Prime Minister: Of course it is wrong that the hon. Gentleman's constituent should have had his operation cancelled. It is correct, however, that 19 out of 20 operations are actually done within the time that they are supposed to be done. What is more, now some 70 per cent. are done within three months. I do not know the exact circumstances of the hon. Gentleman's constituent, but I know that that constituent could not possibly be placed in a better position as a result of the Conservative party's proposals, which are to force people to pay for their operations.

I have to say to Conservative Members that this debate about the national health service and how it is funded will go on from now until the next general election. The truth is that the money going into the health service has actually improved it. We need to do much more and we will do much more. Every single change that we have made on extra resources has been opposed by them. If they were given the chance to run our health service again, people would be forced to pay for their operations. That will never happen under this Government and this party.

Q11. [18132] **Tony Wright** (Cannock Chase): Does the Prime Minister know of any public institution apart from this one where the people who are regulated have the ability to choose and dismiss the person who regulates them?

The Prime Minister: It is for this House to decide how the Commissioner is appointed, who that Commissioner is and the terms of that appointment. I have to say to my hon. Friend and to some Opposition Members that, if the House wishes to change the rules, the measures lie with the House itself. A House of Commons Commission was established with Members of all political parties on it, including the Conservative party's Chief Whip. If people want to change the rules, they are perfectly entitled to do so. However, just because my hon. Friend thinks it is right to change them, that does not mean to say that it is. It is for the House as a whole to decide.

Middle East

3.32 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife) (*by private notice*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Government policy in the light of recent events in the middle east.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for asking this private notice question.

I am sure that I speak for the whole House in expressing once again the shock and anger that I felt when I heard the news on Saturday night and on Sunday morning of the series of terrorist atrocities in Jerusalem and in Haifa, in north Israel. These atrocities killed at least 25 and injured more than 180 people. They came on top of a series of other terrorist attacks that have caused many deaths and that, in turn, have put the people of Israel in fear of going about their normal lives.

On Sunday, I spoke by telephone to Shimon Peres, the Israeli Foreign Minister, and then to President Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. To Mr. Peres, I expressed my sincere condolences and those of Her Majesty's Government. To President Arafat, I stressed the imperative that the Palestinian Authority now properly detains terrorist suspects in Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other groups, and the imperative of the need for him to take other action to remove the continuing threat that terrorists pose to the stability of the whole region.

Israel is entitled to take steps to ensure its security. Our approach to the peace process has been well set out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and by myself, including in my address to the General Assembly of the United Nations on 11 November. We have backed fully the initiative set out by the United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell, on 19 November, and his appointment of General Zinni and Ambassador Burns as US envoys to the region.

Although the situation is grave—indeed, precisely because it is—the case for peace remains as strong as ever. We in the United Kingdom and in Her Majesty's Government stand ready to do all that we can to help the parties to resume substantive dialogue and to bring about the swift and full implementation of the Tenet and Mitchell committee recommendations. Distant and difficult though that aspiration may appear, we work towards a day when two states—Israel and Palestine—live peacefully together within secure and recognised borders, as called for by Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Campbell: In the spirit of the day, I draw attention to an entry in the Register of Members' Interests against my name in relation to the Liberal Democrat middle east council.

May I begin by sharing the expression of sympathy that the Foreign Secretary gave, not only to the Israeli community but, of course, to the Palestinian community as well? Even though it appears that the middle east is staring into the abyss, does he agree that it is necessary urgently to restate two cardinal principles: first, that Israel is entitled to live in peace and security within its boundaries; and, secondly, that the Palestinians are entitled to justice and a viable homeland, as both the Prime Minister and President Bush have said in recent weeks, although, unhappily perhaps, not in the past 72 hours?

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that whatever President Arafat's faults, and they are by no means negligible, it is wholly unreasonable to equate him with Osama bin Laden? Does he also agree that to target Arafat personally, or to encourage others to do so, will have grave consequences in the middle east, both in moderate and in radical states, and not least for the coalition against terrorism, which may simply fall apart?

Finally, whatever violence may be committed against the people of Israel and whatever military action may be taken against the Palestinians, is it not the case—as I think the right hon. Gentleman has acknowledged—that sooner or later dialogue will have to resume? Does he agree that that dialogue is much more likely to succeed if President Arafat makes serious, sustained and credible efforts to apprehend terrorists, and Israel, in return, exercises restraint and orders an immediate cessation of the policy of the expansion of settlements, which causes so much discontent and creates an atmosphere in which Hamas and Islamic Jihad can flourish?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his remarks, and express my sympathy for his current condition. I agree with what he said about peace, security, justice and a viable homeland. Indeed, I said exactly that in my remarks. As for equating President Arafat with Osama bin Laden, that is not a description that I or any member of the British Government has used or would use. There are many criticisms of President Arafat, but he is the head of the Palestinian Authority and needs to be recognised as such.

My criticism of President Arafat and the Palestinian Authority is that they have not done sufficient to pick up the terrorists. I have had many conversations with President Arafat and other members of the Palestinian Authority. Their good intentions are not in doubt, but there is a failure to take action on the ground to pick up those terrorists who are known to them and everyone else. Those people have no love whatsoever for the Palestinian Authority, any more than they do for peace in Israel, the occupied territories and the middle east in general.

Even at this late hour, it is essential that President Arafat and the Palestinian Authority, in recognising the gravity of the situation, take action to pick up those known terrorists and terrorist suspects, not just to arrest them, but to detain them securely and in circumstances in which the international community and Israel can see that they are detained securely.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): We in the Opposition are horrified and outraged by the recent bombings in Israel. Only today, we heard of six more innocent civilians injured and, as the right hon. Gentleman stated, 25 young people were killed and many more critically injured on Sunday. Our thoughts are very much with the families of all those who have suffered so grievously since the intifada started. We hope that those who suffer in that way will, at some stage, feel a greater sense of security.

Does the Foreign Secretary agree that no matter how difficult or even impossible the current position, it has never been more imperative to create the conditions for negotiations to start, based on the Mitchell process, and that, ultimately, going back to the Mitchell process is the only way to make progress? Does he agree that it is essential that Chairman Arafat and the Palestinian authorities ensure not only that those who are responsible for the terrorist outrages are swiftly detained and securely imprisoned, but that they are not quickly released, as has happened all too often in the past?

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the terrible impact of these events is to undermine economic structures in Israel, the west bank and Gaza, creating a vicious cycle of unemployment and deprivation that simply exacerbates the problems? Does he share our view that the continuing crisis might undermine not only the coalition partnership in Israel and the stability of the Israeli Government, but the personal position of Chairman Arafat, and that that is yet another reason why the violence and bloodshed must end? If the right hon. Gentleman, working through international organisations and other bodies and through the offices of our Government, can bring any influence to bear on that tragic situation, he will have our fullest support.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks on behalf of his party. I think that I covered most of his points in my previous answer. The Tenet and Mitchell reports set out a clear framework, agreed by both sides, for progressing from the current position to one of relative peace, and thence to longer-term negotiations.

One of the many individual tragedies in the continuing tragedy that has befallen the region is that there was yet another window of hope following Secretary of State Colin Powell's speech on 19 November and his appointment of General Zinni and Ambassador Burns to take a hands-on approach to carrying forward the process. Yet again, extremists—in this case, on the Palestinian side—have exercised what in practice amounts to a veto on the process, blocking it for the time being. That makes it all the more important that such people, who kill innocent people and are negligent of people on their own side being killed, are locked up and detained for as long as is necessary, not released quickly.

On the issue of political instability, we have seen time and again that the cycle of violence produces great instability and makes it all the harder for those who recognise that the long-term future of their region lies in peace to be heard.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Does my right hon. Friend understand that most of the young people who decide to give up their lives in such a way are born into occupation, live all their lives under occupation, and, with their families, suffer the daily humiliation of the extremes of occupation? At some stage, the Israelis have to get back to the negotiating table, but they will not do so as long as they are using their military might—Israel is the fourth or fifth ranked military power in the world—against a mainly unarmed civilian population. At some stage, the Israelis have to be told to restrain their military forces; otherwise, there can be no peace.

Mr. Straw: I understand how strongly my hon. Friend feels. I hope that he, in turn, understands that throughout our years in office we have tried to be even-handed in the pursuit of peace. However, it is impossible to excuse the use of suicide bombers. Recent UK history has many instances of explanations being offered for various terrorist outrages on both sides of the Irish sea, but whatever the motives or background of those who committed the atrocities, one simple, terrible fact remained: innocent people were killed and that was wholly unjustified.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): The Foreign Secretary will command widespread support for the tenor of his remarks. Will he use Britain's undoubted influence in the region, especially at this stage, in the face of appalling provocation of the Israeli Government, to distinguish between targeted action against the terrorists, which is completely justified and with which no one can quarrel, and reprisals pure and simple, which cannot be justified and perpetuate the cycle of violence?

Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that there is now a question mark over whether Yasser Arafat is still a viable partner in the peace process? Either he has the ability to control and influence, and to stop these dreadful outrages taking place, in which case he is wilfully culpable for not doing so, or he is incapable of exercising that influence and control, in which case he is not much use.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his remarks. He makes an important point about the difference between targeted action and untargeted reprisals. I will ensure that his remarks are drawn to the attention of the Government of Israel. They are important.

In some ways, I wish that the position of President Arafat were as simple as the right hon. Gentleman suggests. However, it is not, as ever, in the occupied territories of the middle east. The simple fact is that President Arafat is the elected senior representative of the people from the occupied territories, and it is a matter for those people, and not for us, to determine who their representative is. Meanwhile, it is fair for us to point to failures by the Palestinian Authority to meet its international obligations to the state of Israel, which it has recognised, and its people. In my judgment, in failing to do so, it has failed, in turn, properly to protect its own people.

Mr. Fabian Hamilton (Leeds, North-East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that while we should condemn the Israeli military attacks personally on Chairman Arafat, we should recognise that he often speaks with one voice in English to the outside world and with another voice in Arabic to his own people? Until he speaks with the same voice to both his own people and the outside world, there can be no return to the peace table.

Mr. Straw: I speak only a few words of Arabic, and I shall not try them out now. My hon. Friend knows well that any remarks made by President Arafat in Arabic can be translated quickly into English. All the important statements that he makes at his press conferences are in Arabic and not English, as I and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister know, having been alongside him on such occasions. I do not think that there is a great deal in that point. However, it is important that we see action taken by the Palestinian Authority to detain those who are causing outrages and who are daily flouting and challenging the authority of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that however great the injustice that has

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

been done to the Palestinians—it is a very great injustice—absolutely nothing can excuse the sort of behaviour that we have seen in the past few days? Does he agree also that this cycle of violence must end and that the European Union, sovereign Governments and America must bring every ounce of influence that they have to bear to secure a ceasefire?

In wholly endorsing the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) about reprisals, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that until there is a ceasefire no process can begin, and that without a process there is no possible hope of the end of these wicked activities? Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore agree to speak to his colleagues in the United States of America to ensure that the most severe pressure is brought on both the parties to this dispute for an immediate ceasefire?

Mr. Straw: I shall see Secretary Colin Powell tomorrow in Brussels. This afternoon, I shall speak to, among others, Hubert Vedrine and Joschka Fischer, the French and German Foreign Ministers, with the precise aim of achieving what the hon. Gentleman wisely set out. I agree with him, with just one caveat. I agree that no serious peace process can begin until there is a ceasefire, but we need a process to achieve a ceasefire, and need it rapidly. Although that is difficult, I hope that General Zinni and Ambassador Burns will be able to assist with it.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is it not clear that the terrorists responsible for Saturday's atrocities—crimes against humanity, as the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) has just said—have no regrets about the Israeli military retaliation because they believe that it will deepen the anger of the Palestinians and create a breeding ground for terrorism? Will my right hon. Friend take up the point about the United States? Is it not clear that the one country that can have some influence on both Israel and the Palestinian Authority, but especially Israel, is the United States? Every effort should be made by the United States to bring about a viable Palestinian state, which, while it will not eliminate terrorism—no one has any illusions about that—will certainly help to undermine terrorism in that area.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right that the terrorists who caused the outrages—and, even more so, those behind them who did not volunteer as suicide bombers and continue to organise those outrages—have no regrets about the loss of civilian life or the provocation to Israel. However, I am afraid that that cannot lead us to assert that Israel should do nothing in response to those threats. There were plenty of occasions when we were fighting Irish terrorism when extremists in the Provisional IRA and others deliberately sought to provoke a reaction from the British Government and security forces; we had to make a proportionate reaction, but we had to react properly.

The United States should be commended by both sides of the House for the efforts that President Bush and Secretary Powell have made since 11 September and, indeed, before that date. The Tenet and Mitchell reports were produced well before 11 September, but there has been an acceleration of effort since then, with the important statement by President Bush in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly on 10 November, followed nine days later by Secretary Powell's speech, which led to the appointment of General Zinni and Ambassador Burns. I know that the United States is ready to do everything that it can, but it believes, as we do, that the first steps out of the terrible situation must be taken by the Palestinian Authority to ensure that those terrorist suspects from Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other groups are locked up and stay locked up.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I associate my party and our colleagues in the Scottish National party with the condemnation of the atrocities and the sympathy expressed in the House to those who have suffered on all sides. The Foreign Secretary will be aware that the Israeli Government are seeking to make a direct comparison between their actions at the moment and those of the western coalition against terrorists in Afghanistan. Will he take the opportunity to reject that comparison and remind us both of the peace process that has taken place as a result of hard work in the middle east and the need to return to that process? Does he also accept that the Palestinian Authority's failures, of which there have been many in the past, are manifest, but that there is no viable alternative for the Israeli Government other than to discuss and negotiate with President Arafat and the Palestinian Authority?

Mr. Straw: In all terrorist situations, there are differences in the discrete causes, but there are also similarities. I am afraid that the most dreadful similarity is that innocent people end up getting killed. Action that needs to be taken will vary; plainly, given the scale of events on 11 September, that action was different from the action required in the middle east.

As to viable alternatives, everybody in Israel, the occupied territories and the region who supports a peaceful future for the middle east understands what needs to be done. It is all there, in Tenet and Mitchell. It is laid out in great detail in Secretary Powell's speech. Working out what ought to be done is the easy part; ensuring that it is done is the more difficult part. I come back to my point that if there is to be a pathway first to a ceasefire, and then to peace in the middle east, President Arafat and the Palestinian Authority must take action now—today—to lock up those terrorist suspects.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Since any onslaught would make an appalling situation even worse, may we take it that the British Government are doing everything possible to deter certain Americans from the folly of attacking Iraq?

Mr. Straw: I have set out before, as has the Prime Minister, our approach to the situation in Iraq. I was pleased that we achieved a much better roll-over resolution to United Nations Security Council resolution 1284, which is the current sanctions resolution, with a clear undertaking from Russia that there would be an enhanced sanctions regime with a proper goods review list within the next six months. The key to Iraq coming back into the civilised world is for Iraq to implement the undertakings imposed on it by the UN Security Council resolutions, including the re-admission of weapons inspectors. I say strongly to my hon. Friend that Iraq continues to pose a very serious threat to Arab states, as well as to the state of Israel, by its continued unlawful development of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): What impact does the Foreign Secretary think the continuous building of Israeli settlements on Arab territories is having on moderate Arab opinion in this ghastly period? Does he think that it makes the task of the Palestinian authorities any easier when attacks are made on the police, police barracks and those who are supposed to be in authority? Is not Israel in a cleft stick, in that if it takes such action, it weakens the very authority that it is inviting to take tougher action against extremists?

Mr. Straw: Successive United Kingdom Governments have said that they do not agree with the building of settlements inside the occupied territories. The future of those settlements must be one part of any peace process, but to get there—to achieve a sense of justice for the Palestinians, alongside what is equally and desperately needed: a sense of peace and security for Israelis—there must be an end to the violence, terrorism and vetoes on any kind of peace process. That requires of the Palestinian Authority the kind of action that I described.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the deaths of innocent Jewish teenagers at the hands of Palestinian terrorists, and the deaths of innocent Palestinian teenagers—of whom we might have heard a little more this afternoon—at the hands of the Israeli army, are both parts of the terrible tit-for-tat that is going on in what is called the holy land?

Will my right hon. Friend bear it in mind that the Labour party members of the Israeli Cabinet walked out of the Cabinet meeting that decided that the Palestinian Authority was an entity that supports terrorism and must be dealt with accordingly? Will he bear it in mind that Yossi Beilin, the ex-Labour Minister who was the architect of the Oslo accord, wrote yesterday in the Israeli newspaper *Yediot Aharonot:*

> "The war that Sharon is planning . . . will push us many years away from the chance of leading a normal life"?

Will my right hon. Friend bear it in mind that a Labour Member of the Israeli Parliament, Colette Avital, a former ambassador to Portugal, said yesterday:

> "Bombarding targets associated personally with Arafat is not fighting against terrorism. If we topple Arafat, are we ready to reoccupy all those territories and be again the masters of all those Palestinians?"

Should not this Labour Government be listening to those Labour voices from Israel?

Mr. Straw: We certainly listen to those Labour voices. I spoke directly to Shimon Peres on Sunday in answer to a phone call. I can think of no one who has sought more to secure peace in Israel and the occupied territories, but his mood was one of gloom and despair about the way in which these terrorists had undermined his efforts on the path to peace. My right hon. Friend asked me by implication whether we share the view expressed by Prime Minister Sharon, which is that the Palestinian Authority is an entity that supports terrorism. As I made clear earlier, that is not a description that we have ever used or would use. At the same time—I shall labour the point—it is extremely important that the Palestinian Authority does more to contain the terrorists who are operating from within the occupied territories. As it does more in that respect, any suggestions that it is supporting terrorism will dissolve.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): When does the Foreign Secretary believe that Palestine will be able to exist within secure and recognised boundaries?

Mr. Straw: I do not think that it is possible for anybody to put a time scale on that. It depends on when it is possible for the good people on both sides to exert power and come together to work on Tenet and Mitchell and then on a proper peace process. As I said, what needs to be done is pretty straightforward, but getting there is much more difficult.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I am not aware of any hon. Member who has sought to excuse the suicide bombings at the weekend or subsequently. They deserve to be condemned.

May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to an e-mail that I received today from somebody in Wadi Fouquin, a Palestinian village next to the Israeli border? Its road has been cut off and people cannot get in or out. The writer of the e-mail referred to a pregnant woman who may go into labour, but the village has no clinic and the people there simply do not know where or whether she will be able to have her baby safely. We need to say to the Israelis very clearly that the action that they are taking is disproportionate and is punishing a people collectively, which is against the Geneva convention. If we are to ask President Arafat to crack down on terrorists among the Palestinians, bombing the very security apparatus that could achieve that result is not a good way to go about doing so.

Mr. Straw: The Palestinian people have suffered grievously since the territories were occupied and they continue to suffer. As many of my hon. Friends and Opposition Members have pointed out, a large number of entirely innocent deaths have occurred among Palestinians as well; indeed, a greater number of deaths have occurred. None the less, we must recognise that in the past six months, the Israeli Government have taken steps to work towards a peaceful solution. Yes, I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes. There have been two recent windows for progress. Tourism Minister Zeevi was assassinated after a period of quiet that had lasted 10 days. The process was disrupted, after which there was continuing lower-level violence. Now there is a situation in which, notwithstanding the Powell speech on 19 November, the appointment of Zinni and Burns and the existence of a better prospect than there has been for many months of a process leading back towards Tenet and Mitchell, that effort and those chances and hopes have been vetoed again by terrorists. Any state that is in that situation is bound to take action—yes, proportionate action—to deal with it.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): In most certainly not condoning Israel's ill-targeted reprisals after the weekend's wicked events, may I nevertheless ask the Foreign Secretary whether he can confirm that Hamas is largely funded by sources in Iran, and, if that is so,

[Mr. Andrew MacKay]

what action we are taking against those sources and the Government of Iran, as a leading member of the international coalition against terrorism?

Mr. Straw: I shall write to the right hon. Gentleman with the information that is publicly available about exact sources of finance for Hamas and other terrorist organisations. In Prime Minister's questions, my right hon. Friend answered a question about whether we should have better relations with Iran, notwithstanding some of the associations that have been mentioned. I share the Prime Minister's view that we are better able to achieve peace in the region by dialogue. I visited Iran twice in the past three months, and I make no apology for that. On my first visit in particular, I spoke to the Iranian Government about what we believe to be their support for terrorist organisations elsewhere in the middle east. That dialogue and engagement must continue.

John Austin (Erith and Thamesmead): Although we must be even-handed in our condemnation of indiscriminate acts of violence that kill innocent civilians, whether by Islamic Jihad, Hamas or the Israeli state, is it right to base our foreign policy on even-handedness when one of the most powerful and heavily armed states in the world occupies its neighbour in contravention of international law and United Nations resolutions? With hindsight, does my right hon. Friend believe that we were wrong to abstain on the proposal for an international peace force—a protection force—earlier this year and that the United States was wrong to veto it? Does he agree that we might not be in our current predicament if that force had been established? Will he reconsider the matter now?

Mr. Straw: I make no apology to my hon. Friend for trying to be even-handed in my approach to foreign policy. That does not mean that one produces an equally balanced statement every day; it depends on the exact circumstances. However, if even-handedness means securing the objective of the people of the state of Israel living in peace and security alongside a viable state of Palestine, which also enjoys peace and security, I plead guilty to it. Such an approach is the only way to achieve peace in the region.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I congratulate the Foreign Secretary on the fairness and consistency of his statement and answers today. I remind him and the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (John Austin) that when a United Nations force was ordered out in 1967, a chain of events began with threats to Israel and culminated in the occupation of what are today the occupied territories.

The Foreign Secretary correctly differentiates between the actions of bin Laden and Arafat. However, perhaps a better parallel is between the actions of bin Laden's suicide bombers and those of Hamas's suicide bombers. When we consider the measures that we have taken against bin Laden, is not it correct that similarly tough measures against Hamas and its suicide bombers should be undertaken by the one democratic state in the area: Israel?

Mr. Straw: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, one of the most striking features of the middle east conflict is the extent to which people can be partisan even in their analysis. It is almost impossible to find a single work that presents both sides of the argument fairly. Like the Irish question or the Kashmir question, one can argue about the matter for ever and a day. Who cast the first stone? It depends on one's point of view. In all those conflicts, many stones have subsequently been cast and we must end that in the interests of the people concerned.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, it is neither appropriate nor helpful to try to compare one group of terrorists to another. I repeat that if one is killed or maimed by a suicide bomber, it does not matter whether that person was ordered to act by bin Laden or Hamas; the victim is still dead or injured. When I was Home Secretary, I proposed to the House that the military wings of Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah and Hamas, among other terrorist organisations, should be proscribed. The House agreed to that.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): We all condemn the appalling atrocities that took place on Sunday, and acknowledge that Palestine needs to do more to tackle the problem of terrorists operating from within Palestine. The difference, however, between those atrocities and the excessive reprisals taking place from Israel is that those reprisals are being carried out officially by the state of Israel. We must remember that at all times. Does this not make it much more difficult for us to open the window of opportunity and get back to where we were last year, when a negotiated settlement was within reach? Since then, violence has escalated, and it has become increasingly difficult to keep that window of opportunity open.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right to assert that the cycle of violence that has taken place, particularly since the intifada began on 28 September last year, has made restraint more elusive on both sides. We all wish to see restraint. It has also led to the circumstances described my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), in which those who seek to be a moderating or restraining element in the politics of Israel or the Palestinian Authority have less authority than before.

My hon. Friend is also correct to say that an important opportunity to secure lasting peace was missed last year, and that what has unfolded since has its origins in the failure to achieve a settlement at that stage.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Surely we must urge restraint on both sides even-handedly—as has been said—and recognise that for a state to commit indiscriminate acts of reprisal and revenge can be just as morally reprehensible as terrorism, and can provoke escalating violence. Will the Government seek diplomatically to impress on our US allies that for some members of the Administration to make partisan or inflammatory statements can only exacerbate the conflict, undermine the international coalition against terrorism and endanger world security?

Mr. Straw: Of course everybody wishes to see restraint exercised and action taken proportionately—a point made by the right hon. Member for Horsham earlier—and properly targeted. We must also recognise, however, that a proportionate response is determined by the proportion of the outrage that occurs before it. That is the difficulty that we face in this situation.

So far as United States policy is concerned, I tend to follow the official statements of Secretary Powell and President Bush, rather than newspaper reports of what somebody is supposed to have said to somebody else. So far as the official statements of Secretary Powell and President Bush are concerned, they have my full support and the full support of Her Majesty's Government.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): While condemning absolutely the suicide attacks in Jerusalem and Haifa at the weekend, may I ask my right hon. Friend what pressure the British Government can bring to bear on the Israeli Government to withdraw from the west bank and Gaza, as demanded officially by the United Nations in 1967?

Mr. Straw: As President Bush spelled out in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly, we are all seeking a secure and safe state of Israel, operating within internationally and regionally recognised borders alongside a viable state of Palestine, in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions. All of us in the international community subscribe to the implementation of those resolutions, but to get to what is laid out in resolution 242—and subsequent resolutions—requires action on the ground by the parties. I have suggested to the House today how some of that action might be achieved.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that the perpetrators—and their backers—of the continuing atrocities against Israeli citizens are people who want the elimination of Israel, rather than a just solution to the conflict on the basis of two secure and viable states?

Does my right hon. Friend recall that a year ago it was the Palestinians who walked out of negotiations? Does he feel that the continuing messages of hate broadcast by the Palestinian Authority and taught in Palestinian schools over the years, including recent months and weeks, provide some justification for Israelis' fears that they are now fighting for their existence, not for a just solution based on Israel and Palestine?

Mr. Straw: I accept what my hon. Friend says: almost all those who are behind, and claim to speak for, the suicide bombers, and other terrorists, want Israel to be eliminated. That cannot happen; it must not happen. It is completely inconsistent with any sense of humanity, and with international law.

As for what happened last year, there are many arguments about who did what, and who caused the negotiations to fail. All I know is that, according to what I have seen, they came within an ace of success—and if they had succeeded, the conditions of the people of Israel and those in the occupied territories would be very much better.

I also accept what my hon. Friend said about the way in which children in some areas of the middle east are being incited with parodies of Israel, although I must add that a measure of restraint should be exercised in regard to similar things that have been said by some Israeli politicians.

It is the Palestinian Authority that has signed up to a proper recognition of the state of Israel, and we look to it to put that recognition into effect.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): My right hon. Friend said that Israel had a right to take steps to protect its security. Does he accept that its long-standing policy of the targeting and assassination of Palestinian activists simply cannot be justified? While no one seeks to excuse suicide bombers, was not the Government of Israel's deliberate choice to assassinate a well-known Hamas leader just before the arrival of the American peace envoys guaranteed to provoke a violent response of some sort, to continue the cycle of violence, and to prompt a suspicion that it was designed to do precisely that?

Mr. Straw: I have condemned such killings in the past when I have felt it justified, in the terms used by my hon. Friend, and I shall continue to do so when it is appropriate. US Secretary of State Colin Powell has done the same. I understand what my hon. Friend is saying; but what we—Members on both sides of the House—must do is ensure that one act of violence is not excused by what happened immediately before it.

There was no excuse for the terrorism that took place at the weekend. Had it not taken place, there would have been a good prospect of Zinni and Burns being able to restart the peace process. The result of its taking place was the understandable reaction of people in Israel, described by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman). It greatly increased the levels of fear in Israel, which are already palpable and which mean that many people in Israel simply cannot go about their normal lives as they would wish. Their children cannot go to school without being worried that they will be killed. Similarly, there is a cycle of fear and suffering in the occupied territories.

We must say to those who are triggering the violence that they have to stop. As I have said, we must also say to the Palestinian Authority that it must take steps to apprehend, arrest and detain for a long time the terrorists who are causing these atrocities, while asking the people and Government of Israel to show a proportionate response in the face of such huge provocation.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): May I pursue the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman)? Is my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary as concerned as Shimon Peres appears to be about the dangers inherent in what is now the potential collapse of the Palestinian Authority? If so, will he communicate his concerns to Mr. Sharon?

Mr. Straw: Yes, I have made clear our opinion on the Palestinian Authority. President Arafat is the elected constitutional head of the people in the occupied territories, and we believe that it is important that, as long as he enjoys the confidence of the people of the occupied territories and of the Palestinian Authority, he should remain in that position and we should deal with him. However, that is in no sense to justify some of the Palestinian Authority's failures, as I have spelled out today.

Speaker's Statement

4.20 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have a short statement to make to the House on the letter of 28 November from the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards to me as Chairman of the House of Commons Commission. It is a matter of great regret to me that a private letter written by an Officer of the House to the Speaker should have reached the media in this manner, and I have asked for inquiries to be made into how it has come about. As to the letter's contents, I will be writing to the Commissioner for Standards to ask her for details of the pressure that she says was applied to her in seeking to carry out her duties. I will also be expressing my surprise that she did not raise those concerns with me at one of our regular meetings to discuss her work. I shall have nothing to add to this statement.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will take points of order after the statement on police reform.

Police Reform

4.21 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): With permission, I shall make a statement on police reform and on tackling crime and antisocial behaviour.

There is not an hon. Member who would not testify that the greatest priority of their constituents is to live free from crime and antisocial behaviour. Freeing people from fear and insecurity that damages their quality of life is a fundamental tenet of government. I am, therefore, placing before the House a radical reform agenda for both the police service and those who work alongside it. It is time to act to protect the victims of crime and disorder, and to help rebuild and renew communities.

I pay tribute to the professionalism and expertise of police and the civilian staff working with them. We all owe a debt of gratitude for the bravery that is often displayed by policemen and women. Our reform agenda will build on success. The British crime survey recently recorded an overall decrease in crime of 12 per cent. That is the largest annual reduction in 20 years, and the fear of crime has decreased from its peak, in 1994. There is, however, no room for complacency.

Modernisation is built on increasing police numbers, and by next spring we shall have reached an all-time record of 128,290. Today, I am able to announce a new commitment: to meet the target of 130,000 officers by spring 2003 one year early. That will be achieved alongside an increase in civilian staff who will be additional to uniformed officers.

Action is needed, however, to improve consistency and overall performance. Only one in four recorded crimes are detected, and only one in 10 result in a conviction. The variations across the country are unacceptable, and the time has come to tackle the differences in performance and in absence. Detection rates vary from a high of 63 per cent. to a low of 15 per cent. For robbery, the rate varies from a low of less than 15 per cent. to more than 50 per cent. One force achieved as few as eight days per officer lost through sickness, but another had twice that rate. One force achieved a medical retirement rate of 9 per cent., but in another almost two thirds retired on grounds of ill health.

We have established a standards unit to work alongside a refocused inspectorate. That will ensure that the best can be replicated by the rest. A new central police training and development authority will draw together leadership, management and training. A new national centre for policing excellence will develop and disseminate best practice on investigation and operational policing. We will seek to improve personnel policies, and will establish a new locally delivered national occupational health service.

To achieve the goal of safer communities, there must be a dramatic modernisation of working practices. Through the police negotiating board, we are seeking consensus on a programme of change and reform. We wish to ensure that those at the sharp end of public service are properly rewarded for the difficult job that they do. We are looking to enhance the status and rewards for those doing the most dangerous, difficult, or unsociable jobs. We want to see more flexible working arrangements and an end to unnecessarily restrictive regulations. The police negotiating board has been asked to agree changes to part-time working, the current 16-hour minimum, and the requirement to fix rotas a year in advance.

Reform must be underpinned by support. We will cut bureaucracy and halve the number of best value indicators. The diary of a police officer illustrated that over two fifths of police time was spent inside the station. We will civilianise and computerise many of the tasks undertaken by those who would be better deployed out of the station. We will increase the number of specialist investigatory teams, develop a cadre of specialist detectives and accelerate the expansion of forensic work.

Technology can also play a key role in enabling officers to do their job more effectively. The Airwave programme will now be extended across the country at a cost of £500 million, ensuring proper communication within and between forces. We will widen the number of those who can work with and assist the uniformed police. The number of special constables will be drastically accelerated. Community support officers—sometimes called auxiliaries—will be trained aides to the police. The expanded "police family" will allow street wardens, traffic wardens and others to be accredited by the police for specific duties within strictly defined limits. They will be appropriately trained.

Our endeavour is to face down the antisocial and thuggish behaviour that bedevils our streets, parks and open spaces. That will help with our civic renewal agenda, ensuring that the community becomes part of the solution. The police cannot reduce crime and disorder and tackle the scourge of hard drugs alone. Families have a key part to play in teaching right from wrong, and respect for others. Local authorities, schools and the health service, and the voluntary and private sectors, must work together. All of us have a role to play in combating criminal activity and social disintegration: decency and respect are the responsibility of us all.

It is through the crime and disorder reduction partnerships and our community renewal programmes that we will be able to restore confidence. By supporting neighbourhood watch and other local initiatives, and mobilising the community itself, we really can make a difference.

Reform is for a purpose. Those we represent do not have a choice of policing services. That is why standards are at the heart of this reform. I am proposing today a three-tier approach to ensuring that the public are served to the standard they expect and deserve. Regulations setting out mandatory requirements, where it is necessary for all forces to adhere to a national standard, will drive consistency across the country. Codes of practice will be issued by and in the name of the Home Secretary. Those will be developed by the national centre for policing excellence, drawing on the expertise of the Association of Chief Police Officers. In addition, guidance, where local flexibility and responsiveness require a light touch, will provide a menu of best practice.

There is no intention that the Government will interfere in the day-to-day operational independence of the police. That would not be in the interests of the people whom we serve, the police or the Government. However, where action is needed, it is the duty of the Government to respond. Using the expertise of the standards unit and the inspectorate, we will establish new powers of intervention where consistent failure provides inadequate protection for those whom we serve.

Basic command units, as well as the police force area, will provide comparison, like with like. We will work with chief constables and commanders to establish and spread best practice. We will provide support through multidisciplinary approaches to tackle the worst of repeat offending and repeat victimisation. We will mobilise the community against drug-related crime, and establish policing priority areas. We will update the role of the National Crime Squad and the National Criminal Intelligence Service.

It is essential that we provide a greater degree of accountability as well as of devolution and delegation. We will establish pilots for decentralising budgets to basic command units, enabling greater flexibility in the use of resources and the response to local needs. In addition, we will support the developing role of the police authority in reaching out and responding to the community.

When things go wrong, it is important that people have confidence in the process. That is why I confirm today that in the police reform Bill we will be establishing an independent police complaints commission.

I spoke of our pride and confidence in the police service. That is why the Government have decided that we should award the Queen's jubilee medal to the police service. It is a symbol of our support. However, the test will be the difference that we make to the well-being of those whom we serve.

I want to put to rest for ever the cry, "There is nothing we can do," which is so often heard. Our job is to make sure that those who need help get it. Those who fear to walk down their local street or in their local park must be able to do so once again. Our job—my job—is to mobilise all the forces at our disposal to make that a reality, and I am determined that we should do so.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I am grateful to the Home Secretary for his courtesy in providing early copies of the statement and the White Paper.

I begin by welcoming unreservedly the Home Secretary's splendid attack on the excessive bureaucracy recently imposed on the police forces of this country. We are delighted to receive him as a member of Her Majesty's opposition to the previous Home Secretary. I assure him that we shall work with him enthusiastically to demolish yet another part of the house that Jack built.

We welcome also the aspirations in the White Paper to increase the flexibility of working practices in the police forces. As the Home Secretary rightly said, there can be no good reason for rigidities such as the requirement that one year's notice be given of any change in rest periods. However, will the right hon. Gentleman say by what means he will ensure that such rigidities will be removed in practice?

The whole House will agree with the Home Secretary's desire to enhance the police's use of information technology, but what has happened to the custody and case preparation system based on information and communications technology, about which we were told by the previous Home Secretary on page 82 of his February White paper? While we are at it, what has happened to the rest of that White Paper? Will any of its remaining recommendations now be implemented?

[Mr. Oliver Letwin]

We share the Home Secretary's desire to provide the police with more ancillary staff, enabling policemen to spend more time maintaining order and fighting crime. It is not altogether surprising that we share this aim, since we have repeatedly called for such measures over the past few years. Does the Home Secretary accept that hiring people to support the police is one thing but hiring people to pose as policemen is quite another? Does he agree that the police have special authority because they are given special training, have special obligations and live under a special code of discipline? Does he accept that the morale of the police and respect for the police would diminish if, in an effort to provide a show of increasing police numbers, he were to erode or muddy the clear distinction between policemen who have these special characteristics and other people in uniform who do not?

On the Home Secretary's important proposals on standards and targets, we recognise fully the need to spread best practice among the various police forces, as well as the need to expose the wide differences to which he referred in their performance. As the Home Secretary rightly points out, it is his duty to set national targets and to provide a stimulus for police forces to reach those targets. However, does the Home Secretary agree that there is a great difference between quite properly holding chief constables accountable for their performance and quite improperly seeking to micro-manage individual police forces from Whitehall?

Is there not a danger that the operation of a standards unit, allied to reserve powers held by the Home Secretary, might lead in practice and over time to chief constables coming to think of themselves as employees of the Home Office? Is there not a danger that intervention by the standards unit in the affairs of individual basic command units within a given police force may gradually undermine the operational independence of the chief constable of that force? Is there not a danger that if the independence of chief constables is undermined in practice, some future and less benign Home Secretary may be able, to some degree, to politicise the police?

Does the Home Secretary agree that these are delicate issues, which lie at the centre of the preservation of the rule of law in this country? Does he accept that the preservation of the rule of law is the single most important task of this House, and that nothing should ever be allowed to prejudice the fulfilment of that task?

Mr. Blunkett: I think that I can welcome the welcome of the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) for the White Paper. In any event, I will, in the hope that he did welcome it. The hon. Gentleman raised a number of questions, and I will answer them all.

Yes, we are tackling bureaucracy head on. We are tackling a legacy of decades of build up of codes of practice, paperwork that has been demanded and a failure to invest in technology that would allow people, from the moment they make their first notes, to be able to translate them all the way through the system.

Yes, we will carry forward the case and custody programme. I make no bones about the fact that the history of technology for Government as a whole, and for my Department in particular, has not been good. Between the Lord Chancellor's Office and my Department, we are determined to get this right. We have just appointed Jo Wright from IBM, who will be taking forward the very important task of making sure that we get this right.

Working practices and the development of a taskforce to carry forward the anti-bureaucracy drive under Sir David O'Dowd, who is stepping down as the chief inspector of constabulary, will ensure that the intention turns into reality. I assure the hon. Gentleman that it is not our intention to burden the police with any more unnecessary regulation.

Hiring people to pose as constables is not something that we intend to do. We are responding to the cry from the community and the police service across the country with full-time community support officers—the Metropolitan police call them auxiliaries—who can work alongside and under the direction of the police service. Secondly, the street wardens whom I saw this morning in north London are massively increasing the reassurance and confidence of a community that has seen a dramatic reduction in attempts to burgle and take away vehicles in just the two months that the wardens have been there.

Standards are of course at the heart of the matter and the hon. Gentleman is right to say so; we do not intend to take responsibility from chief constables, but rather to reinforce it. Chief constables will retain their operational freedom and I have made that clear this afternoon. To hold people to account—not to micro-manage—is no threat to anyone; someone has to hold chief constables to account and police authorities have a limited remit in relation to the budget and the developed plan. That is why we have experienced difficulties over the years. Simply to put the current rules on misconduct alongside a clarification of the rules on incapability or gross inefficiency poses no threat to anyone—nor does it in any public service, as far as I am aware.

Chief constables will retain their operational freedom; they will not be set against superintendents—or commanders, in London. The operation on the ground—the police station that people relate to and refer to—is important. Giving supers freedom to use resources more flexibly will enable them to get people back on the beat, rather than spending their time in the police station—like the 43 per cent. average that we discovered.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the rule of law is paramount, and that we must uphold it and expect our judiciary to do so. Our policing services are at the front line of that. That is why we are giving them our backing. I think that I have answered all the hon. Gentleman's questions.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I join the Home Secretary in paying tribute to the police, to the specials and to the civilians in the police service. I also welcome without reservation many of the things that the Home Secretary said. He made a clear commitment to replace the officers lost under the previous Labour Government, and to increase them to a record number. He made a commitment to a more flexible working arrangement and career structure for the police, and to an independent police complaints commission. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, my party has for a long time argued for a standing conference on policing, so we welcome the creation of the new national police forum where it can be debated in a more studied way in future. Evidently, all my colleagues welcome the fact that, next year, the police will receive the Queen's jubilee medal for their services.

May I push the Home Secretary a little further on police numbers? Does the Government's welcome commitment mean that there is a target and that by a certain date, "every community will have one"—to put it crudely—and that there will be community police officers throughout the land in urban and rural communities?

Subject to questions and clarification, we also welcome the announcement about the extended police family. Will the Home Secretary confirm the important fact that they will all always be public servants—public employees—accountable either to police authorities or local authorities? Will he confirm that they will always be counted as additional to, and not instead of, the police establishment; and that their powers—I am aware of the points made in the White Paper—will be subject to the most careful debate and consideration, so as to obtain the maximum agreement between the public, police authorities and the police in the months ahead?

I want to follow up the point made by the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) on police accountability. There were some troubling inconsistencies in the use of the words "interference" and "intervention"—no interference but some intervention. Does the Home Secretary accept the old authoritative principle that no man can serve two masters, and will he confirm that he and the Government are absolutely committed to chief constables being answerable to their communities and their police authorities? Will he confirm that the Government have no intention of moving towards a national police force?

On priorities, we share the Home Secretary's view that average national clear-up rates are unacceptably low and that the divergencies are unacceptably wide. However, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the public look to the police to achieve three things: first, to deter and reduce crime; secondly, to detect crime and bring criminals to justice; and, thirdly, to respond quickly and effectively when the public call on them? Does he agree that all three must be our objectives, and that we must not concentrate only on clear-up rates to the detriment of the other two?

Mr. Blunkett: I accept the last point unequivocally, and it is one that would be shared across the parties. The target on numbers is reflected, of course, in the individual targets at force level, using as a lever the crime fighting fund, which my predecessor wisely introduced as a tool to ensure that good intentions were carried into practice. I cannot guarantee that there will be a police officer in every community for the reason that the word "community" is not precisely defined, but I take the spirit of what the hon. Gentleman is saying, and all of us should seek to do so and to translate the targets that I have set for 2003 into further targets, following the review of expenditure in the 2002 spending review.

The hon. Gentleman and the shadow Home Secretary asked about chief constables. We do not intend to interfere with the role of chief constables. Their relationship with the police authority will be paramount. That must be the case, which is why I have not taken the power directly to deal with incapability or inefficiency but to direct the police authority to act.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about those who are employed as part of the wider family. Community support officers will be employed by the police service itself. Those who are not employed in that way and become the third tier, and are therefore wardens and the like, will be employed mainly by local authorities under the regeneration programmes. There will be a dual key so that their role can be activated only if the crime and disorder reduction partnership or the local authority, in the case of those who employ those people directly, agrees with the chief constable that that should be the case. We are not in the business of seeking to privatise the police, but, of course, security services work in large shopping complexes and major entertainment venues and we seek to accredit them and get them to work directly with the police, so that they are under supervision. When the security industry authority is up and running, it will enable us to do that more readily.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): May I welcome the Home Secretary's proposals in the White Paper, which, I hope, will improve the efficiency and credibility of our police? In particular, I welcome the long-awaited independent police complaints commission. Does he accept that, although the quality of our policing has improved immeasurably in recent years, we still have a long way to go? Does he agree that it is hard to justify increased resources for the police unless we get value for the already considerable sums that we spend on policing? How confident is he that the measures that he has announced today will put an end to the overtime scams, the sickness scams and the early retirement scams that tarnish the reputation of British police?

On detection rates, I am sure that the Home Secretary is aware that figures can be massaged. Will he ensure that we are comparing like with like; otherwise we shall put the most honest and transparent forces at a disadvantage?

Finally, the Home Secretary referred to setting up a cadre of specialist detectives. May I offer a warning, by mentioning the west midlands serious crime squad? Many of the serious problems in the police over the years have developed from elite squads that have become a law unto themselves. I am sure that he will want to ensure that measures are in place so that, first, those squads are accountable and, secondly, that people do not stay in them for too long and develop bad habits.

Mr. Blunkett: I take the wise words of warning from the Chairman of the Select Committee on Home Affairs. Even those of us who were not involved in such issues at the time have engraved on our hearts the words that he uses. That is why the standards unit and the refocused work of the inspectorate will be critical in rooting out any dangers of that sort that exist, and why it is very important that the extension of the British crime survey to a sample of 40,000 individuals will ensure that we root down into command unit level, not just force level, so that we can examine in more detail the performance that my hon. Friend describes, so that we compare like with like and root out failure. I cannot guarantee—I wish I could—that all the failures and the undermining of confidence that my hon. Friend described can simply be eliminated. However, the tools and measures that we are putting in place will go a long way towards achieving that goal.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): What does the Home Secretary propose to do to end the anomalies in the funding of pensions and the perverse incentives that the police pension system gives to people to retire earlier

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

than they would otherwise wish? Furthermore, how is what the Home Secretary has said about rooting out antisocial behaviour consistent with the pressure that the Government are putting on the courts to go soft on the young vandals who appear before them?

Mr. Blunkett: That is the first time that I have been accused of going soft on anybody or anything, and I have no intention of doing so. I intend to ensure that we take every possible measure to stop people reoffending and that we take tough action with the persistent offenders who obviously, as a result, have repeat victims. That is one of the scourges that we face. At any one time, about 100,000 people commit half the crime in this country, and the concentration on them does not mean going soft on the ones that we can deal with through the behaviour contracts and antisocial behaviour orders, which we will slim down. We will remove what I have described as the bureaucratic objections to implementing them and we will ensure that they are available more widely.

The hon. Gentleman touched on an issue that relates to value for money. Everyone in the House would like to deal with the problem that he mentioned, and I look forward to him making a contribution to me personally on what he wants to happen and on how best we can achieve it.

Clive Efford (Eltham): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, but if the changes do not result in our being able to tackle the nuisance and harassment that takes places on inner-city estates, the action will not be worth taking. The police currently do not have the resources to target such incidents in our communities and the victims are often too fearful to come forward to give the necessary evidence so that appropriate action can be taken. Therefore, when my right hon. Friend sets up specialist detective units or street wardens, will the people involved be trained in gathering evidence? If they become expert witnesses, we can target a problem that causes so many difficulties in our communities and which is often raised in our surgeries at the weekend.

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend is right to say that properly trained and accredited individuals can play a part in becoming professional witnesses without experiencing the fear and intimidation that is present in many communities. West Lancashire has piloted a programme with the total support of the police and it has been able to provide cameras and tape recorders. It has been possible to use those eyes and ears on the ground to enable the police to take action swiftly and to get the kind of results that everyone would wish for their community.

Lady Hermon (North Down): I welcome the Home Secretary's statement on police reform, and particularly the creation of an independent police complaints commission. He will know that Northern Ireland is slightly ahead on police reform because of the Patten report. It put human rights at the core of police reform in Northern Ireland. Will human rights be placed at the core of the new codes of practice?

On the award of the Queen's jubilee medal to the police service, will the Home Secretary clarify whether that extends to the new Police Service of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Lady has me on the last point—I plead guilty to not knowing the answer. I have concentrated so much on England and Wales that I am not aware of whether my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has made an announcement. I can assure her, however, that there is no question of discriminating against the new Police Service of Northern Ireland. I will check whether that announcement has been made and ensure, as soon as I leave the Chamber, that she is informed.

The human rights codes need to be practical and of value on the ground. We will provide the advice and the necessary safeguards for the public and the police on what can and cannot safely be done within the remit of the codes. I want to ensure that the advice in the codes puts the human rights of the victims and the community, as well as of others, at the top of the agenda.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, especially its emphasis on arrangements for youth crime and disorder—the No. 1 issue in many areas, including mine. What activity would trigger a standards unit intervention in a police force or a basic command unit?

Mr. Blunkett: Once the data are collected and the comparisons are made, in addition to compiling an annual plan, the force or, in the case of a BCU, the superintendent working to the chief constable will be required to produce an action plan, which will be monitored. Should there be a persistent failure either to take on board the codes of practice or to follow guidance that elsewhere had set standards showing that good practice achieves change, such as the national intelligence model, it would be up to the standards unit and the inspectorate to work first with the police authority and, in extremis, to report to the Home Secretary, who will be empowered to instruct the police authority and the chief constable to act.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): A chief constable of my acquaintance supports what the Home Secretary says about the greater use of high technology to ease the job of the police. So, when he was instructed to send out a copy of today's White Paper to every policeman under his command, he was pleased to e-mail the Home Office to say that he intended to do so using e-mail. He was surprised to receive the response that, on the Home Secretary's personal instruction, he was not allowed to do that by e-mail and had to do it by paper. Why was that?

Mr. Blunkett: It would be a damn good point if I had given a personal instruction either to the Wiltshire force or to anyone else. I am a great believer in people being able to read things easily and quickly. If forces wish to e-mail their stations and officers, they are welcome to do so.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): May I assure my right hon. Friend that his statement will have the vigorous support of my constituents, especially those who suffer from the impact of under-age drinking and prostitution on the streets, and the severe impact of heroin dealing and use? Is he aware of the initiatives of Cleveland police to tackle drug dealers in a series of raids this week, followed by a commitment to take out a drug dealer a day? Will he convey his support and congratulations to the chief constable, Barry Shaw, and the chairman of the police authority, Ken Walker, on the actions that they are taking on behalf of our community?

Mr. Blunkett: I think that my hon. Friend is challenging me to say "No", but I do, of course, offer an unequivocal "Yes I will." I am pleased that those people are taking that action. There is much that we can do together, not merely to tackle the problem of those who are dealing on the streets, but to contribute to the work that is taking place to tackle the intermediate market. In the west midlands, action is being taken to tackle those who stand between international traffickers and the people causing misery in our neighbourhoods. We have a long way to go, and the National Crime Squad and the National Criminal Intelligence Service will have a part to play with local constabularies in making that happen.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I welcome the Home Secretary's encouragement for beat policing, but is he aware that some senior officers take a contrary view and have, in effect, abolished it? That happened in my area two years ago, to much public annoyance. Is it an operational issue for the police, or something to which national standards will apply?

Mr. Blunkett: We shall provide guidance to forces on best practice. We want imaginative approaches. It is a question not of PC 49, with or without the whistle, walking the same beat every night and every day so that people get to know both when he will and when he will not be there, but of creating imaginative patrols that get people out of the station, interchanging those who are in plain clothes with those who are in uniform when that is appropriate, and ensuring that community policing means what it says.

The standards unit will concentrate on achieving best practice across the board. Without the constable in the community and the intelligence that that brings, and without the reassurance that is part of the process, we will not get the change that we need. I assure the hon. Gentleman that if a force refuses to recognise that reassurance and support for the community and community partnership is not forthcoming, we shall take the necessary steps to ensure that action is taken.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I am sure that my right hon. Friend knows that his announcement will be warmly welcomed by my constituents if it means more bobbies on the beat, believing as they—and I—do in the deterrent power of a uniform. Will he assure me, however, that whoever is responsible for the expansion in numbers, whether of special constables or neighbourhood wardens, will pay particular attention to encouraging women and some of our older citizens to present themselves for those posts? Will he pay equal attention to ensuring that what we get is neighbourhood wardens, not neighbourhood vigilantes?

Mr. Blunkett: The answer to my hon. Friend's last question is an unequivocal yes. Such people will have to be accredited, and the dual key will ensure that all partners involved are in agreement. Community support officers, the new civilian programme and wardens give us an opportunity to broaden the scope of those who are encouraged to take part in policing, for example, by working on the gender agenda, as it is called, which is mentioned in the White Paper, or encouraging ethnic minorities to participate. Such posts can be the initial steps toward wanting to become fully fledged police officers. We have a great opportunity to change the nature and the make-up of the police service, as we have seen in London.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): When the Secretary of State says that the number of special constables will be "greatly accelerated", what does he mean? Will he quantify it? Will he also give us the benefit of his latest thinking on the payment of special constables?

Mr. Blunkett: Recent research into why the number of special constables fell found that, apart from many of them joining the full-time service, there were issues relating to management, recognition and the status that they were accorded. We can swiftly do something about that. In January, there will a new recruitment campaign. I am having discussions with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor—I always am—on getting a package of measures that will provide greater incentives to those who give freely of their time and energy.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): My right hon. Friend should be aware that his keynote speech on police reform to the Police Superintendents Association, which signposted much of the contents of his statement and the White Paper, was warmly welcomed by every senior police officer to whom I spoke. However, does he agree that police performance standards will not rise as hoped unless the Spanish practices so beloved by the neanderthal wing of the Police Federation are ended? Senior police officers must be allowed to manage resources effectively. Never again do I want to hear of the Thames Valley police constable who presented a doctor's sick note claiming that the officer could not be expected to lift anything heavier than a kettle, or of his colleague, who was off work with a bad back but still had time to continue moonlighting as a fitness instructor.

Mr. Blunkett: Well, you only fire at an open goal when you discover that it is a hand grenade that you are kicking rather than the ball. I look forward to genuine co-operation from the Police Federation in getting rid of all the practices that give the police service a bad name, and that undermine the confidence, morale and motivation of colleagues. They have to fill the vacancies when others are not present at work. They have to do the job that somebody else should be there doing. They, like the rest of us, have to pay for those who retire early when that is inappropriate. We shall work together, including the occupational health service, to ensure that what my hon. Friend describes is never present again.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Having argued in the past from the Opposition Benches for an increase in the number of special constables, I warmly welcome the Home Secretary's proposals drastically to accelerate their numbers. However, I warn the right hon. Gentleman that he might find resistance among full-time police officers. How will he address that?

If the Home Secretary is to introduce an extended police family, what additional powers does he propose for traffic wardens? Does he agree that that might have to be handled with some sensitivity?

[Mr. David Tredinnick]

Will the independent police complaints commission have new members, or will it still use police officers to investigate police officers, as previously happened under the Police Complaints Board, and as still happens under the Police Complaints Authority? Will he examine the centralisation of policing, which has certainly been perceived as a problem in Leicestershire, where there are fewer but larger police stations? That is causing some concern.

Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman again revisit the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984—PACE—which requires the use of custody officers for charging? That involves many sergeants in police station work who otherwise could be out and about catching criminals.

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, we are looking at civilianisation. A great deal can be done to ensure that a police officer is not tied down by duties that could be carried out by a properly trained and supported civilian staff member.

I think that the hon. Gentleman asked me five questions. I am wondering which one would he like me to answer.

Mr. Tredinnick: The complaints authority.

Mr. Blunkett: The authority will be able to employ its own investigation officers rather than drawing down the resources of another police service.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): My right hon. Friend has presented a huge agenda for change. Given that there has been an all-round welcome, the proof of it will be in his ability to deliver the agenda for change. I congratulate him.

My right hon. Friend will be aware that many forces throughout the country, including mine in Staffordshire, want to be on the innovative end of changing work practices and working with local communities in areas of greatest need and in neighbourhood renewal areas. Is there any way in which he can give his seal of approval to the services that we want to deliver in Stoke-on-Trent?

Mr. Blunkett: We are extremely pleased that a number of areas have volunteered to be policing priority areas, which will not have rigid boundaries or be zones. In partnership with the police, and with investment through regeneration, areas of specific difficulty will be targeted. Policing priority areas will work with the police at a national and local level in bringing immediate and welcome relief to those who believed that nothing could be done and that nothing would be done. I am pleased that Stoke has volunteered to be part of that programme.

Norman Baker (Lewes): There has been a broad welcome for the Home Secretary's statement, but there is also genuine nervousness that the independence of local police authorities should not be undermined by anything that the right hon. Gentleman has promised us. Does he accept that the proposed standards unit, which has many merits, could represent the first step on the road to a national police force? Does he agree that that would be a disappointing and unfortunate conclusion, and should not happen?

May I also gently remind him that under existing powers he was able, in effect, to sack the chief constable of Sussex by press release? I hope that, in retrospect, he accepts that that was not a sensible move and that the police authority should be allowed to deal with those matters itself.

Mr. Blunkett: I thought that it was sensible that Mr. Whitehouse resigned; I have no regrets about that. I want a system that works effectively and in which police authorities can deal with problems effectively. There is no question of centralising and nationalising the police forces of England and Wales; we are not proposing to do that. I make it clear, as I have done before, that the powers of the police authority will be exercised through the police authority.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement. In particular, I thank him for responding to representations that other hon. Members and I have made about having more special constables. However, in the west midlands, we face the problem of retention. Money and recruitment have gone up but, unfortunately, we lose disproportionate numbers to neighbouring forces such as Staffordshire, Shropshire and Warwickshire. What changes does my right hon. Friend propose to effect a solution to the problem of retention?

Mr. Blunkett: I understand that there has been a problem with what might be described as seepage to other force areas. We need to work on that nationally, but we must also engage the inspectorate and others to work with the force on internal practices and consider how recruitment programmes in neighbouring forces can reduce the pressure. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) have just reassured me that they are on the case.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I join others in welcoming much of the Home Secretary's statement, particularly the decision to award the Jubilee medal to members of the police force, which will be warmly welcomed in my constituency. A number of police officers from Carterton police station wrote to me about the issue, saying how disappointed they have been up to now. I therefore thank the Home Secretary for his announcement.

Does the Home Secretary agree that the test of his reforms will not be the standards unit, which may, or may not, clash with Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, or some of the things done at the top, but the extent to which power and responsibility is devolved to the station commander—often a chief inspector or a superintendent? Does he agree that it is essential that they should be able to empower police officers, pay more to those who are doing a good job and, on the rare occasion when police officers are not up to the job or are not suited to it, encourage them to find another profession?

Mr. Blunkett: I agree entirely. The importance of leadership and management at that level and the exercise of sufficient flexibility will be crucial to the carrying out of that role, including ensuring that there is proper supervisory training for sergeants. The new role of beat officers will enable them to take more responsibility, including responsibility for the wider police family. All of that adds up to a delegation and decentralisation designed to meet specifically and flexibly the needs of the local neighbourhood and community.

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): I welcome the Home Secretary's statement. How will he set up the independent police complaints commission, in which I have a particular interest, given what we have gone through with Operation Lancet in Cleveland over the past four years and what we have learned about accountability from that experience? It is important that we get accountability through the commission. Who will serve on it, and what consultation will my right hon. Friend undertake?

Mr. Blunkett: A great deal of discussion and consultation has already taken place on the IPCC. I will ensure that my hon. Friend is brought up to date on the precise stage that we have reached in making key appointments. We will ensure that we can accelerate the independence of the commission by means of the recruitment that I described a moment ago, which will break the dependence of the current complaints authority. I know that my hon. Friend will forgive me for not entering into the pain and difficulty experienced in Cleveland; in future, we want to make sure that processes are speedy and effective.

Bob Russell (Colchester): The Home Secretary rightly drew attention to the excellent work undertaken by the neighbourhood watch movement, and reference was made to support. Will that support include financial reimbursement to the volunteer co-ordinators who undertake so much excellent work for the neighbourhood watch? Was it an oversight that in the Home Secretary's statement there was no mention of Crimestoppers and the 0800 555 111 national eyes and ears service for the public, which, as I am sure the House will agree, provides an excellent service and should be properly funded?

Mr. Blunkett: I gave neighbourhood watch as an example of a long-established and widespread organisation with—I almost said tentacles—parishioners in every ward. Crimestoppers is a valuable scheme and we are working with it on long-term funding. We have just announced a third of a million pounds to ensure that it is lifted out of its immediate financial difficulty. We want to share that with others. We will speak to the crime reduction and disorder partnerships about the funding of co-ordinator posts. It has been drawn to my attention forcefully in the past six months that although police authorities have authority over such matters, its application is spasmodic across the country. We need to address that.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): As a member of the police parliamentary scheme, I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Is he aware that although serious crime in north Kent has fallen sharply in recent years, my constituents share his frustration at the relatively low detection and conviction rates, especially for persistent young offenders? He will be aware that in Kent we are fortunate in having a progressive and effective chief constable. Perhaps my right hon. Friend has discussed some of the proposals with him, as I am looking forward to doing later this week. Is my right hon. Friend confident that that approach will be shared by all chief constables? What will he do if he finds a chief constable who stands in the way of reform and wants to prevent the raising of standards, as proposed?

Mr. Blunkett: The process described in chapter 7—go on, I shall be pompous—paragraphs 40 to 43 sets out the intervention powers to which I referred earlier, which are linked to the powers in chapter 6, paragraphs 83 to the end of the chapter. I thought that I had better memorise those during lunchtime—that was for Simon Carr of *The Independent*. The page numbers vary, depending whether one is reading e-mail or the print version. I shall end my reply by saying that I agree entirely with the accolades heaped on Sir David Phillips, not least because he is the president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, and I have to do business with him.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): Is it not worrying that the fear of crime stays stubbornly high, despite falling crime figures in the recent crime survey? Are not community constables well placed to tackle that? In his quest for good practice, I invite my right hon. Friend to visit Colne Valley, where he could congratulate Chief Superintendent John Holt on having the wisdom to recruit more community police officers, and PC Ian Oxley, who has worked tirelessly to recruit special constables, especially through his work with the community and local businesses to raise the much-needed money for women special constables, who need vests fitted for them costing £500 each. Does my right hon. Friend intend to resource special constables so that they can carry on their valuable work tackling the fear of crime?

Mr. Blunkett: As I said earlier, I am very keen indeed to try to develop the role of special constables and the incentives that are provided to encourage them. I commend the examples that my hon. Friend has given. I do not remember her ever asking me a question about something that she has not insisted that I come and see for myself. Despite the depths of winter, which make Colne Valley a wonderful place to ski but not necessarily to get to, I shall do my best to do that.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. We must move on to the next business.

Points of Order

5.20 pm

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When answering my question yesterday about the Campbeltown to Ballycastle ferry, the Minister of State, Scotland Office said that he understood that, in relation to funding for the ferry, the Liberal Democrat Ministers in the Scottish Executive were

"rather mean about the matter".—[*Official Report*, 4 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 150.]

I have a letter from Jim Wallace, one of the Ministers concerned, in which he writes that the Minister of State

"comprehensively misrepresented . . . the position of the Liberal Democrat Ministers".

I have also received a letter from the Minister of State, who apologises for inadvertently misrepresenting the views of the Liberal Democrat Ministers. As the original misrepresentation was made to the House, I trust that he will come to the House and apologise for his mistake. Have you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, received any request from him for the opportunity to make such a statement?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I have no knowledge of such a request. The Minister of State is not present to respond to the hon. Gentleman's point of order, but will, no doubt, read the points he has put on the record.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have in my hands a document headed "Labour thugs attack MP", in which the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) makes a number of deeply serious allegations against other Labour Members, including Whips. He alleges that there have been both verbal and physical attacks on himself. In particular, he singles out the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) as attempting to intimidate him into believing that

"if he did not stop criticising Government legislation, the Whips would not prevent other Labour MPs further physically attacking him."

Those are extremely serious allegations. Similar allegations are made against the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Jim Dowd), who has personally and physically intimidated me in the past in this very Chamber.

Have you had any notification, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as to whether Mr. Speaker has received a formal complaint from the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham, who has said in a press release that he is making such a complaint? Furthermore, what action can you take not only to protect Members of this House from attack by other Members, but especially to protect dissident Labour Members from physical attack and intimidation by their own Whips? This is a most serious matter and action needs to be taken.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As somebody who has occasionally voted against the Government, I must say that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) is more likely to launch a charm offensive than to intimidate anybody.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Any complaint of the sort to which the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) referred should be made in the normal way that is laid down by the House, and will, no doubt, be dealt with accordingly.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I speak as the representative of a number of parties that are not represented on the House of Commons Commission, despite the Prime Minister's claim that it is an all-party body. I might well be inclined to support the motion tabled by the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley), which appears on the Order Paper but for which no date has been fixed. Can I ask through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what procedure of the House Members from my party or from the other parties that are not represented on the House of Commons Commission can use to bring the matter and principle of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards to the Floor of the House for discussion, debate, Division and decision?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The control of business in the House is entirely in the hands of the Government.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I seek your advice on matters that will arise after consideration of the ten-minute Bill? Motion 4 deals with the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill. I do not think that you were in the Chair for any of the relevant periods last night, but I am sure that your colleagues will have told you that the House was eventually adjourned on a Government motion in the middle of a debate on an Adjournment motion while the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) was on his feet.

I should like guidance on the following matters. First, is the resumed debate on the Adjournment motion that we were discussing when the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham was speaking, or are we back to the substantive motion?

Secondly, given that the original sittings motion was superseded by the Adjournment motion, which was in train when the House was adjourned formally, will we have a decent period for debate on the sittings motion? Does time begin again for that purpose? Some of the normal conventions on closure cannot apply if times for both debates are added together. Are we starting again?

Will you assure us that the Parliamentary Secretary, who was properly in his place yesterday evening and kindly undertook to reply to matters that were raised, will have the opportunity to do so when other colleagues have contributed?

I believe that we have never had occasion to deal with my last question. Today's Order Paper contains a motion on the business of the House that cannot have been tabled until extremely late last night. Is it in order generally for the Government to table motions when the sitting is suspended, or can that be done only when the House is sitting? Will you confirm that the business of the House motion was not tabled during the two periods when Madam Deputy Speaker suspended the House for 10 minutes in the early hours of this morning?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I will do my best to answer the hon. Gentleman's points of order. First, we are discussing the substantive motion today. Secondly, no new time will be allowed; contributions that have already been made will count and hon. Members who have spoken will not be entitled to speak again. Thirdly, the Parliamentary Secretary has the right to respond to the debate if he so chooses; it is a matter for him.

On the point about the Order Paper, the Government always have contingent instructions to take care of circumstances such as those that we are considering.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Further to the earlier point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As the guardian of the conventions of the House, will you confirm that the usual channels do not exercise the right to speak in the Chamber? Is not it therefore rather cowardly, and against those conventions, to make allegations against a member of the usual channels? Colleagues regard my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) as so friendly that he has been given a job in the Whips Office this year that allows him to carry a large stick with which to defend himself against several hon. Members.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I do not believe that the House wants to go over that matter again. However, it is normal for an hon. Member to inform hon. Members if he intends to refer to them in the House. *Hansard* will record what has been said today.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that last night's sitting in secret was the first since the second world war?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, it was the first since 1958.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You referred to the fact that the House sat in secret; there is therefore no record of the sitting. How will hon. Members who were not present know who took part in the debate and who can participate in today's debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Those problems arise when the House sits in private.

Private Hire Vehicles (Carriage of Guide Dogs Etc.)

5.29 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for the carriage of disabled persons accompanied by guide dogs, hearing dogs or other assistance dogs by drivers and operators of private hire vehicles; and for connected purposes.

The Bill is simple and has a simple purpose: to amend the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to ensure that owners of working dogs are not refused the use of minicabs with their dogs.

Earlier this year, an event was hosted by the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association at the House of Commons to celebrate the introduction of section 37 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which requires licensed taxi drivers to carry dogs in their cabs. That is a welcome change, but the provision has not entirely removed the discrimination that exists against the owners of working dogs, because the Act does not cover private hire vehicles—in other words, minicabs.

The problem was first drawn to my attention about two years ago by a constituent of mine, Mr. Alan Powell, who described the problems that he had had over a number of years in finding minicab drivers who were prepared to take him and his guide dog. Drivers would turn up at his house when he had booked a car, but would refuse to take him when they saw the dog. He would regularly have to ring several companies before finding a driver willing to take him and his dog.

This morning, I met a guide dog owner who described having gone to Tesco's recently to do his weekly shopping. After he had done his shopping, he spent two hours phoning one minicab company after another to try to find a minicab prepared to take him home. One or two actually arrived, but then refused to take him with his dog. In the end, the assistant manager of the store took pity on him, got her car out and took him home.

Guide dog owners rely much more than most people on reliable and accessible taxis and private hire cars to help them get around and live a normal life. In a survey carried out recently by the joint committee on the mobility of blind and partially sighted people, one in seven people said that taxis and private hire vehicles were their most frequently used form of transport. One in five said that they used a taxi or private hire vehicle at least once a week. Many people said that that was because private hire vehicles and taxis were easier to use than most other forms of transport. It is obvious why that is the case: a door-to-door service is offered. A disabled person who does not have a guide dog might need a companion to travel with them, and taxis make life easier in that way. For people who rely on assistance dogs—be they guide dogs for the blind, hearing dogs or other types of working dogs—taxis are often the most convenient form of transport.

Of course, the majority of taxi drivers are not the problem. Most people to whom I have spoken about this have said that the majority of drivers try to be helpful and courteous, but that some are quite the opposite. Some drivers and taxi companies are deliberately unhelpful, and some licensing authorities do not appear to think that there is a problem.

[Mr. Neil Gerrard]

The licensing situation for private hire vehicles is rather mixed across the United Kingdom. Generally, local authorities are responsible in England, Wales and Scotland, but London is different. In London, licensing will shortly become the responsibility of the Public Carriage Office, and there has also been consultation with the Greater London Authority about the possibility of such licensing being included in its remit. At the moment, however, no London authority has a requirement in its licensing regulations that guide dogs should be carried. Northern Ireland is also different, in that licensing there is the responsibility of the Department of the Environment in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

There is no doubt that real progress has been made in the last two or three years, largely because of the campaigns that have been run by voluntary organisations. However, the situation is still patchy. Across the country there is a total of 374 local licensing authorities, and it is good that 257 of them have now put a requirement into their licensing regulations that private hire vehicles will have to carry guide dogs. Another 50 or so are working towards that aim, but more than 60 local authorities either are not interested or have refused to do anything to change the licensing requirements.

Although progress has been made, there are still gaps. Guide dog owners may know the position in their own areas, but they cannot be expected to know where local authority boundaries begin and end, or whether a company is licensed in one area or in another. They may take a holiday in a different part of the country, and find that the requirements there are different. The patchwork of arrangements across the country creates real problems.

Some local authorities that have refused to act have said, "We do not want to create burdens for small businesses." I am not sure what the "burdens" are supposed to be. Another response has been, "We have received no complaints; there is no problem in our area." I very much doubt that there is no problem, even if no complaints have been received. People may well not know the licensing position, and may not know who to complain to.

Other authorities have said, "We will have a problem because many minicab drivers in this area are Muslim, and will object to having dogs in their cars." That is not the case. When the objection was discussed in my borough of Waltham Forest last year, one of the leaders of the local mosque helpfully made it clear that was not the mosque's attitude, and that it should not be used as a reason for minicab drivers to refuse to accept a guide dog.

I was recently given a cutting from a Blackburn newspaper, according to which Blackburn with Darwen council is currently considering the possibility of extending licensing. A Mr. Mohammed Narwan, a representative of the local private hire drivers association, is quoted as saying:

> "People should be able to travel in private hire vehicles with their guide dogs free of charge."

I simply do not accept the excuse about Muslim drivers. Obviously provision must be made for those who might require an exception on medical grounds, but that can easily be accommodated by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

We are not discussing a problem that affects a huge number of people or would impose a huge burden on minicab firms. I am told that there are roughly 5,000 guide dog owners nationwide, but for them this is a massive problem that affects how they lead their daily lives. Both the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and the Royal National Institute for the Blind have made it clear that they want this simple, positive change in the law, which would make life better for those whom they represent.

If we are interested in social inclusion, we should certainly be prepared to take my proposal on board. It concerns an issue of discrimination—discrimination that we could end quickly and simply. That is the Bill's purpose.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Neil Gerrard, Mr. David Amess, Mr. Roger Berry, Mr. Tom Clarke, Harry Cohen, Mr. Edward Davey, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Colin Pickthall and Rev. Martin Smyth.

PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES (CARRIAGE OF GUIDE DOGS ETC.)

Mr. Neil Gerrard accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for the carriage of disabled persons accompanied by guide dogs, hearing dogs or other assistance dogs by drivers and operators of private hire vehicles; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 25 January, and to be printed [Bill 62].

NORTHERN IRELAND GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Orders No. 114 (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (legislative proposals and other matters relating exclusively to Northern Ireland)) and No. 116 (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)),

That—

(1) The Proposal for a draft Criminal Injuries Compensation (Northern Ireland) Order, being a legislative proposal relating exclusively to Northern Ireland, be referred to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee;

(2) the Committee shall meet at Westminster on Thursday 13th December at 2.30 p.m.; and

(3) at that meeting—

(a) the Committee shall consider the Proposal for a draft Criminal Injuries Compensation (Northern Ireland) Order referred to it under paragraph (1) above;

(b) the Chairman shall interrupt proceedings at 4.30 p.m.; and

(c) at the conclusion of those proceedings a motion for the adjournment of the Committee may be moved by a Minister of the Crown pursuant to Standing Order No. 116(5) Northern Ireland Grand Committee (Sittings).—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL AFFAIRS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 117 (Standing Committee on Regional Affairs),

That—

(1) the matter of regional governance in England, being a matter relating to regional affairs in England, be referred to the Standing Committee on Regional Affairs;

(2) the Committee do meet at Ten o'clock on Tuesday 18th December at Westminster to consider the matter referred to it under paragraph (1) above; and

(3) the proceedings at the meeting be brought to a conclusion at half-past Twelve o'clock.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Business of the House

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [4 December],

That,

(1) At the sittings on Tuesday 11th, Wednesday 12th and Thursday 13th December, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any Lords Messages relating to the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill have been received; and

(2) At the sitting on Thursday 13th December, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until he shall have reported the Royal Assent to any Act agreed upon by both Houses.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question again proposed.

5.40 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I am very grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to continue the remarks that I was making last night. Perhaps the House will forgive me if I begin by apologising for the fact that I shall not be giving way to right hon. and hon. Members as generously as I did last night, when I gave way—I have counted—on 23 separate occasions. The House may feel that I had rather a good innings last night and that I might therefore be trespassing on the House's patience if I speak too long today.

There is another reason why I shall not give way so often. I anticipate that the Government will seek to bring this debate to a conclusion within an hour or so of its start. I also suspect that various hon. Members who were in the Chamber yesterday, most of whom remained in the Chamber throughout last night's proceedings, will wish to say something in this debate. I have in mind specifically the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) and my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), but there may be others and I apologise if I have omitted anyone. I hope that it will be possible for at least those hon. Members to participate, if that is what they wish. It is with that in mind that I shall be much briefer than I would have otherwise been. I am also conscious that I have had an opportunity—51 minutes or so—to express my views.

There is one other bit of business. May I welcome the Leader of the House to the debate? He was in the Chamber yesterday for the opening speech, but then he departed. He will see from the record that I made some pretty uncharitable remarks about his not being here. However, I am glad to see that, at least this afternoon, at a more convenient hour, he is on the Treasury Bench. I welcome that fact because this is an important debate.

There is one more point that I should deal with before coming to the substance of the debate. The House will be asking itself—it might be helpful to know—why it is that we are debating something now that we were debating about eight or nine hours ago. Last night, we were debating the business motion, the effect of which is in reality to conclude debate on the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill on Thursday 13 December—for reasons that I explained yesterday—at 7 o'clock. Various right hon. and hon. Members—including me, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills, my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) and the hon. Member for Southwark, North and

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

Bermondsey (Simon Hughes)—felt very strongly about that. There are powerful arguments against the proposals and those hon. Members advanced them powerfully.

There were, however, only about two more speeches to be made last night, when it became apparent that the Government were going to move a closure. We knew that because those of us who have been in this place for some time suddenly saw that the Labour Benches, which had been largely deserted, had begun to fill up. We also saw the Government Whips chuntering together in the way that they usually do. We therefore knew that there was going to be a closure.

Liberal Democrat Members—I commend them on this—hit upon a procedural device: to move that the House sit in private. As I understand it, that was the first time since 1958 that that has happened. Unfortunately for the Government, however, at that critical moment, they were plotting closure. So when Liberal Democrat Members moved the motion, there was no one to cry no. The consequence was that we went into private session, the Galleries were cleared, the amplifiers were switched off, *Hansard* departed—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has said that he is not going to speak at quite the same length as he did yesterday, but he is now giving a blow by blow account of what happened in the Chamber last night. Perhaps he could turn to the substance of his remarks.

Mr. Hogg: As there was not a record of the proceedings, an account might be helpful; but I have of course finished my reprise. I have explained why we are having this debate today. However, we are debating a very serious point.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that we seem to be able to debate the motion in prime time today without any real inconvenience to the Government's agenda for today? Would he like to try to explain why the Government thought that they could not do today what they tried to do in the middle of last night? The public should be made aware of that.

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend makes a serious point. This is an important business motion and it was being secreted through last night. What is more, it would have been voted on by the deferred voting procedure, which means that hon. Members sign a visiting book on Wednesdays. I refuse to participate in that process, because it is wrong in principle. It is right and proper that matters of importance should be debated on the Floor of the House in prime time and that right hon. and hon. Members should vote in the ordinary way.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I endorse the remarks made by the right hon. and learned Gentleman. It was the objective of my colleagues and I at all stages to try to achieve three objectives procedurally. First, we wanted to raise the issues and get answers to the questions. Secondly, we wanted to have the debate at a proper time when it could be heard and reported and people such as the Leader of the House could be present. Thirdly, we wanted to be able to vote at the end of the relevant debate. We have managed to achieve that, if through a rather unusual device. I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his assistance.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. His motives were as he has stated, and I supported them. He has brought about a most desirable outcome. I hope that hon. Members will not think that I am being churlish if I do not give way much more, because I want to allow other hon. Members to participate.

I have taken the liberty of saying that this is a serious matter. I have spoken many times on the Bill and I have advanced the generality of my argument against it. I shall not repeat that today, because those who are interested know why I am against it. I oppose especially the manner of its enactment.

The Lords messages mentioned in the motion are the amendments that will come from the other place. The plain truth is that we have no idea of the weight or the content of those messages. That being so, we cannot tell whether the proposed ending at 7 pm on Thursday 13 December is reasonable. We are asked to assume that it is, but nobody—not even Government Front Benchers—can say that it is because we will not know what the messages are until the Lords delivers them.

Another related point is that it is important that those institutions outside the House with real concerns about the Bill—I hope that Government Front Benchers will understand that there are many of those—should have an opportunity properly to make their representations on the amendments as they come from the other place, and as they go back and forth. The procedure that we would adopt under the business motion would actively prevent that from happening, and that is wrong.

We have been told by the Minister—I am not sure that he intended to be quite as candid as he was—that we would have a timetable motion to govern the process of business on the messages. He will realise that the nature of the timetable—and, indeed, the nature of today's business motion—cannot properly be determined until we know the number, weight and content of the Lords messages. In reality, the timetable and the motion should not be laid until the messages are identified. In any event, the timetable will be shaped by the business motion, rather than the other way round. A timetable should be drawn so as to ensure that the House has a proper opportunity to debate the legislation, and the business motion should reflect the time needed. In fact, the timetable will be the subject of the artificial constraint imposed by the business motion.

Another point concerns the statutory instruments. The Minister told us last night—it was fair of him to do so—that secondary legislation would be introduced, pursuant to the Bill. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal and I made the point that the documents will already be in existence, albeit that they will be called drafts. If the Minister had wanted to, he could have laid those documents in the Library—he still could—or read them out in extenso, although you might stop him, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In any event, the House could be told the contents of the statutory instruments. It is unsatisfactory that we should not know those contents or be able to discuss them before we determine the end date. The statutory instruments may be offensive in themselves.

Indeed, they may be so offensive that we might not want the Bill to pass at all. That is a point that we cannot judge until we see the statutory instrument, and we shall not see that until we are given an end date.

From time to time last night, I approached the debate with a certain levity, as did other hon. Members. It was a fine occasion. I enjoyed it, and I think that other hon. Members did too. However, this is a very serious matter. Although I have not always been able to secure the support of Conservative Front-Bench Members, I have consistently opposed the Bill because it seriously abrogates legal and civil rights.

Sometimes a case can be made for abrogating such rights, and I am prepared to accept that there may be a case for some abrogation in respect of some parts of the Bill. However, no such case can be made for the Bill in its entirety. If the Government are going to abrogate civil, legal and political rights, they must do so in the proper way, with full and proper discussion in Parliament.

The House will vote on the business motion later, and I do not suppose that Labour Members will support us on the matter. However, in the Division Lobby they will have an opportunity—which I hope they will take—to say to Ministers, "Look, my friends, what we are doing is wrong. What is more, we must not do it again." If they do that, the action taken by Liberal Democrat Members last night, which I supported, and the words spoken in this debate will have been worthwhile. A very important principle is at stake. We neglect it at the country's peril, and in breach of the duties that we owe our constituents.

5.52 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I begin by expressing my gratitude to hon. Members of all parties. *Hansard* shows that the motion that I put to the House at 12.52 this morning was passed nem. con. I am grateful to all hon. Members for allowing the House to use that safety valve. There are not many safety valves left now, but hon. Members' response to my motion was very helpful.

As the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) said, the result is that we have brought out of the dark obscurity of the early hours of the morning into the relatively bright light of prime-time business some extremely important issues. It would be improper to refer to any of the discussion that took place after the motion was passed. Even though the present Bill is not likely to be retrospective, I suspect that the Home Office, and the Home Secretary, in their current mood, would have me locked up if I referred to any matters discussed in private session.

As was said last night, I do not believe that any Member of this House or the other place is not committed to effective measures to deal with terrorism. There was some suggestion, or spin, that anyone who resisted the business motion was somehow against the emergency measures needed to deal with terrorism. That is a canard, and it is not fair on the Labour Members of the two Houses—let alone anyone else—who have major misgivings about the Bill and the way that it has been handled. Our lack of wholehearted, comprehensive and unquestioning commitment to the handling of the Bill and all of its contents does not mean that we are not committed to the defeat of international terrorism.

Another advantage of bringing the matter before the House in prime time is that we have the pleasure of the company of the Leader of the House, who will recognise the text that I am about to quote. I hope that the Minister who will reply to the debate found that the sampler above his bed—when he finally got there in the early hours—still carried the motto, written in proper, traditional Victorian woven script, "Good government and effective scrutiny go together."

The Leader of the House said that to the Hansard Society on 12 July. He added that it was part of the exercise of achieving good government that this House and the other place must undertake their scrutiny roles with responsibility and proper dispatch. That is why it is so extraordinary that in the circumstances already described, the House is being asked to prejudge, in effect, the validity and value of amendments coming from another place. We do not know how substantial they will be.

In previous Parliaments, it may have been possible for Ministers in the House of Commons to take the view that the opinions of people in the House of Lords could be discarded. However, the first of this Government's reforms of Parliament has given the Lords a new legitimacy. It is only right, therefore, that we take more notice of what the House of Lords says on matters such as this.

Moreover, the Leader of the House told us a few weeks ago that he thought that the House of Lords in its present form was so good that he was prepared to countenance a substantial number of appointed members in the second phase of reform. That gives additional legitimacy to the House of Lords.

We cannot therefore prejudge that what we get from the other place can be discarded because it has no value or validity. We cannot assume in advance that the amendments that the House of Lords has not even tabled yet will not be valid. Indeed, Labour Members in the other place may be disposed to accept some of those amendments, which makes it very important that we do not tie ourselves down to a business motion, in the format that is before the House today, that prejudges that issue.

Mr. Gummer: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the business managers of both Opposition parties could have come to an accommodation with the Government to ensure proper opportunities for the discussion of Lords amendments without interfering with what remains of the Government's programme?

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I know that that offer was made, informally, through the usual channels, and I shall return to how we could have found more time to do what he suggested.

It is critical for the House to know what amendments will come from another place before we tie ourselves to a programme. Those amendments themselves can be amended, and we need time to assess whether they can be improved still further and thereby achieve the sort of compromise that many hon. Members want. However, the other place may complete its scrutiny only of the Bill late on Tuesday night. We will be able to see the amendments that are tabled then and on the subsequent day, so the opportunity for intelligent amendment—informed by people in the House and outside it, as was noted earlier and, indeed, last night—will be limited. The Bill is big, and covers many issues, and such amendment is very important.

[Mr. Tyler]

There may be circumstances in which the Government are disposed to accept all the amendments that come from the other place. If so, why do they not accept them now? That would save the House a lot of trouble, but we must assume that the Government will not accept them all, but resist some. However, if they are going to accept the amendments passed in the other place, the sooner they tell us which they will accept, the better. That will allow us to deal with the amendments more expeditiously.

For the moment, I shall assume that the Government will dig in their heels. The indications, from the Home Secretary down, are that that is the Government's mood. In those circumstances, hon. Members have a responsibility to provide proper and careful scrutiny of the improvements that have been suggested. We do not want to put on to the statute book legislation of this importance that is full of loopholes and problems.

Moreover, as the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham said, that is not the whole story. As its name implies, secondary legislation is secondary to primary legislation. We cannot know how apt, apposite and effective that secondary legislation is until we know what the primary legislation is. We cannot know how legitimate, proper and in order the secondary amendments are until we see what amendments come back from the Lords. We need to know the reaction of Ministers. Will they be prepared to accept some amendments, will they want to amend others, and will the House come to the view that compromise on some is a possibility?

That was clearly spelt out in the watches of last night. The Parliamentary Secretary was honest enough to say that there is a whole package of secondary legislation to follow. We cannot take a view about the legitimacy of such legislation until we have seen the amendments to the original legislation.

As you will have heard last night, Madam Deputy Speaker, there are views about the Bill on both sides of the House. It is an unusual Bill. The unkind might refer to it as a ragbag; I have described it as the good, the bad and the downright ugly. More charitably, it could be called a portmanteau Bill. It certainly covers a huge range of issues of varying urgency and impact upon basic civil liberties and human rights. Inevitably, parts of it raise different issues with different people. It is unusual in that respect, because there are so many aspects to its clauses. In those circumstances, it is not unnatural for Members of the other House, let alone Members of this one, to respond differently to its different parts.

The legislation that is put before us is often not only short but directly focused and Members on both sides can take a broad-band approach to it. They know where they are on a Bill's basic issues and how they will respond to its different parts. That is not the case with this Bill. As happens often in debates in the other place, there has been a judicial review of parts of the Bill, independent of party politics. The bishops have had a view about specific aspects, although it would not be proper for me to go into detail. It is equally true that some distinguished and experienced Members of the Labour party in the other place have major misgivings about parts of the Bill.

The Leader of the House, no less, has been saying how important it is for the revising second Chamber of this Parliament to be independent of Government and to have expertise and experience to bring to its responsibilities. As we have in this place skimped Report and had no Third Reading debate, it is not unnatural that we have to rely on our colleagues at the other end of the building to do some careful detailed scrutiny of these issues. It would be outrageous if, after all the good work that they had done on our behalf, we then said, "We don't care what they said. Let's tear it up and get on with the job." That would be a negation of the responsibility of Parliament which, the Leader of the House has frequently reminded us, lies upon our shoulders.

We still do not know what will happen under the business motion. Will there be a ping-pong situation? Will there be an opportunity for sensible people to sit down and achieve some compromise, perhaps even taking out of the Bill those issues that are not urgent and with which it is not necessary to deal immediately? My hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) referred last night to issues that predate the terrorist attacks on 11 September. They cannot be regarded as so urgent as to be necessary now.

It was apparent from the way in which the debate began to develop last night that there is no parliamentary imperative, let alone an outside imperative. We have yet to hear anyone say that the Bill must reach the statute book next week or terrorists will attack on Christmas day. It is outrageous for anyone to pretend that we must have the Bill then, to the day.

I have pointed out to the Leader of the House that he unexpectedly gave us an extra day for the Christmas recess. Most of us knew that we were going to be here on Thursday 20 December, and then he told us that we were to rise on Wednesday 19 December. So there is room for shunting; we can find more time.

What imperative demands that we must complete all our study of, and responsibility for, the Bill by the night of 13 December, given that it is complex, contentious and that there is opposition to it within Government ranks in both Houses? There is one date that makes that essential, but it is nothing to do with Parliament, the quality of the Bill or the opposition to it in either House. It is simply that on 14 December, the Prime Minister is due to go to the European summit at Laeken in Belgium. He wants to take in his back pocket a Christmas present from the Houses of Parliament and say, "Look what a good boy am I. I am getting tough on terrorism. I have a derogation from my Parliament on the European convention of human rights. Why don't you?" That is what it is all about.

It is the Prime Minister's imperative, for political reasons. It is not to improve the legislation or to put on the statute book a measure of which we will be proud in years to come and which we will know was the right response to an emergency. This will be a tawdry Act because it has been dealt with in a tawdry fashion.

6.6 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I have been truly amazed by the moderation shown by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), Liberal Democrat Front Benchers and my own. This is a monstrous process. Their decent evaluation of whether there is merit in all the contentions in the Bill has been exemplary. In point of fact, the argument on many of the clauses has never pointed to how they relate to the special new circumstances that have arisen since 11 September that mean that this country's very survival is at risk.

I object strongly to this process. I was very grateful when your predecessor in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, confirmed that last night was the first time since 1958 that the House has sat in secrecy, and it should be on a measure such as this. That is consonant with the Government's argument that we are in a state of emergency. That was the proposition put by the Home Secretary, who has indicated that he will not yield in the Lords.

I have no doubt what the motion means. The Government are on a journey of coercion. They are saying to the Lords as best they can—we will be the puppets, the shadow, in this parliamentary process—"You will deliver us this Bill in the shape that we require it by a certain date." They have no power to enforce that, but I saw the Lords yield during the seven times that the European Parliamentary Elections Bill ping-ponged between this place and the other. Their Lordships blinked. Anyone who has taken the most casual glance at the proceedings of the other place will know that they have had the leisure and appropriate time to discuss and weigh up important and entire issues. The Government have tried to drive through this monstrous piece of legislation, unjustified in so many of its particulars, in 16 hours, including all the time needed for votes.

I am amazed that the Government troubled with the House of Commons. They have set a new record in deeming that which has not happened to have happened. I am surprised that they did not reach into their armoury, having set a precedent in the constitutional history of this country, and have the House declare—there are enough willing Labour Members for them to do so—that this process is taking place without debate. We are very close to such a situation.

I hope that this coercive measure fails. I am mindful that we have not been allowed a reasonable amount of time in which to discuss matters such as habeas corpus, internment, new religious hatred laws and the third pillar of Maastricht. We have had 14 minutes, with a 90-minute order, directly to translate into British laws a change in our criminal laws that affects our constituents and that has been constructed out of a secret meeting somewhere on the continent. That is monstrous. We are prepared to suspend habeas corpus and to bring in internment in this country.

I am anxious about this vast portmanteau Bill, which has imported a whole series of concepts that have no relationship—certainly none has been demonstrated—to the dangerous circumstances that arose on 11 September. I am surprised only that the Home Secretary did not grasp the opportunity to deliver some of the contentions of the Auld report and to take away our right to trial by jury. The Bill would have provided a good opportunity.

I want the world outside to know what has gone on in this House of Commons: without knowing about the weight, import, number or seriousness of Lords provisions, motions such as this are hung in front of us, late at night, in secrecy—as if we were in wartime circumstances—with the microphones turned off, with one good, loyal citizen in the Public Gallery waving goodbye as we close down the House of Commons to outsiders. *[Interruption.]* It is said that the Liberal Democrats closed down the House, but they could not do that. It is the duty of the Government to secure the business of the House and the country. Hon. Members should reflect on the purpose of this Chamber.

The motion demonstrates that we are nothing. I do not understand why Labour Members cannot stand up for things that we have believed in all our lives, such as habeas corpus, one of the most important features in banishing slavery from these shores.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Shepherd: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall not. I am mindful of the time constraints, because there will, of course, be a closure motion.

We can push away consideration of important matters. We do not know the terms of the guillotine motion. The guillotine that the Government will impose next week will tell us whether they will even allow us to have a serious discussion of the serious amendments that we were unable to debate when the Bill was previously before the House.

If the country thinks that its liberties are defended by this Chamber, it is very, very wrong. I want liberty to be defended by this Chamber, but now we are looking to an appointed House—an appointed House: what shame!—to make and defend the liberties and traditions of our country. That is why I oppose this abysmal, outrageous motion. It is all part of the attempt to create a climate in which people believe that this country is in such a desperate plight that the very life of the nation is under threat. It is not. No one believes that.

We believe in proper, targeted, particularised measures to supplement those that already exist. The Government have no sense of country, and in one real sense, terrorism wins a significant battle with this form of legislation. I wish that the House would open up and recognise what we have become: we are nothing when Governments can jig around with their majority, with no debate on the substance of the basic freedoms for which this House came into existence. That is the purpose of the House but the Government will not permit its achievement.

6.13 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): I hope that the House will reflect on the superb sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd). We are doing something significant. Sadly, I do not have the same credibility as those Members who have already spoken as I was not here last night. I was speaking at a populist gathering in London that went on until a late hour. However, through the brilliance of the House of Commons, I have been able to read the *Hansard* report of the debate that took place last night. In fairness, we should give credit to *Hansard* for recording everything that took place before the House went into private session.

I have some brief points. I hope that the House of Commons will appreciate that the Bill is desperately important; it is of great significance. When we consider that all the changes that we are making in relation to the third pillar of Maastricht were discussed in 12 minutes in this place, we realise that we are treating legislation

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

with contempt. The time taken to push the measure through shows that we are not taking democracy seriously. I fear that the motion shows that, too.

Mr. Gummer: Does my hon. Friend agree that although we hold opposite views on Maastricht and the third pillar, we share precisely the same views on the means that the Government are using to pass measures with no debate in the House of Commons? Does not the fact that we can stand together on that show exactly how desperate the Government have become?

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am delighted that my right hon. Friend agrees with me, as I have been complaining for many, many years—in fact, since 1973—about the vicious and spiteful way in which Governments of both parties have forced through European legislation. I know that he would have been no part of that. Certainly, something significant has happened.

We should also seriously consider the fact that the motion means that we cannot have adequate debate. We are talking about being limited to only two and a half parliamentary days. We do not know what other business will be proposed during that time. If the votes take place after 10 o'clock, it will not be possible to proceed with them. There would have to be a deferred vote on the following Wednesday, which would mean that the Government could not complete their timetable. Unless there is a tightly drawn timetable motion, it will be impossible to hold the relevant debates.

The House should consider whether the motion will help the passage of the Bill. I have noticed that, as a result of all the recent changes, whereas the Lords used to be a quiet and inoffensive body, it now appears to take its democratic responsibilities more seriously. Will we help to get the measure through and create the good will that the Government obviously require if we proceed as we are doing?

We are treating the House of Commons with contempt, forcing through massive legislation with no proper discussion. What the Government are doing will create more trouble; it will not solve problems. I certainly appreciate that the Government are anxious to pass measures on security speedily, but what they are doing is insulting to our democratic traditions and may result in their not getting legislation that they particularly want.

There is not enough time properly to consider the measure or discuss Lords amendments properly. I fear that the result will not be to help pass the measure but a lack of good will.

Finally, I hope that Members will think about what happened at the last general election. The vital aspect of that election was not who won, whether Labour, Conservative or Liberal. It was the massive number of people who did not vote. Among younger people, there was not even the slightest interest in politics. The way that we carry on is driving people away from their democratic responsibilities.

When people realise how we forced through this massive, important measure in such an appalling way, they will feel that there is little point in the democratic process. The House should think about the massive strike action taken by the voters. If we treat democracy with contempt, we shall simply add to that process and there will be less participation in democracy.

I hope that the House will think about those matters because what we are doing today will not help. It will create more problems, more confusions and more delay.

6.19 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): It is good to see you back in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, for a less eventful sitting than when you last occupied it. It is, of course, an irony that we seem almost to have time aplenty to discuss a motion that contains little of substance, whereas we had almost no time at all to debate a huge raft of terribly important and controversial provisions that will affect this country for many years to come.

The Government told us that the allocation of time was such that they could spare no more time to debate the Bill in Committee, or on Report or Third Reading, yet by the ingenuity of my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), we have managed to find an extra hour or so and, indeed, a couple of hours of Government time last night to debate what was called a piffling motion. One wonders why the Government were not able to find more time to debate the Bill, and questions should be asked about that.

At the beginning of the debate last night, the Parliamentary Secretary—who has his back turned to me—was, I am afraid, left alone on the Treasury Bench through no fault of his own. With the best will in the world, the hon. Gentleman—for whom I have a good deal of respect—is not able to assess whether the motion is adequate because he is not over-familiar with the Bill. One has to have gone through the Bill in detail to understand exactly whether the motion is appropriate and what is likely to happen in the other place. I should have thought that a Home Office Minister might have taken the trouble to stay with him on the Treasury Bench last night to advise him, but that was not the case.

It was also a great pity that the motion seems to have been drafted by members of the Government, whose duty is to get business through the House, rather than by those who may have anything important to say about the Bill and who want to reflect on the concerns that hon. Members on both sides of the House have about it.

Simon Hughes: Does my hon. Friend accept that one of the other criticisms that has still not been remedied—perhaps the Minister will help us in his winding-up speech—is that we still do not have any indication of the timetable under the motion. A further guillotine motion may well be imposed on debate next week. If we at least knew the structure of next week, we might be somewhat better off, but that is another secret not so far revealed to hon. Members, let alone Opposition Members.

Norman Baker: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. In fact, the only certainty that we have is the motion. We have no certainty about the Bill's consideration in the House of Lords; about whether Labour peers will table amendments; or about whether the Government will accept any amendment. We have no certainty about the timing in the House of Commons; about any guillotine motion; or about what interested external groups will have to say about the Bill. We have no certainty about anything, apart from the fact that the Government want to railroad the Bill through the House, irrespective of the outcome in the other place. That is the only certainty about which the Government seem to be interested.

I suspect that a good number of amendments will come from the other place. If the House of Lords is doing its job properly, it will want properly to reflect on the fact that this House has not been able to consider whole swathes of the Bill, as the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) correctly said. I pay tribute to him for the conviction and passion with which he speaks on such issues.

For example, part 11, on the retention of communications data, was not discussed for one minute in the House, yet it contains huge powers that will allow the Home Secretary to accumulate data in pursuit of not simply terrorists, but those involved in any criminal activity under clause 101(5)(b). That is a matter of profound importance, but we had not one minute to discuss it.

I had only one and a half minutes in which to discuss the transportation of nuclear material, and we are entitled to know more about that. The House spent only one and a half minutes on that part of the Bill, and we spent very little time on a range of other issues. We spent barely enough time even on the topics that we did discuss—whether it was Ministry of Defence police or face masks.

I contrast that with the time that we have had to debate the Proceeds of Crime Bill in Committee. That Bill has been properly timetabled, and there have been good debates. To be fair to the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), when the Opposition Members who serve on that Committee have asked him whether he has thought about an issue, he has said, "No, I haven't, but it's a good point and I'll go away and consider it." Ministers have not had the opportunity to do that with this Bill because the Opposition have not been able to ask, "Have you thought about this sentence?"

Simon Hughes: My hon. Friend may not have had a chance to read this yet, but I am sure that the Minister will be aware that the Joint Committee on Human Rights produced its second report on the Bill this morning and has found many of the Government's concessions to be inadequate. It has suggested that the Bill needs to amended in many other ways. With a week to go, all parties in both Houses say that the Bill is inadequate, especially in its human rights aspects. That report has not yet been considered. Does my hon. Friend agree that such Committees were set up to give advice, but it seems that there will be no chance to take that Committee's advice, let alone to act on it?

Norman Baker: My hon. Friend makes a very pertinent point. What are those Committees for? I serve on the Human Rights Committee, as does the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills, and it has said that it is very worried about the Bill and that, in certain aspects, it is inconsistent with the European convention on human rights. What are the Government doing about that? They have tabled no amendments to deal with those issues. Instead, the Bill is steamrollered through the House. Those Committees seem to be a sop, so that the Government can say that they exist, that they are wonderful and that they are committed to human rights. However, when they propose something that the Government do not like, they are completely swept out of the way.

Worse than that, when the House had a debate of sorts—was it in Committee, or on Report or Third Reading?—a Minister told us that debate and voting were shenanigans and that we were wasting time. What are we here for if not to debate and vote? It seems as though the Government want to close things down and run through their business as soon as possible and that they think the Opposition are a bit of nuisance and wish they would go away. The Bill will not go away. It is very controversial, and its consequences will be seen throughout the land if the Government do not listen.

The Government still have time to listen to the House of Lords and to Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members and—dare I say?—their own Back Benchers. Let us not forget that the gloss of support does not extend to Labour Back Benchers. They are just as unhappy with the Bill as Opposition Members. If the Government have any sense, even at this late stage, they will make more time for the Bill and listen to some of the comments that hon. Members have made.

6.26 pm

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): I shall be brief. We have heard some extremely powerful arguments during the debate, but exclusively from Opposition Members. The Government know that there is no satisfactory answer to many of the points that have been made. Of course, we do not know what Lords messages will be received, but we do know that, at worst, the motion could be oppressive and, at best, it is premature, and we shall divide the House.

6.27 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): Hon. Members raised a number of issues last night, early this morning and this afternoon, and I shall do my best to deal with them clearly and succinctly, although there has been rather more heat than light during the debate, especially last night and in the early hours of this morning.

The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd)—an hon. Gentleman for whom I have great respect—made an extraordinary contribution this afternoon, in which he questioned the patriotism of Government Members because of the business motion. I hope that, on reflection, he will accept that his remarks were over the top and deeply offensive.

The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) referred in his closing remarks to the disconnection between the public and the House and, in particular, to the disconnection between young people and politics. I can think of nothing more that would switch off young people from politics than the scenes that we witnessed in the Chamber in the early hours of this morning, with the pathetic use of filibustering tactics by the Liberal Democrats and some Conservative Back Benchers.

I should like to address the specific points that have been raised. First, several hon. Members have suggested that the Divisions on matters relating to the Lords messages might be deferred. I can absolutely reassure the

[Mr. Stephen Twigg]

House that that would not be the case. The Sessional Order that relates to the deferral of Divisions is very clear. It states that Divisions on questions relating to

"motions . . . in the course of proceedings on bills"

and on a number of other matters will not be deferred, so there will not be a deferred Division.

We had a somewhat protracted discussion at the beginning of last night's proceedings about the meaning of the word "Thursday" and how long next Thursday will last. The answer is very much as suggested by several Opposition Members: Thursday could well continue beyond that which we would conventionally understand Thursday to be. Thursday will continue either until both Houses have agreed to an Act and Royal Assent has been notified or until it is clear that no agreement can be reached. I very much hope that the House will not break the previous record established during the consideration of the Coercion Bill in 1881, when the day lasted for 41 and a half hours. It appears that compromise is possible, so Thursday may be extended.

That connects to my third point, which is about the time available for debate. Several Opposition Members have raised the reasonable concern that there should be sufficient time on the Floor of the House to debate the Lords messages. In particular, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) mentioned that issue and, when he intervened last night, I said that there would be a supplementary programme motion. It will obviously be drafted once we have received the messages from the Lords and in the light of the number of amendments that are before the House. The House will decide on that motion and, although I can give no guarantees, I will pass to those involved in drawing up the motion the concerns that have been expressed in the debate.

Simon Hughes: One of the few certainties that we have is that the Lords expect to finish their Third Reading debate next Tuesday evening. Given that, can the Minister give us any indication as to what, if any, business will be taken here next Tuesday evening if this motion is passed? For example, will we debate a timetable motion then or will it be brought before the House on the Wednesday? After we know what the Lords have sent us on Tuesday evening, will there be an opportunity for all the parties concerned to be able to discuss the issue so that we can have some management of the remaining time if, unhappily, the House agrees to this motion?

Mr. Twigg: Certainly every attempt will be made to ensure that all parties are involved. I made it clear in my opening remarks yesterday that we would not move immediately to discuss the Lords messages on Tuesday night. We would have a printed version, and the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal thanked me for that in his contribution. I can give the broad assurance that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) seeks. There will be cross-party involvement in drawing up the programme motion and we will not move immediately to discussion on Tuesday night. We will move to the concrete discussion on Wednesday.

Mr. Hogg *rose—*

Mr. Twigg: I do not intend to take any further interventions, because I shall speak for just another five minutes. I took many interventions yesterday and I have promised Members on both sides to respond to the points that have been made in the debate.

Several hon. Members have mentioned consultation, but I fear that Opposition Members protest rather too much on that point. Some said that they want to have the opportunity to consult outside organisations and, of course, that is extremely important. However, none of us can have failed to have noticed that there has been extensive debate, discussion and consultation since 11 September about the nature of the response. Yes, there is controversy and discussion, but no one can really say that we have not had full debate and an opportunity for outside organisations to influence the proceedings in this House and the other place.

Several hon. Members referred to secondary legislation, so let me make clear the basis for that. The special meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 20 September set 1 January 2002 as the deadline for implementing the 1995 and 1996 European Union extradition conventions. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is publicly committed to meeting that deadline and actual implementation will follow, as required in the conventions, 90 days later. However, the Home Secretary will want to meet the legislative deadline in the terrorism road map agreed by the Justice and Home Affairs Council.

Several hon. Members have asked that we make the regulations available publicly in draft. I am advised that they are being finalised and that they will be made available as soon as it is possible to do so, although that is unlikely to be much before they are laid before Parliament. Next week we will, however, be able to provide a summary of the main effects of the regulations on the Extradition Act 1989. In advance of that, the Government's proposals to implement the two conventions can be found in the consultation paper issued in March this year, "The Law on Extradition: A Review".

The motion on secondary legislation will be required precisely because the House cannot take a view on secondary legislation until the primary legislation is passed. The House, however, has procedures for considering secondary legislation. All measures under the Justice and Home Affairs Council will take place under the affirmative procedure and will therefore be subject to debate.

Finally, let me say a few words about the conduct of the debate last night and today. Last night, the Liberal Democrats took advantage of parliamentary procedure in an attempt to derail discussion of the Bill. The official Opposition co-operated with the Government to get a sensible solution, but some Conservative Back Benchers joined the Liberal Democrats in resorting to arcane parliamentary procedure to frustrate debate.

Ironically, the reasons that the Liberal Democrats have given to explain their actions do not stand up. A motion to sit in private does not prevent another motion for closure. Even if the Government were contemplating a tactic of closure, it would have been within the discretion of the Chair whether to allow a such a motion. Therefore, like many outside, I find the tactics of the Liberal Democrats baffling.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have listened to the Minister and he has referred to legislation on extradition. He knows perfectly well that the European Union arrest warrant, which was due to be considered and completed on 7 December, cannot be carried through in the way that the Government and the European Council originally intended, because the Government completely fouled up their own legislation two days ago. Furthermore, the measure is subject to a scrutiny reserve. Will the—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. That is a point for debate, not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Twigg: I welcome the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) to the debate; it is certainly the first time that I have seen him. Clearly a mention of Europe aroused his instant interest as he sits in his previous position on the Back Benches rather than in his new position on the Front Bench.

We heard a number of interesting contributions that did not relate directly to the motion. The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) has become a belated convert to modernisation with his criticism of late-night sittings and late-night discussion of motions. I was struck by the fact that today he was able to say succinctly in 13 minutes what took him more than an hour to say last night. Similarly, of the Liberal Democrats, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) managed to say in 12 minutes what it took the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey 34 minutes to say last night. That demonstrates that we have had sufficient time to deal with the motion fully and properly.

I am pleased to commend the motion to the House. The provisions of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill are a direct response to the changed security situation following the tragedy of 11 September. The powers in the Bill, such as those for the detention of suspect terrorist asylum seekers and for aviation security, are needed on the statute book as soon as possible. I believe that we have got the balance right, enabling debate, scrutiny and consideration in both Houses while seeking to secure the Bill according to the Government's timetable. On that basis, I commend the motion to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 288, Noes 152.

Division No. 103] **[6.38 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Baron Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric

Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry

Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Smith and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L

Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*

Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gray, James
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael

Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen O'Brien and
Mr. Charles Hendry.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That,

(1) At the sittings on Tuesday 11th, Wednesday 12th and Thursday 13th December, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any Lords Messages relating to the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill have been received; and

(2) At the sitting on Thursday 13th December, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until he shall have reported the Royal Assent to any Act agreed upon by both Houses.

European Affairs

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

6.50 pm

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): Next week, on 14 and 15 December, the Belgian presidency of the European Union will host the final European Council of the year at Laeken, at which Britain will play a strong role as a European power, now, under the Labour Government, more influential than at any time since we joined the rest of Europe in the early 1970s.

By co-operating with our fellow members of the EU, Britain gets practical benefits: more jobs, faster economic growth, safer food, cleaner beaches, cleaner air, purer water, less crime and, crucially, better security. In the modern world, our strength as a nation derives from the strength of our partnerships and our alliances. Nations are stronger when working together than when alone. In the modern world, sovereignty shared is sovereignty regained. We should be more confident and get more real about our sovereignty. Does getting more involved in Europe mean that we will give up our sovereignty? No, because there is a difference between giving up and choosing to pool sovereignty because doing so promotes Britain's interests.

We have already given up our right to do what we like in defending Britain, because we are members of NATO. We already pool sovereignty with the United States of America and others because by doing so Britain has stronger defences. Anyone attacking us invites retaliation from all the NATO nations.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): We are discussing a matter of fundamental interest to our country. Would my right hon. Friend care to comment on the fact that although Labour Members are paying great attention to his speech, there is not a single Conservative Back Bencher—

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells) *rose*—

Mr. Allen: Oh, forgive me. I withdraw that remark. One Conservative Back Bencher is present in the Chamber. What does that tell us about the views of the Conservative party?

Peter Hain: I do not want to intrude on the Conservatives' private grief. Presumably, their desire for a truce in their internal civil war over Europe is the reason why all their rabid Back Benchers are away.

More than 50 years ago, we gave up our right to do as we liked in foreign policy by joining the United Nations. Its Security Council resolutions have the force of international law, and everyone, including Britain, has to respect them, but as a permanent member of the Security Council we can make the laws. By pooling sovereignty, the British people have greater influence in building a safer, more stable world.

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Peter Hain: The hon. Gentleman will reply to the debate later, but why not?

Mr. Trend: Perhaps the Minister might care to comment on the fact that had the Government not lost control of the business last night and today, the start of this debate would not have coincided with the meeting of the 1922 Committee. That is why Conservative Members are not here.

Peter Hain: I know that many of my hon. Friends want to speak, so I shall be reluctant to take any more interventions from Conservatives, especially interventions of that quality.

Pooling sovereignty can entail compromises. That is sometimes hard for some commentators and politicians to understand, but real people know that in real life we cannot always get exactly what we want, and nor can other countries in those international bodies. We can better advance British interests by being right at the centre of NATO, the UN and, indeed, the EU.

In recent weeks, the EU has acted with great resolve and rapidity to tackle the threat of terrorism. Already we have agreed that there will be a common European arrest warrant, a common definition of terrorist offences and common measures to freeze the assets of terrorist suspects. None of those measures could have been achieved outside the EU. By co-operating with other countries we strengthen our defences against terrorism—an evil that knows no national boundaries.

There is more to do. We have to boost co-operation between our national law enforcement and counter-terrorist agencies, approve without delay the Commission's proposals to improve air transport security, and ensure that all member states ratify the UN convention on the suppression of the financing of terrorism and strengthen their domestic legislation. The EU has emerged as a key player in the global fight against terrorism. The natural alliance between the countries of north America and Europe is at the core of the international coalition.

At Laeken, we have the opportunity to show once again the strength of the EU's backing for the current military campaign and to renew our commitment to the diplomatic and humanitarian tasks, which are just as vital if we are to defeat the terrorist threat. The signing in Bonn this morning of the agreement on Afghanistan's future is a significant achievement. We pay tribute to the UN and to the Afghan leaders—men and women—who have grasped the opportunity to begin to rebuild their country. It is a victory for the international coalition against terrorism. A stable Afghanistan with a broad-based Government is as important to our own security as it is to the Afghan people, who have been liberated from the clutches of the odious Taliban. At Laeken we shall reaffirm our support for the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General and Lakhdar Brahimi to deliver on today's deal and build a broad-based, multi-ethnic Government in Afghanistan.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Is it not a little early to say that we have a stable Afghanistan?

Peter Hain: I did not say that the job was finished, but the hon. Lady, for whom in other respects I have considerable respect, should recognise that many of her arguments in relation to the international coalition's action in Afghanistan have been proved wrong. The people of Afghanistan—including and especially women—are enjoying greater freedom than they have had for many a long decade.

[Peter Hain]

Between us, EU member states and the Commission have already committed 320 million euros to the international humanitarian effort in and around Afghanistan, and the EU will have a continuing commitment to the region. Our kind of Europe has a collective duty to act as a more effective force for good in the world, so two years ago my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and President Chirac launched a British-French initiative on security and defence that the EU has been developing ever since.

In the aftermath of 11 September, it is all the more important to underpin our security with the capacity to carry out humanitarian and peacekeeping tasks where NATO as a whole is not involved. Far from weakening NATO, as some have alleged, we have an opportunity to strengthen NATO by strengthening the capabilities of EU member states.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The fact that there is a crisis in the aerospace sector is widely recognised, and today aerospace workers lobbied the House of Commons. Will the European Governments at Laeken address that crisis in aerospace industries throughout the EU? Might consideration be given to bringing forward orders that have already been committed for the A400M—the military version of the Airbus? That would do a great deal to help us in the north-west.

Peter Hain: My hon. Friend speaks forcefully, as always, on behalf of his constituents, and I know that many hon. Members have interests in the aerospace industry. Those points will be taken on board because we want to ensure that Airbus Industrie has a positive future—I think that it builds the best aeroplanes in the world. Given the difficulties it has already experienced, the aerospace industry overall should take advantage of all the opportunities that might lie ahead.

The European security and defence capability has been welcomed by President Bush, by all NATO members, by all candidate countries, and by almost everyone else across the world—except that fount of all wisdom, today's Conservative party.

I especially welcome Ankara's confirmation this week of support for Turkish participation in European defence—an outcome that our officials and my right hon. the Foreign Secretary have worked hard to secure. At Laeken, we expect to be able to draw the realistic conclusion that the EU is now able to conduct some crisis management operations, and will be in a position to take on increasingly demanding operations as the assets and capabilities at our disposal increase. However, our best weapon in the fight against terrorism is international solidarity. Alongside existing EU members, applicants for admission to the EU have backed the international coalition and the anti-terrorist measures agreed by the EU.

Britain has long been a champion of enlargement. We used our presidency in 1998 to launch negotiations for the first set of six applicant countries. Since then, we have pushed for and secured rapid progress. As a result, 12 countries are now negotiating their accession. A 13th—Turkey—has been confirmed as a candidate. Our Prime Minister was the first European leader to call for the first new member states to be admitted in time for the 2004 European parliamentary elections. At the Gothenburg European Council in June, that objective was agreed. At Laeken, in 10 days' time, we shall take the matter further forward. All 10 of the candidate countries with target accession dates by 2004 have now closed 19 or more chapters of the 30 that make up the EU acquis.

The Commission's recent strategy paper confirms that we are on track for our goal of completing negotiations with the best prepared candidates by the end of next year. As the paper reaffirms, while a political settlement of Cyprus's problems is plainly desirable, it is not a pre-condition for that country's entry to the EU. Only yesterday, the first meeting between the leaders of the two Cypriot communities agreed to direct talks. We continue to support a just, viable and lasting settlement to the Cyprus problem.

With the Bill having passed through this place and having completed consideration in Committee in the other place, we are now on target to ratify the Nice treaty, which is essential for enlargement to proceed. At the Nice summit a year ago, and for the first time since we joined the common market in 1973, we won an increase in Britain's voting weight relative to the smaller countries. We succeeded in providing for a smaller and more efficient Commission. We secured more qualified majority voting in areas where the UK's interest lies in reform and change while preserving our ability to defend the status quo and vital national interests where that is necessary.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I am delighted that qualified majority voting will help us to reach consensus but still protect our vital interests. In respect of the prospectus directive, which affects the financial services interests of the City of London, does my right hon. Friend agree that what is taking place in London is larger than what is taking place in the rest of Europe? Qualified majority voting might result in the loss of our competitive advantage, and that would not be in our interests.

Peter Hain: I know that my hon. Friend is extremely knowledgeable and an expert on the EU, but I am not sure that she is right in this instance.

At Nice, we showed also that Britain is in the vanguard of reform and change in the EU. In the 12 months since Nice, the EU has agreed other practical measures that will directly benefit British citizens. These include new rules to speed up procedures for returning illegally abducted children home, new measures to limit emissions of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and ammonia to make cleaner the air that we breathe and new airline safety measures so that we can fly the European skies more safely. Further practical benefits are in the pipeline for next year—again with British influence.

There will be a new package of measures to liberalise the EU telecommunications market, which will increase consumer choice and should help to drive down phone bills. A new Community patent will encourage innovation and make it easier for business to protect intellectual property rights quickly, reliably and cheaply. There are measures to open up the pensions market so that people can shop around Europe for the best deals.

None of those measures could conceivably be implemented so quickly and efficiently without the familiar structures and procedures of the EU. They will be of immediate and obvious benefit to all our citizens.

Several Members have raised with us the case of 12 British citizens who are being detained in Greece following their arrest near a military base.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): My right hon. Friend has listed all the benefits of the treaty of Nice, and I would applaud each one of them. Unanimity seems to have been denied by the Irish referendum, and my Irish colleagues tell me that it may be denied if a second referendum is held. Can we proceed to enlargement without the treaty of Nice being approved by all the present members of the EU?

Peter Hain: In practical terms, the answer is no. The Nice treaty is the only realistic route to enlargement, at least on anything like the timetable that we have agreed. In practical terms, we could not proceed without a similar treaty.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Peter Hain: I am trying to answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty). I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) is an addict when it comes to these matters, and I shall come to him in a moment.

The Nice treaty needs to be ratified by the House; otherwise, we shall deny all our friends in Cyprus, Malta, the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and all the other accession states the status in the EU that they have so desperately striven to secure. I hope, therefore, that my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East and my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok, who is about to interrupt me, will support the treaty and the Government in the negotiations.

Mr. Davidson: May I reassure my right hon. Friend that I am certainly not an addict? I am not nearly as sad as that. However, I take an interest in the plight of small countries. Is it the Government's position that they respect the decision made by the Irish people in a referendum, or is Britain pressurising Ireland to conduct a further referendum? Will he make it absolutely clear what Britain's position is on this matter?

Peter Hain: I am delighted to do so. Yes, we respect the Irish people's verdict; no, we are not pressuring the Irish Government to do anything. On the contrary, the Irish Government have come to us and our fellow European member states. They have said that they wish to offer advice, having further consulted their own people to ascertain whether there are any further assurances from the EU, and especially the European Council, that might enable another referendum to be called. The Irish people can then be invited to make up their own mind, as was done—

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Blackmail.

Peter Hain: The hon. Gentleman has been told by his leader to keep quiet as the shadow Attorney-General. He is not supposed to say anything on Europe, but he says "blackmail" from the Opposition Back Benches. When the Conservative Government whom he supported—well, sometimes; I am not sure whether he supported them on this matter—were in office the Danes initially rejected the Maastricht treaty in a referendum. On a further referendum, they were given assurances that enabled them to vote again—

Mr. Cash: Blackmail.

Peter Hain: I think that it is intelligent to seek reassurances on the matters that one is worried about and to consider the matter again. If the Irish choose to do that, they will have our support.

I return to my point about the British citizens who are detained in Greece following their arrest near a military airbase. I can assure the House that our officials in London and at the British embassy in Athens are providing the detainees with the consular assistance that they need, and are working closely with the Greek authorities to expedite the case.

The rapid pace of change in the world means that we in Europe cannot afford to stand still. Reform is not merely desirable, it is a survival strategy. At Nice, member states agreed to take the process of reform further forward at another intergovernmental conference, to take place in 2004. At Laeken, we shall agree the remit of a convention under which a wide-ranging debate will be held on the future of Europe in preparation for the intergovernmental conference.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): Does my right hon. Friend think that we are exercising change at the right speed, given that the general public are perhaps rather disenchanted with the EU? Given the turnout at the last European elections and the fact that possibly there is only one referendum every generation, should we be doing more to address these issues?

Peter Hain: I agree. We are doing more. At the convention launched at the Laeken summit the weekend after next and at the following IGC we will address the key objective of closing the gap between the leaders and citizens of Europe.

The House will welcome the fact that its direct participation in the convention is already assured. Two Parliamentarians from each member state will be members. The rest of the convention will consist of one representative from each Government, 16 Members of the European Parliament and one representative from the College of Commissioners. The candidate countries will also participate. We expect the convention to address fundamental questions, such as how to demarcate the powers of the European Union and the member states; how to ensure that co-operation in the EU remains rooted in democratic legitimacy; and how to simplify the treaties so that citizens can better understand and appreciate what the EU does in their name—the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Challen).

We welcome a debate to clarify who does what. We also welcome the simplification of treaties so that people can understand them, as I have sought to do in a new booklet summarising them in 300 words; it was published last night and I am happy to send a copy to every Member of Parliament who wants one. In addition, we want to

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involve national Parliaments more. All of that is a British agenda, which is now being accepted by our colleagues across the EU.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): My right hon. Friend talked about simplifying the treaties; lawyers get a bit worried when they hear such talk. Will the simplified treaties be legal documents and, if so, will the European Court of Justice adjudicate on them?

Peter Hain: I am always reluctant to cross swords with my right hon. Friend who is an expert, not just on Europe, but on the treaties in particular. In fact, I venture to suggest that he knows a lot more about them than I do. He makes a legitimate point; there will be a disclaimer on the simplified directive and the treaties stating that they cannot be quoted in a court of law because they are a lay person's guide; I am sure that my right hon. Friend will welcome that.

The convention will not take decisions on the future of Europe; that task properly belongs to the Governments of the member states taking part in the IGC. The Governments of nation states will take that decision; in Britain it will be subject, as ever, to the final word of Parliament.

Angus Robertson (Moray): Returning to the convention and UK representation, will the Minister share with the House his thoughts on the make-up of the UK delegation? He will be aware that the German länder will be represented by the upper House of the German Parliament. He said that it is vital that national Parliaments are involved. Does he agree that the national Parliaments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should be represented directly on the convention delegation?

Peter Hain: No, I do not; that is the simple answer. Two representatives of the House of Commons are provided for under the provisional agreement, which will be finalised at Laeken. European policy is a reserved matter for the House. I recently had the privilege of being invited to the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament and was pleased to answer its questions. I see myself working in partnership with that Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly to make sure that the vision that we project in Europe is as inclusive as possible. It would not be possible to have direct representation by all the länder, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and so on in the convention unless it was much larger than is being contemplated.

Mr. Cash: As the Minister will know, I have certain responsibilities for the interpretation of treaties and other responsibilities for legal advice to the House. In the context of the question asked by the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), the Minister is right that those matters are reserved. However, I remember crossing swords with the late Secretary of State for Scotland on the requirements of the Scotland Act 1998; although countries can aspire to the partnership described by the Minister, in practice if there is an ultra vires provision it is down to the Minister in Whitehall to override it by order. That is prescribed in the Scotland Act and applies to questions of European law if there is a conflict between the two countries.

Peter Hain: I will take the hon. Gentleman's word for it; his authority on those matters is unsurpassed. I am delighted that his voice has not been silenced on European matters and I hope that he will intervene throughout the rest of our debate.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that while it is important for the convention to pursue its work in Brussels, it is also sensible for its members to report regularly to their national Parliaments and, to pick up the point made by the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), liaise with regional bodies as well? Throughout the life of the convention, there should be as much consultation and involvement of people as possible; we are all worried about the gap between European institutions and the people, and that would at least be an attempt to close it.

Peter Hain: That is a positive and constructive suggestion from my right hon. Friend, a distinguished predecessor of mine. We shall certainly look at that important proposal and I hope that the House authorities and the usual channels will look at it as well.

It is important that we know what the British people think about Europe. Today, I have placed in the Library the results of an opinion poll that we commissioned from ICM, which surveyed a relatively large and authoritative sample of 2,000 people across Britain. The main findings include the fact that a majority of two to one think that our membership of the EU is a good thing for Britain. Big majorities agree that the EU promotes peace and security in Europe and is good for British jobs and trade. The poll shows that the British people's priorities for the future work of the EU are maintaining peace and security and fighting poverty, unemployment and crime. It is that same practical Europeanism that the Government are seeking to advance.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): What about the euro?

Peter Hain: I shall come to that.

The poll confirms that many people know too little about the EU; no surprise there. But it also shows, rather more interestingly, that the more people know about the EU, the more positive they are about it; knowledge is a wonderful thing. The Government will continue to encourage that, especially among Conservative Back Benchers—indeed, among Conservative Front Benchers as well. The poll confirms that, like our Labour Government, people are worried about EU red tape and bureaucracy. Like our Government, they are concerned that the UK's national identity should not be lost in the EU. The poll shows that a majority are not at present convinced that we should join the euro—no surprises there either—although the majority against is rather smaller than in other polls; 47 per cent. of the ECM respondents were against joining it, while 36 per cent. were in favour.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): There has been much play on the issue of national identity. Will my right hon. Friend reflect on whether the Scots or Welsh have less of a sense of national identity after hundreds of years of membership of the United Kingdom? Has the fact that the French, Germans and Italians have been EU members from the beginning made them feel that they have lost their national identity?

Peter Hain: My hon. Friend makes an extremely valid point. As a Welsh MP like him, I know—as do you, Madam Deputy Speaker, hailing from Wales—that our Welsh constituents are fiercely patriotic about their Welshness, but are also proud to be British. The same is true in Scotland and, indeed, France; I do not detect that the French are any less French or less proud of being French citizens as a result of being positively pro-European. The same applies to the Germans, the Spanish and the citizens of any other EU member state. They are proud to be French, Spanish or German, as we are proud to be British, and proud to be European as well. That, I think, is the point that my hon. Friend was seeking to emphasise.

The poll to which I referred confirms what we have long been saying as a Government: that what matters about the EU is what it delivers, how it makes a practical difference to the lives of its citizens, and how it helps sustain and strengthen the real, prosperous, safe Europe in which our people want to live.

The European Council at Laeken will be the last before euro notes and coins are issued on new year's day in member states that are part of the single currency—a momentous step that will have an impact on us all. The change-over has been carefully prepared. We all have a strong interest in its success. A successful euro is in the interests of Britain, because so much of our trade is with countries in the euro zone.

Meanwhile we shall continue to pursue our agenda for economic reform in Europe, pioneered by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his Spanish counterpart at the Lisbon European Council in 1999—an agenda that will be given further impetus under Spanish leadership at Barcelona next year. That is yet another example of how, by building partnerships and engaging wholeheartedly with our friends in the European Union, we can deliver practical reforms and practical benefits for the British people.

The coming 12 months will provide ample further evidence of the ways in which the EU delivers what Europe's citizens want. Key decisions are due on freedom, security and justice in the European context; action against terrorism; European defence; economic reform; and enlargement. These are all issues that matter to our citizens, and they are all steps towards our goal of building our kind of Europe: a practical, people's Europe that, in a world full of challenges, is the surest way to underpin British security and British prosperity.

7.21 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): Since our last debate on European affairs, much has changed. The continent of Europe has had to face up to the challenge of terrorism. Just as in a previous generation many millions of people recalled the moment when they heard about the death of President Kennedy, so hundreds of millions of people alive today will always have in their memories the terrible visual images of 11 September. Yet out of that unspeakable horror, countries with very different political traditions have made common cause as the evils of terrorism are recognised.

As we reflect on the past few decades, however, perhaps we find that the most astonishing political event in Europe was the collapse of the Berlin wall—a momentous event which gave an opportunity to millions of our fellow Europeans to breathe freely and escape a hideous totalitarianism that had gripped their lives for decades.

A number of those now democratic countries are already valuable members of NATO and, we hope, will soon be embraced politically and economically by the European family of nations. Given their history, their accession to the European Union is a moral imperative, as well as a political and economic one.

For Russia, the collapse of the old Soviet Union and its satellites has resulted in a particularly difficult period of adjustment. Old suspicions and distrust have lingered on. That is why few developments have been more welcome than Russia's positive response to the appalling events of 11 September. It has given the international coalition much-needed support in fighting the terrorist threat, and President Putin has shown himself to be a strong national leader. The House will no doubt agree that it has been important for the cause for which we are fighting that Russia has joined the battle against terrorism so wholeheartedly and helped to provide crucial logistical support.

That has been accompanied by an overdue thaw in the relations between Russia and NATO. We applaud the Prime Minister's efforts to build bridges based on the new rapprochement. We in the Opposition were pleased to see how much Lord Robertson's visit to Moscow last month accomplished. The proposal to set up a Russia-North Atlantic council has considerable potential. Both parties stand to gain far greater security by working together.

There is still, however, a small dark cloud on the horizon in the picture of eastern Europe. It is regrettable that September's elections showed that it is not for nothing that Belarus's Alexander Lukashenko is called Europe's last dictator. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe said that President Lukashenko's Government

> "did everything in its power to block the opposition"

and that there was

> "a campaign of intimidation directed against opposition activists, domestic observation organizations, opposition and independent media, and a smear campaign against international observers."

The future of countries such as Belarus and Ukraine, for different reasons, causes concern to the eastern European EU accession countries, which want stable and successful neighbours.

The welcome warming of relations with Russia, especially the lessening of its concerns about NATO's post-cold war role, makes it easier to address the concerns of the Baltic states about security, by admitting them to NATO. Arising out of the experience of close co-operation over Afghanistan and our gratitude for that, Russia should no longer feel threatened by the Baltic states joining NATO. Every NATO state gains when a new member is admitted, and for the Baltic states admission would be a further sign of their acceptance and recognition by the world as full and independent parts of democratic Europe. Admission to NATO would enable

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them finally to put their difficult past behind them, at no risk to the interests of Russia or their own Russian minorities.

Ms Stuart: Although I agree that the Baltic states should be admitted to NATO as quickly as possible, does the hon. Gentleman agree that we should distinguish between the situation of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, which are all slightly different, and that there would be problems with Kaliningrad, should they join NATO and the EU?

Mr. Spring: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making that point, as I know that she takes a particular interest in these matters. Following the events of 11 September, we should explore the position and take the opportunity to derive some benefit from the horror that occurred.

Since the House last debated European affairs, a great step has been taken in the struggle against state-directed terrorism. Last June, Slobodan Milosevic was handed over to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague. It is clear that in Europe at least, state terrorism has been shown not to pay for the individuals who direct it. Nevertheless, the western Balkans remains a region of great instability. Ethnic hatreds still hang over the region's future. In Kosovo, much progress has been made and free and fair elections have been held, in which all ethnic groups took part.

That brings us to Macedonia. I am sure that the entire House regrets the continued shootings and strife there, after it seemed that a peaceful settlement had been reached. It is clear that unless a way can be found to give Macedonia's inhabitants stability and security, the whole region will be in danger of another inter-ethnic flare-up.

The military framework for dealing with the Balkan crises has been NATO, and it has proved flexible and successful. European Union countries outside NATO, such as Austria and Finland, have worked with it in peacekeeping operations such as KFOR. We should never risk losing such practical flexibility, which demonstrates NATO's importance and pre-eminence.

The greatest strength of the response to the events of 11 September has been that it was a flexible and layered response within a flexible and layered coalition. It has been flexible in that it has not required every member of the EU to sign up to precisely the same response, and layered in that it has allowed for different levels of enthusiasm, and different levels of participation as a result. Some members have felt unable to make a military contribution in the fight against terrorism directly or to the campaign in Afghanistan in particular, while others have deployed forces or stated their intention to do so.

A single European foreign or defence policy as advocated by Romano Prodi and others would have limited the effectiveness of the European response to that of the lowest common denominator, rather than allowing flexibly for a varied and layered response which allowed the EU to hold together while responding according to individual national capabilities. It is manifestly absurd that the advocates of greater integration have adduced 11 September as a reason for it. In fact, it plays in entirely the opposite direction. We need to ask ourselves this question: what would a single defence and foreign policy on this issue have been? The lesson of the challenge of 11 September shows that a flexible Europe met that challenge as an integrated and harmonised Europe could never have done.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is the existence of a European defence identity and the capacity to act in areas such as the Balkans that allow the flexibility that we have seen since 11 September, which has enabled us to build an international coalition that can act in areas such as Afghanistan?

Mr. Spring: I am not sure that I follow the hon. Gentleman's thought process exactly. Of course, there should be European defence co-operation. We have always been in favour of that, but we believe that it should work under the umbrella of NATO. That is the difficulty that we now face as a result of Nice.

Joyce Quin: Will the hon. Gentleman make it clear whether he is definitely repudiating the part of the Maastricht treaty—let us remember that it was signed up to by a Conservative Government and a Conservative Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary—that included a commitment to the

"progressive framing of a common defence policy"?

Is he now repudiating that commitment?

Mr. Spring: The right hon. Lady knows perfectly well that there was never any intention to establish a separate command structure outside NATO, but if one looks at exactly what was agreed at Nice, one sees that it is entirely different. I remind her that, originally, the Prime Minister himself bitterly opposed the moves that arose out of St. Malo. That is on the record.

The most practical thing that we can do to help our friends in eastern Europe is to proceed with enlargement of the European Union, which is the greatest task that faces member states. Regrettably, what the Government signed up to at Nice now threatens to undermine the very raison d'être of Nice: enlargement. There is no guarantee that the Irish people would change their minds if the Irish Government held another referendum on Nice. For enlargement to occur, a fallback position is clearly needed. We have pointed that out to the Government before and they need to answer the point. It is no use carrying on pretending that this is not a problem. I am sure that the whole House will be glad to hear whether such a fallback plan exists, and if so, what it is. I would not like to think that the Government had not comprehensively and urgently considered the problem.

The other great difficulty in the accession process is the lack of reform of the common agricultural policy. We know that, if there is no reform, the costs will explode and enlargement would be made virtually impossible. We have talked about these matters frequently in the Chamber, but I ask the Minister to note the final declaration at the recent World Trade Organisation meeting in Doha, which committed members to improvements in market access and substantial reductions in trade-distorting domestic support. It would be very helpful to all hon. Members to understand exactly what that means in practice, as it applies to the common agricultural policy. I hope that he will refer to the matter. Of course, agricultural reform was not even raised at Nice, which is very regrettable.

Before Nice, we were told by the previous Foreign Secretary that the accession process arising out of the so-called Amsterdam treaty leftovers probably did not require a formal treaty to pave the way for enlargement. If the accession process is, as we believe, a historical imperative, Nice should have been focused on it unequivocally and overwhelmingly. Before Nice, the previous Foreign Secretary told us about the 50 items for potential extensions of qualified majority voting put forward by the French presidency and then substantially ruled them out. In practice, however, at Nice the Government agreed wholly or partially to the majority of such extensions—so much for rhetoric versus reality.

As I told the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin), with regard to St. Malo our own Prime Minister flatly rejected the creation of any military structure outside NATO. What emerged at Nice was a European rapid reaction force that had nothing to do with improved defence capabilities or enhanced burden sharing, but everything to do with a structure that could ultimately undermine NATO and the United States presence in Europe.

Peter Hain: In that case, why have NATO and the United States welcomed it?

Mr. Spring: I have read what President Bush had to say. The Prime Minister's interpretation does not accord with what was signed up to at Nice. If the Minister looks at the annexes and exactly what was spelled out, he will see that there is a separate structure. As he will know, there is genuine concern in NATO, the United States and this country about a rival structure that may cause tensions within NATO in future. I am sure that he would not want that to happen. The separation of the command structure is spelled out unequivocally in the Nice annexes, and the Government simply cannot pretend otherwise. There are those who say that, since 11 September, there has been much rethinking. I hope so, for it is not only the decreasing military capabilities of Europe that have been put under the spotlight.

Let us turn now to the charter of fundamental rights. I am delighted to see the former Minister for Europe, the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), in the Chamber as it was he who compared the importance of the charter with that of the *Beano*. He said:

> "We do not . . . favour the Charter's incorporation into the Treaties."—[*Official Report*, 1 February 2000; Vol. 343, c. 541W.]

A matter of weeks later, he said:

> "I think it would be premature to decide now whether or not it should go into the treaties."

Furthermore, the Prime Minister appeared to rule out an EU-wide constitution in his Warsaw speech.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Obviously, the hon. Gentleman does not read my speeches with the same enthusiasm with which I am listening to him now. He will know that I said that the charter of fundamental rights was not a legally enforceable document. There was no question of its being entered into the treaties.

Mr. Spring: I shall address that point specifically in relation to the interpretation of the European Commission's view of its efficacy in that respect. We said at the time that the charter would be the basis for a European constitution, and of course that is exactly what is happening at the moment.

When I recently asked the current Minister for Europe about discussions that he had had regarding the inclusion of a possible EU constitution in the forthcoming Laeken declaration, he declined in a written reply on 22 November to answer that very simple question. The plain fact is that numerous European leaders, including Chancellor Schröder and President Chirac, have made powerful calls for a European constitution based on the charter. Our Government know what the consequences will be for our country; we have no written constitution. Nothing will alienate the British people more from the EU than a wholesale increase in judge-led law and the further blurring of the division between the legislature and the judiciary.

So, Nice was a catalogue of bad preparation, bad judgment and a lack of foresight on the part of our Government. It not only put in place the seeds of an intrusive and damaging European supranational constitution and the potential for tensions in NATO, but most of all, to the extent that it dealt with enlargement—as it should have done—it may well have obstructed it.

Of course, we would have accepted the functional changes associated with enlargement, such as those in voting power. Nice was not about stopping the processes that are alienating Europe's citizens from the institutions of the European Union. It has simply aggravated the problem. All of this was signed up to by a Government who have failed to repatriate one single power to national Parliaments and to stop the remorseless process of political integration—a failure that has arisen because they have absolutely no view or conviction whatever about what an enlarged European Union should look like in 10 or 15 years' time.

However, as the Minister for Europe said, the processes that lead up to Laeken, and subsequently to the intergovernmental conference in 2004, are in place. We want to make a positive contribution to the discussions that lead up to the IGC. In contrast to the thought-free zone opposite, we have already devised fresh ideas to reinvigorate the role of national Parliaments and give proper force to subsidiarity.

Let me spell out some of our ideas. We want to put a senior Minister directly in charge of our Brussels representation, who regularly reports back to Parliament, answers questions, faces scrutiny and spends part of the week in Brussels. He or she would sit on the Committee of Permanent Representatives on that basis. We support a formal subsidiarity panel to which national Parliaments, not the courts, could appeal. We support enhanced scrutiny, and consideration of how national Parliaments can amend EU legislation. We want a structured and open dialogue between national Parliaments and the Council of Ministers. We also support a national parliamentary committee that oversees EU expenditure in every member state and monitors any possible fraud and abuse.

Roger Casale: It sounds increasingly as if the hon. Gentleman is arguing for some sort of European constitution.

Mr. Spring: We got used to the hon. Gentleman's interventions in the Committee that dealt with the Nice ratification process. I shall not comment further.

[Mr. Spring]

The proposals that I outlined, among others, would completely alter the balance and tone in the EU. We want clear limits on what is being done at the centre.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Let me take the hon. Gentleman back three or four sentences. He briefly mentioned a proposal for national Parliaments to be able to amend European legislation. I am not sure whether he means that an individual country should amend the legislation for all the countries. However, that is an unreliable process unless all the countries get together to amend the legislation for everybody. That is the purpose of the European Parliament.

Mr. Spring: I was trying to make the point that we need to enhance the role of national Parliaments. The Minister for Europe has also said that. We should consider the matter properly. We are making suggestions that can subsequently be discussed and debated to ascertain whether they can be developed. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that there is no point in discussing the disconnection of national Parliaments from the architecture of the EU without making some practical proposals. Those that I have outlined are among several ideas that we want to consider. It is important that our national Parliament has a role in the EU that it currently lacks.

Angus Robertson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for allowing yet another intervention. He talked about several ideas on subsidiarity, yet he did not mention the role that sub-state Parliaments in the United Kingdom might play. Perhaps he has missed something out or has no ideas about subsidiarity apart from the role of the House of Commons.

Mr. Spring: I appeared before the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament with the hon. Gentleman, and I spelled out my views in great detail. His memory is a little imperfect.

We support a change in the tone and structures of the EU. We want clear limits on what is done centrally. How does that square with the Prime Minister's view that there should be no finality to what is done at the centre? Of course, exceptional and unforeseen circumstances may arise and demand a unified response; that is different. However, it is ridiculous to diagnose the problem constantly and offer no prescription. The British people want not high-flown, windy rhetoric, but a clarity that is absent from current Government thinking.

The Minister for Europe talked about the eurozone and the fact that the euro will come into play in a few weeks. Of course, the strength of the euro will depend on the performance in the economies of the countries in the eurozone. As the right hon. Gentleman said, we can only hope that the economies of Europe will grow, because they are important export markets for us.

However, it is worth remembering what the Prime Minister said before the 1997 election when he talked about his love of the pound and his feelings about the Queen's head on the £10 note. He said:

> "I feel it too. There's a very strong emotional tie to the pound which I fully understand. Of course there are emotional issues involved in the single currency. It's not just a question of economics. It's about the sovereignty of Britain and constitutional issues, too."

Since then, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Europe have made further comments. They have said that there is no constitutional bar to the single currency. At what point and by whom was that resolved? Did a group of learned Queen's Counsel pronounce on the matter? Perhaps it was the Attorney-General, or did the Lord Chancellor make a magisterial pronouncement? We await the right hon. Gentleman's explanation with bated breath.

Mr. Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Spring: Many Labour Members would like to speak. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that I have given way generously this evening.

The Minister for Europe recently gave his views on the euro on "Newsnight". He expressed such wonderful banalities as, "We can't afford to be left behind in Europe." He showed that he had no clue about the operation of the European central bank by saying, "Where we don't have influence yet is in the direction of monetary policy." However, his most fatuous remark was, "Even if you opt out you are affected by it."

Leaving aside our position as the fourth largest economy in the world, let us consider Canada, which is a member of the North American Free Trade Area and has an economy that is far more dominated by and more inextricably tied to the United States than our economy is affected by its relationship with the continent of Europe. Yet no one in Canada believes that it is essential for the Canadian dollar to be abolished. There are many other examples around the world.

As the Bank of England has confirmed, foreign investment has not been dissuaded from coming here because we are not in the eurozone. What economic statistic can the Minister for Europe produce to reflect the disadvantages that apparently burden us?

The single currency has little to do with economic considerations and everything to do with the politics of integration in the EU. As Mr. Duisenberg, president of the European central bank, openly said:

> "The process of monetary union goes hand in hand with political integration and ultimately political union. EMU is, and was always meant to be, a stepping stone on the way to a united Europe."

Let us not be in denial. The Chancellor's five economic tests are wholly subjective. The only test that matters is the sixth test of how and when to win a referendum. We shall argue for retaining our currency on economic, political and constitutional grounds.

If the Minister for Europe wants to elevate the important debate above woolly rhetoric, he should consider producing a White Paper to examine the economic, political and constitutional implications of the single currency. If the Government did that, I am sure that the document would bear out our view that it is in Britain's interests to retain our currency. That view is held by a clear majority of British people.

I have already referred to the tensions and difficulties in the Balkans. I should like to mention two other worrying areas in Europe. Today a meeting is taking place in Nicosia between the representatives of the two Cypriot communities, Mr. Denktash and Mr. Clerides. The position of successive Governments has been clear: we favour a bizonal, bicommunal, federal structure for the island. We have strong historic ties to Cyprus, and its accession to the EU has put a spotlight on the island. The continued division can be no bar to Cypriot accession.

Turkey also has ambitions for EU membership that we have accepted. However, it is greatly in Turkey's interest to resolve the problem in Cyprus, not least because of the growing disparity of living standards between the two parts of the island. Cyprus has already closed 23 out of the 31 accession chapters. We can only hope for a settlement. However, its absence cannot be allowed to impede full EU membership.

Lastly, I want to consider Gibraltar, where passions have risen dramatically in the lead-up to and the aftermath of the recent Brussels process meeting in Barcelona. We welcome the Government's commitment to ensuring that Gibraltarians will participate in the next European elections and we look forward to hearing the details. I hope that the Spanish Government will try to minimise the points of friction across the border.

The people of Britain have a special feeling for the people of Gibraltar, for good historic reasons, and value their continued association with us. I am sorry to have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that nobody is more directly responsible for the upsurge of concern and anxiety in this country and, particularly, in Gibraltar than he is. He said:

> "Our European partners do not understand why a dispute between two member states over a territory with a population one fifteenth that of Luxembourg should be a deciding factor in such decisions."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 7 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 90WH.]

When the right hon. Gentleman made that statement, he showed a deeply patronising attitude. It was highly provocative. He then dispatched his Parliamentary Private Secretary—the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint)—to appear on television to discuss Gibraltar with the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) and me. The hon. Member for Don Valley made the disgraceful and inaccurate statement that smuggling was taking place on a massive scale. Where is the evidence for that? The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs rejected the accusations of massive smuggling and money laundering last year.

So, despite assurances about respecting the right of Gibraltarians to determine their future, an atmosphere of bullying hostility has been created. This is a mess entirely of the Government's making; it is destructive and wholly unnecessary. We have made it clear that the way forward in any negotiations should be based on the concept of two flags and three voices, echoing the successful peace process in Northern Ireland. We would encourage the Spanish Government to seek a productive and friendly dialogue with their Gibraltarian neighbours and, in that atmosphere, encourage Gibraltar to respond.

All hon. Members hold Spain in great admiration. In the time span of a generation, it has transformed itself into an exemplary parliamentary democracy and a successful constitutional monarchy. It is also a valued EU and NATO partner. Despite all that, there is no question but that the right of Gibraltar's citizens to maintain their constitutional arrangements is an absolute one, and no amount of weasel words will alter that fact.

Ms Stuart: On Gibraltar, I broadly agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need three voices round the table. However, the Chief Minister of Gibraltar made it quite clear when he gave evidence to the Select Committee that he believes that the interests of the people of Gibraltar are better served by an empty chair than by his presence at the negotiations.

Mr. Spring: The hon. Lady does the Chief Minister an injustice, because he has made it plain that the concept of two flags and three voices is one to which he would be happy to accede. In fact, we have had discussions about such a process echoing the peace process in Northern Ireland. The hon. Lady is not being fair to the Chief Minister, because the situation might be quite different had the matter been handled differently by the Minister.

Peter Hain: The fact is that we have offered the Chief Minister exactly the same conditions for participation in the Brussels process talks—which are aimed at securing an agreement that will improve life in Gibraltar—that previous Chief Ministers have agreed to, and which have been offered by previous Conservative Governments. We are simply picking up the baton in a process started under Baroness Thatcher in 1984, seeking to promote dialogue with Spain and Gibraltar to resolve this intractable problem.

Mr. Spring: Of course, the right hon. Gentleman is right to want to resolve this intractable problem. He must, however, ask himself why there has been such fury and passion on the subject, and why the Chief Minister adopted the attitude that he did. It is no good the right hon. Gentleman shrugging his shoulders. He should not be shrugging his shoulders about an issue such as this, because it is of deep concern not only to the people of Gibraltar but to the British people who write in their droves to Members of Parliament because they are concerned about what is happening. All I am suggesting is that there is a way of resolving this issue, but it does not involve using the kind of language that the right hon. Gentleman and his Parliamentary Private Secretary have used with such reckless abandon.

There are many lessons to be learned from the last 12 months. Nice was a failure of aspiration and influence by this Government, and the Brussels process was turned wholly unnecessarily into a cauldron of anxiety and suspicion. Nevertheless, following September's truly terrible events, we have been forced to examine the nature of our own societies. Despite our being a pluralistic, socially liberal country, tolerant by world standards and slow to anger, the Prime Minister's determined response overwhelmingly had the support of the nation. It has brought all of us who cherish civilised standards more closely together, from the Atlantic to the Urals and beyond. But it has also shown us in Britain that we abandon our ultimate independence and flexibility at our peril. If we disconnect our people from our institutions—as we continue to do, particularly with regard to the EU—the validation of our democracy will surely be further weakened. This is clearly a lesson that the Government must urgently learn.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Clearly, many hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate, for which there is limited time available. I urge hon. Members, therefore, to keep their contributions brief. More may then be able to catch my eye.

7.55 pm

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): We are now being encouraged at the highest level to address ourselves to the possibility of an early referendum on membership of the euro. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister sees the barometer rising; the chairman of the Labour party—the Minister without Portfolio, my right hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke)—has boldly pushed the boat out.

I am a European. I have lived in France and remain an unrepentant francophile, and I have studied the classics and history—how could I not be a European?

The motives and ambitions of the founding fathers of the European communities were noble. French and German officials who had jointly administered occupied France were determined that enlightened politics and bureaucracy should prevent any further such catastrophe.

I confess that during what sometimes felt like the rather long hours that I spent seated at the table of the Council of Ministers, there were moments when I allowed my mind to wander from the immediate agenda. I have watched the representatives of 15 European nations, with their histories of conflict between them, earnestly thrashing out their policy differences under the auspices of this still new institution, the European Union, and I have been moved.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has expressed regret that Britain did not play a shaping part in the inception of the European Union. But why did we not do so? It was not for reasons of insularity. The fact is that nothing in Britain's historical experience disposed us to feel that we should be part of the new system that the French and the Germans were creating. We had not experienced almost total destruction in war. We had not been occupied since Norman times. We had seen off the threat of German invasion. We were complacent about our institutions of parliamentary sovereignty.

If we had deep national doubts about more limited propositions in the 1950s and the 1970s, there are now even deeper doubts about merging our currency with the single European currency.

For all my personal sense of being a European, and notwithstanding that I believe firmly that it is right for Britain to be a member of the European Union, I cannot believe that we should join the single currency—in the foreseeable future, at any rate. The reasons that we should not do so are both economic and political.

Fixed currency regimes have not been good for Britain. The 1960s saw a struggle, first to avert devaluation and then to cope with its consequences. The Bretton Woods system collapsed in the early 1970s. The snake, the crawling peg, the shadowing of the deutschmark, and the exchange rate mechanism—all the subsequent devices to fix currency parities—were damaging to the British economy.

On the other hand, since we fell out of the ERM in 1992, the British economy has prospered remarkably. Low inflation, low long-term interest rates, low unemployment, successful export performance, and our standing as the world's fourth largest economy—all the achievements that I was so pleased and proud to hear my right hon. Friend the Chancellor expound in the pre-Budget report—are attributable in very real measure to the freedom, which we have in the main skilfully exercised, to concentrate on other purposes and on disciplines other than the exchange rate.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Does my right hon. Friend not agree that what is being proposed in terms of membership of the euro is membership of a single currency, not—as we have had in the past—membership of a basket of currencies known as the ecu?

Alan Howarth: I agree with my hon. Friend. We therefore have to contemplate this issue with even greater seriousness.

I do not see how the great and the good of the economic establishment can know what the appropriate rate of entry into the euro would be for sterling. They certainly got it badly wrong in the case of the exchange rate mechanism. If—more by luck than by judgment—they should get it about right in 2005, why should we suppose that that rate would still be appropriate in 2010 or 2015? The economies of different countries will perform differentially, whatever the momentary convergence and whether within euroland or outside it.

A single interest rate is difficult enough to judge and manage within the United Kingdom alone. The policy that is appropriate to contain house-price inflation in south-east England is not the policy to help industrial manufacturers in south-east Wales to export, or to help the communities that have been so devastated by the collapse of steel-making to pick themselves up. How much harder it must be to operate a single monetary policy to suit the needs of a community of 12, or maybe more.

The social and political stresses consequential on the single European currency and single monetary policy will not be alleviated, as in the United States, by labour mobility, nor, as in the United Kingdom, by an automatic stabiliser—a cyclical adjustment of deficit targets, enabling public expenditure transfers to take place in favour of people and areas affected by unemployment. The Maastricht treaty sets damagingly tight limits on borrowing by Governments: it must amount to no more than 3 per cent. of gross domestic product, even when their countries are in recession. The stresses will have to be alleviated by tax-funded public expenditure.

The theory is that taxation policy will remain a matter for individual member states, but can the weaker regions of euroland realistically be expected to cope single-handed with the collateral damage caused by interest rates that are inappropriate for them? The pressure for the regional fund and the social fund to grow and grow will be irresistible. Only recently, the President of the European Commission called for the establishment of a European central fiscal institution. Tax-funded redistribution from richer to poorer across national boundaries within the European Union must entail an increase in supranational governmental powers in Europe.

A federal Europe was always part of the original project, as the treaty of Rome's commitment to "ever closer union" effectively avowed. The single currency project has always been politically driven—supported, naturally, by multinational business. It has been driven by elites, who have not carried public opinion with them at all easily. Few economists will argue confidently that it is right on economic grounds.

The enthusiasts adduce a number of economic arguments in favour of Britain's joining the euro. Their principal arguments are these. They say that Britain will not be able to cope on its own; but we are inside the European single market. They say that our businesses would be protected from foreign exchange volatility, which ignores the fact that the dollar is more important to Britain's trade than the euro, and that the euro has been highly unstable against the dollar. They say that it would be nice not to have to pay the costs of foreign exchange transactions, which is a trivial argument. They say that more international investment would be attracted to Britain. That is belied by the fact that, in each of the last five years, we have attracted more inward investment than the original six members of the European Community put together. They say that we would be better placed to influence decisions in Europe and the world. That is plainly wrong as far as the European central bank is concerned—political influence is specifically ruled out by the treaty—and ignores Britain's membership of the G8 and the Security Council. Some industrialists say that, if only we join, we shall trade happily ever after with a competitive exchange rate. That is the sort of self-delusion that makes it certain that, whatever the exchange rate, they will fail to make their businesses competitive.

The question, therefore, is whether joining is right for Britain politically. I believe it is not, for the historical reasons I have given and because of my conclusions when I examine the condition of the EU's institutions and consider the implications for democracy.

I regret to say that the Commission is entirely unfit to handle significantly greater responsibility. Both as Science Minister and as Minister for the Arts, I was shocked at its incompetence. I was particularly scandalised by Directorate-General XXIII's handling of the droit de suite issue, which must be a locus classicus of misgovernment. Despite repeated requests from British Ministers, the Commission refused to undertake a cost-benefit analysis of a policy which, when implemented, will certainly be destructive of the EU art market, which happens to be located in London. I was also deeply unimpressed by the inadequacies of Directorate-General X in developing and handling the Culture 2000 programme.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): Is not Commissioner Neil Kinnock making tremendous advances in reforming the Commission?

Alan Howarth: Notwithstanding the heroic struggles of Commissioner Kinnock, as Vice-President, with the task of reforming the Commission, he has a job on his hands even tougher than any he had to do as leader of the Labour party.

I mean no disrespect to the European Parliament if I note that it is an immature institution, by no means capable of bearing the weight of democratic responsibility implied by the single currency. Its powers are modest. It is based on limited trust, and on shallow accountability. We in this country are not remotely ready, ideologically or organisationally, to practise democratic politics on a European scale. The remedies now proposed by the Belgian presidency to deal with the gulf that they see widening between the peoples of Europe and the institutions of the EU include cross-European political parties, further extensions of qualified majority voting, enshrining the charter of fundamental rights in EU law, and direct election of an EU President. I hope very much that at Laeken my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will explain that it is not sensible or appropriate for Britain to accept such proposals. We would do better to concentrate on learning how to make devolution work well in the United Kingdom, and on restoring our citizens' faith in this Parliament.

The Labour party was elected in Britain to carry through a social democratic programme, particularly to improve our public services. Membership of the single currency would, at least, severely hamper our efforts. We would lose the freedom to pursue the economic policies that we judged to be right. As things are now, the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England has had the freedom to cut interest rates over recent months more aggressively than the European central bank. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor's fiscal programme, which he was told by the Commission earlier this year would be out of order within economic and monetary union, looks admirably judged. The International Monetary Fund projects UK growth next year of 1.8 per cent., against eurozone growth of 1.3 per cent.

If we joined EMU, we would be members of a system whose record on unemployment—I think particularly of the loss of manufacturing jobs—has been and remains lamentable. Why should we imprison ourselves in a system locked into deflation by the remit of the European central bank, and compounded by the masochism of the growth and stability pact? Let us keep our discretion in policy making, and our capacity to configure policy to take account of our distinctive economic characteristics and social priorities. Let us not put our jobs at such risk and erode our democracy.

I greatly admire the thoughtfulness, energy, skill and courage shown by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in international affairs—not just following 11 September, but since 1997. His scope as a leader, domestically and internationally, would be diminished rather than enhanced in the integrated Europe to which the single currency leads. I do not think it appropriate or realistic for Britain to aspire to lead the European Union. It will be better if, true to our history, we continue from within a more limited—though positive—participation in Europe to preserve the freedom to act on our judgment of Britain's interests at home and abroad.

8.9 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I am very pleased to follow the right hon. Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth). Our political opinions have diverged somewhat in recent years, although I am glad to say that there is a convergence on this issue, at least. I have always respected his political principles, even when I disagreed with him. However, I am delighted that he puts right at the front of his political thinking the crucial need to maintain self-government in the United Kingdom. That is important for the electorate.

Although the vision that the right hon. Member for Newport, East and other Labour Members have for the United Kingdom's social and political structure differs very much from mine, I think that he and I agree that the electors must be able to choose. If hon. Members hand over all these powers to people whom we have not elected and cannot remove, we shall be giving away not so much our powers as those of the people who elect us. That will create a very widespread disillusionment with unpredictable results.

[Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory]

The Minister introduced the debate by referring to the forthcoming meeting at Laeken. I suppose that that will be one of the periodic episodes when the European Union goes through an internal crisis of confidence and tries to re-invent itself. We have learned that a paper has been prepared for that summit by the Belgian Prime Minister, who is chairman of a committee of wise men that includes Jacques Delors. That paper, like everything else in the European Union, is confidential, but, again like everything else in the European Union, it has been leaked.

We are told that that study has concluded that the European Union is secretive, remote and undemocratic. Although I fully agree with that analysis, I am slightly worried about this constant reinvention of the European Union. I have lost count of the number of times that it has tried to relaunch itself or give itself a make-over, a face-lift or some type of rethink. Of course nothing ever really happens. The aim is a noble one: it is always to close the gap between rulers and ruled and to create a people's Europe rather than a politician's Europe. But of course it never happens.

This particular reinvention looks particularly unpromising because its apparent solution is to entrench the European charter of fundamental rights and to introduce a written European constitution. Both policies were firmly rejected by the United Kingdom and the Prime Minister in the Nice negotiations, although I confidently expect that if the German and French Governments get their way on it, the Prime Minister will find a way of saying that he was in favour of those policies all along.

The basic flaw is that the supposed solution to widespread public disillusionment with the European Union is yet more of the same policies. I think that, one day, it will occur to Heads of Government that something is more fundamentally wrong with the Union and with the structure and direction of policy. The Minister has referred to that disillusionment in this debate. It manifests itself in various ways, such as the very low turnout in European elections, which has reached almost farcical levels in the United Kingdom. We have also had the very unexpected referendum results.

It is very noticeable that when the people of Europe are allowed anywhere near a decision, they usually reject the advice of the European political elite who tell them what to do and they reject the proposal. That is what happened in the Danish referendum on the euro, when almost all the political parties, newspapers, trade unions and employers' organisations told the people of Denmark to vote yes, but the people of Denmark voted no. The same happened in Ireland with the treaty of Nice.

Unless that disillusionment and sense of alienation is tackled fundamentally, the results will be dangerous and even unpredictable. However, I do not want to be only critical; I have a few suggestions for the Government, the first of which is simply to tell the truth. As I know that that is difficult advice to give to the Government, I shall give an example. The other day, the Prime Minister came down to earth from his mission to save the world and set about trying to save the reputation of the European Union. He came up with the old familiar figure that 60 per cent. of our trade is with the European Union. That is simply untrue.

The Pink Book, of which I am a regular reader, gives a most useful geographic breakdown of the United Kingdom's trade patterns, and it breaks down our current account into earnings and payments. The recently published 2001 edition of the Pink Book says of those earnings and payments that

> "The European Union (EU) accounted for . . . around half (48 per cent.) of the world total".

That figure is less than half of the total. Even if we took out investment earnings and other transfers, the figure for trade alone would be 51 per cent. There is no figure anywhere in the tables or the text of the Pink Book, even for goods alone, that even approaches the 60 per cent. figure that has been quoted by the Prime Minister and the Government. Let us, right at the start of this debate, at least respect the facts. If the Government ever again produce the figure of 60 per cent. of our trade being with the European Union, we will know that they have something to hide or a very weak case.

We also have the debate on the euro. I was very struck by the acute analysis of the right hon. Member for Newport, East, and I agreed with much of what he said. Again, however, we are not having a proper debate in this country because we are not being given the facts. We are not even told what the estimated cost of changing over to the euro would be for this country. Various private-sector estimates are that the cost for the United Kingdom private sector will be £30 billion, but the Government have to tell us what the public sector cost will be. I know that such an estimate exists. I was in the Treasury five years ago, and even then there were outline estimates for Departments and Government agencies of the cost of changing over to the euro. If the Government are serious about having a debate on this crucial issue, let us have the facts.

We know that the truly difficult debate is occurring not yet in the country but inside the Government and that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor are circling round each other looking for political advantage. They have the agreed five economic tests, but we all know that those are highly subjective and that the same people who are asking the questions will be answering them and then judging the result. We also know, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) said, that there is an unannounced sixth test, which is whether public opinion can be changed in time.

Therefore, on this crucial issue, all we have from the Government is a policy of fudge and delay. If the Government really want to start a rational debate and include people in this assessment, they should try to advance some of the arguments for joining the euro themselves, rather than leaving it all to poor old Britain in Europe. I do not know whether Britain in Europe still exists as an organisation; it is certainly very demoralised and bankrupt. Nevertheless, it is most unfair for the Government to expect Britain in Europe to make all the running when Ministers themselves are unwilling to try to dream up some of the supposed advantages.

The arguments so far simply resolve themselves into one of inevitability: we are told that it is going to happen and that it is therefore a good thing. That is less of an argument than an attitude, and a pretty feeble one at that.

We used to be told that communism was inevitable, but free people in a democracy have choices to make. We need to know what is best for this country.

The only other argument that we hear is the influence argument. We are told that we have to join the euro to sit at the top table, whatever that is. Sometimes, the metaphor changes: unless we join, we will miss the bus or be left behind in Europe in some unexplained way. Of course, that is all nonsense. I want influence over the matters that I am sent here to decide by my constituents. I want 100 per cent. of that influence, but it is a secondary matter whether I have influence over other countries with their own electorates.

In any case, what brings a country influence in the world is not membership of some bloc but economic success, combined with military capability and the freedom to use it, and a foreign policy that is clear and over which the country has control. All that is on display in Afghanistan. We have influence on that issue, but it has nothing to do with our membership of the European Union or whether we are in or out of the single currency. In fact, the reverse is true. All our influence is threatened by the European Union.

Economically, the EU is in the slow lane. The eurozone has an appalling record of job creation. It is sitting on a demographic and pension time bomb that it will not acknowledge. It endlessly talks about economic reforms, but nothing happens. After the Lisbon summit, the Prime Minister came back here with wonderful declarations about reform, but nothing happened. Nothing ever changes. Meanwhile, the regulations, the red tape and the tax harmonisation continue, eroding the competitiveness of Europe in the wider world—and that is the really big issue. I simply do not understand how we would benefit economically. If we take into account the fact that our gross contributions to the EU are running at £20 million a day, of which we get back only about half, the profit and loss account looks distinctly unappetising.

Politically, the Government persist with the old-fashioned view that we exist as a country only in so far as we belong to a bloc. There are far more important forces at work in the world today, driven by issues such as information technology and the internet that have made geography irrelevant. We have witnessed the rise of the English language to world dominance, which is a huge advantage to this country that has nothing to do with the European Union. In fact, it is threatened by the EU, which persists in refusing to recognise that English has become the language of business and information technology in the whole of the rest of the world. Multilateral trade talks in the World Trade Organisation and tariff reduction talks are increasingly making the EU tariff wall irrelevant. Those developments reinforce the global maritime tradition of the UK. It is thus bizarre that the Government should defy that and attempt to lock us irreversibly into a low-growth trade bloc on our doorstep.

The big lie at the centre of the debate is that it is about economics. I agreed very much with what my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk said about that issue. It is widely acknowledged on the continent that this is a political project. Sometimes we pride ourselves on the quality of our debate on the issue, but we should not boast like that because the other EU members are far more honest about it. For example, Otmar Issing, a chief economist at the European central bank, said:

> "There is no example in history of a lasting monetary union that was not linked to one state."

That is true, but it is dismissed by the British Government as the ramblings of a continental eccentric. However, people such as Mr. Issing and his colleagues are serious, sensible, intelligent men and they know what they are talking about. They are speaking the truth. It is only the British Government who pretend that the euro project is all about some five economic tests dreamed up by the Treasury. There are enormous political and constitutional implications that are simply dismissed by the Government. I respect those hon. Members and others who make the political case for joining the euro. I disagree, but at least we can have a debate. I have no respect for people who advance the case for joining the euro and ignore the political implications or claim that they are irrelevant.

Let us also be honest about what is happening to our democracy even in the absence of joining the euro. The Government are now regularly outvoted in Europe, which means that policies are imposed on us that, by definition, the House and the Government disagree with. The right hon. Member for Newport, East mentioned the art market, which is a good example. Some 50,000 people are employed in the British art market, but it will go off to New York because the EU intends to impose a resale levy on works of art.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that he is a member of a political party that has taken the major steps over the past 30 years to get to where we are today? Does he now suggest that his party has been wrong for the past 30 years and is he calling for withdrawal from Europe?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am giving a specific example of an issue on which the hon. Gentleman's Government have been outvoted, and it should worry him. Instead of asking what I would have done if I were still in government, he should ask what is happening now when the Labour party is in control. Is he worried about the 50,000 people employed in the British art market? The change will not affect the big auction houses, of course. They already own assets in New York and will simply transfer their sales out of the EU to avoid the droit de suite or resale levy. As usual, it is the small people—the packers, the porters, the insurance agents and the transport agents—who will suffer and lose their jobs.

To be fair to the Government, as I try to be on occasion, they understood the danger and voted against the tax, but they were outvoted. Where was the influence in the EU? That is the danger of what is happening. We are undermining those areas of national life in our economy where we have a competitive advantage, not to the advantage of the rest of the EU but—in that clear case—to the advantage of the art markets in Zurich, Tokyo and New York. They cannot believe their luck. They cannot believe that the EU would drive out of its jurisdiction an area of economic activity in which it has been so successful.

Moreover, ratification of the Nice treaty means that more matters will be subject to majority voting and that the problem will therefore get worse. Even where we agree with EU policies, more and more decisions are being taken at the level of the European Union and further from the people whom we represent. The Government talk a lot about devolution and about moving decision making down so that it can be more relevant to electors and our constituents. Progressively, however, more decisions are being taken by a higher tier of Government, even more remote from people's day-to-day lives.

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

The same is true of expenditure in Europe. Money is being spent ever further from individual taxpayers. It is transferred to Brussels automatically. No vote in this House is required, and no budgetary process takes place in this country to agree the annual tribute that we pay to Brussels. It all happens under the European Communities (Finance) Act 1995. There is nothing that the House or the Chancellor of the Exchequer can do about it. A sum of £20 million a day is automatically transferred to Brussels, some of which filters back to us as a result of the fraud and mismanagement that is inherent in the system.

The electors have rumbled that. They know what is going on. Member states and the Commission denied for years that fraud and mismanagement were a problem. Finally, the members of the Commission resigned over the matter, but then half of them returned to office and the system goes on as it always has.

The European Court of Auditors still refuses to pass the EU's annual expenditure accounts. If I were a director of a public company that did that, I would probably be in prison, but that is the system to which we belong.

The budget goes on getting bigger, so the problem does too. Neil Kinnock has been mentioned. I am sure that he is doing his best to clear up the mess, but no one thinks about turning off the tap so as to stop the problem arising in the first place. We are reinforcing failure, and the people whom we represent have seen through that.

My final point concerns an immediate example that I should like to share with the House. The European arrest warrant directive will be decided tomorrow or the next day in the Justice and Home Affairs Council in Brussels. The warrant has received no scrutiny in this House. The relevant European Standing Committee met on Monday to consider it but broke up because the Minister arrived with the wrong documents.

When he opened the debate, the Minister said that one of his aims was to increase the involvement of national Parliaments. The treaty of Amsterdam, signed by the Government in 1997, makes that a requirement. It states that it wishes to encourage greater involvement of national Parliaments in the activities of the European Union. That is a mandated requirement by treaty law, but what is happening? The European arrest warrant directive is about to be agreed without any involvement of this House.

That is a very serious matter, as the directive proposes the forcible transfer of suspects from this country to other member states. If another member state lodges an arrest warrant, we would be obliged to hand over a suspect, even if the alleged offence was not a crime in this country. Even more remarkably, the alleged offence might not have to be committed in the country making the application, but in this country. As a result, we will hand over citizens to other criminal jurisdictions because of events in this country that do not infringe British law.

By any standards that is a remarkable development in British jurisprudence. It has not been debated in this House at all, but it is due to be decided tomorrow. It was debated in another place, where it caused much confusion. The Minister involved could not give many answers. The directive will be decided in secret, and on the basis of certain assurances given in another place that have not been given to this House.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be impossible for a British Minister to accede to the decision in Brussels tomorrow, if the matter has not been debated in this House?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is certainly impossible politically and morally, but we wait on events. Points of order have been raised in this House and, I understand, in another place, but no assurances whatsoever have been given on the matter.

The European arrest warrant will be the subject of primary legislation. A Bill is promised for early next year. Another startling development of recent days is that under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, which is still being considered, it need not come before the House for primary legislation but could be dealt with by secondary legislation. That is unamendable, and where it is debated is at the discretion of the Government. It can be debated upstairs in Committee, and whatever its members may say or think, any motion that the Committee passes can be overridden and the matter can go through forthwith, without debate in the Chamber. That is what secondary legislation means.

The entire issue of criminal sanctions for British people and our ancient judicial protection, built up over centuries, can all be changed in future by secondary legislation. Yet the Minister says that he wants to improve the involvement of national Parliaments. That is another example of all words and no action. Grand declarations and high-sounding assurances mean nothing.

Unless we can close the gap between words and deeds, the disillusionment felt by our constituents will become uncontrollable. Will the Government, for once, give us the unvarnished information so that we can debate these matters? Above all, they must stop fooling themselves and trying to fool others about what is really happening in the European Union.

8.36 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): These European affairs debates are an opportunity for the House to discuss the forthcoming European Council. The right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) has just spoken for 27 minutes and, to paraphrase him, it was all words and no content. It was the same speech that he gave six months ago or 12 months ago. We can imagine him sitting in Wells with a blanket around him and his hot cup of cocoa, reading his Pink Books. It is time that Conservative Members realised the importance of European debates. Only one Conservative Member is left now on the Back Benches, which shows how enthusiastic they are about Europe.

I pay tribute to the work that the Government are doing on Europe. It is because of the work done by my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Minister for Europe that the Prime Minister has been able to take such an important lead in world affairs. Europe is behind us and behind the alliance in our coalition against terrorism because of our positive engagement in Europe over the past four and a half years.

I have a few points for my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe, and I hope that he will take them with him when he goes to Laeken. We have been talking about enlargement for a number of years, and are getting to the stage when the applicant countries need a firm date for entry. I used to favour the idea of small groups of countries joining separately over the next few years, but I think that the mood has changed and that most European countries—although I do not know the Government's position on the big bang principle—probably favour the entry of a large number of countries, perhaps the majority of those applying.

I realise that some countries, such as Romania and Bulgaria, probably have not reached the stage that others have reached. Turkey, of course, has only recently been confirmed as a candidate country because of the lead taken by the Prime Minister. However, I think that the other countries expect to see real progress.

Without a firm date for entry, we will be sending a negative message to the countries of eastern Europe. They have worked hard on the negotiation process and public opinion is with them at the moment, but if we send a message that they must wait even longer, people in countries whose Governments strongly support entry into the European Union will feel that they have been left out.

It is most important that we are firm on enlargement, that we continue our leadership role and ensure that we put the argument strongly, because there is a feeling in some EU countries that we could wait—that perhaps we could just let in Poland and a couple of other countries and that the rest can follow. However, the mood is for change, so I hope that the Minister will go with a firm commitment to do something about setting a date for the applicant countries.

The right hon. Member for Wells and the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), who is no longer in his place, talked of the need for positive engagement. The right hon. Gentleman wondered what had happened to Britain in Europe. To divert him from his constant reading of Pink Books, I shall send him a book that Mr. Simon Buckby sent to me recently: "The Case for the Euro". I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to read it. I know that the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) is keen to read such literature.

It is important that hon. Members realise that the Government have been putting the positive case for the euro. The Government support the euro; we believe that membership of the European Union is extremely important. That is why the chairman of the Labour party so recently said that membership of the single currency needed to be put before the British people as soon as possible.

However, the fact remains that the five economic tests laid down by the Chancellor have still not been met. My right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth) will find himself in a minority in the Labour party on that point. The vast majority of members of the Labour party and of the public are in favour of a strong relationship with Europe and, from conversations and meetings that I have held over several years, I believe that the vast majority of the British people want to join the euro, but the arguments being put by the hysterical tabloid press have distorted the case. If we are to win a referendum, we must put our arguments—exactly as the Government have been doing.

I should point out to my right hon. Friend, however, that we are not yet ready for that referendum because those tests have not been met. We need to follow proper constitutional arrangements before we reach the referendum. Conditions must be assessed and they must be in the interests of this country. The matter must then go to the Cabinet; if the Cabinet agrees it, it must come to Parliament and then—and only then—will it go to the British people. All the British people will then have an opportunity to discuss it. There will be a wide-ranging debate and the hon. Member for Stone and the other horsemen of the Apocalypse who are not in the Chamber today—the hon. Members for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) and for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) have suddenly been promoted and are thus silent on this issue—will also have an opportunity to put their views.

Dr. Tonge *rose—*

Mr. Vaz: I am sorry that I cannot give way to the hon. Lady, because other hon. Members want to speak. The Liberal Democrat position is the right one—except on the tests. It is important that the tests should be met. The Liberal Democrat view that we should go ahead with a referendum without the proper economic case is wrong.

The Minister is right to talk about reform. I have not read his latest leaflet, which reduces the treaties to 300 words. It is a brilliant idea. It is exactly what we should be doing. Indeed, as there are so many Welshmen in the House today, I wondered whether they might want a Welsh translation—I can think of a few other languages into which the leaflet might also be translated.

Some Opposition Members, in the hysteria of the tabloid press, are trying to turn the European issue into one of not only language but the complications of the European Union. It is important that we should explain those points and the arguments to the British people in simple language.

It is vital that we continue to push ahead with the reform agenda in Brussels. It is time that Brussels took off its burka. So much takes place in secrecy that people do not understand what is happening. I favour the televising of European Council meetings as an opportunity for people to see the good work that is being done by the Prime Minister, the Minister for Europe, the Foreign Secretary and other Ministers. It is important to raise the veils of secrecy.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mr. Miliband) for his work in the group of Laeken. It is essential that Britain is represented in that group by such an outstanding individual, ensuring that our agenda is discussed in Europe at the highest level.

Unless we reform those institutions and the way in which the EU operates, we shall not be able to make the case for the euro in a referendum and win. As I have said before, the people of Britain will learn to love the EU only when they learn to love reform. My right hon. Friend the Minister has spoken the language of reform today, so he has our wholehearted support on this issue, and I wish him well in the forthcoming European Council meeting.

8.45 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I am pleased to follow the contribution of the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), not least

[Mr. Michael Moore]

because he has restored some of the balance to a debate that has been going one way for a prolonged period. The Liberal Democrats broadly support what the Government seek to achieve on Europe, and we hope that they will continue to promote progress in reforming and developing the EU at the summit in Laeken next weekend.

We are disappointed with the Government about one major issue—the single currency, to which the hon. Member for Leicester, East has just referred. Despite the Government's bold assertions in arguing the case, to which he referred, we believe that their approach is characterised by timidity and a lack of unanimity, so a rather confused message is coming across. Outside the environs of Westminster, few people could say with any clarity where the Government are going.

Of course, in a few short weeks, the single currency will be a reality in the shops of Amsterdam and—dare I say—probably in some shops in the United Kingdom as well, and the transactions of Britain's exporters will be very much embedded in the process, too. Finally, the bogeyman of the single European currency will be put to rest, with the realisation that the single currency works across Europe and that the sky does not fall in as a consequence of its use.

The Government's approach to persuading the British public about the merits of the European single currency continue to dismay its friends and encourage its enemies. It takes a massive leap of faith to find any unity throughout the recent speeches of the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and Foreign Office Ministers. The Government need a clarity of purpose, or at least a consistency of spin. It is not enough simply to send the spin doctors out to tell the journalists what the speeches meant. Positive steps need to be taken to argue the case and prepare the country for the full reality.

Only when we get the conditions correct for entry can we possibly hope to win a referendum; it cannot possibly be won in six weeks of campaigning. We need a sustained programme of education and persuasion, and we need a sustained Government voice. The Government will witness some of the details being finalised at Laeken in a few days' time, so they must substantially increase their efforts to promote and prepare this country for what we believe to be an important development for us.

Of course, the main aim of the summit will be to put in place the mechanisms to assist the debate on EU reform and the preparations for the 2004 intergovernmental conference. We Liberal Democrats hope that the intergovernmental conference will be able to produce a constitution for Europe. We do not hide from that, as the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) suggested that those on the Conservative Front Bench do, and they ducked dealing with their fears on that issue.

A constitution is important simply to set out clearly the roles and responsibilities of the different EU institutions, to define more clearly their relationship with individual member states and to prescribe the rights of individual citizens, by incorporating the charter of fundamental rights in that constitution. In that way, we can begin to address the huge concerns that people have about the progress of Europe and the growing disillusionment that dismays those of us who support Europe.

The convention to be set up by the summit is crucial to the process and, in due course, to the outcome of the intergovernmental conference. If the convention is to be meaningful, its terms of reference must not be too restrictive and it must not prepare for a set outcome. If the debate is to be effective, it must be structured but not prescriptive.

The European Scrutiny Committee report on the issue makes important recommendations. The convention should focus on the four key points coming out of the Nice treaty, but it should be free to consider other matters as well. It should be required to give an indication of the particular option that it prefers while not ruling out the others that it has considered. In addition, a House of Commons Member should be appointed to it by a motion of the whole House and not as the result of a stitch-up by the Whips. When appointed, that person should be required and given the opportunity to report back to the House on the convention's progress.

One key point from Nice has become increasingly evident. Whatever we are doing, we must make Europe better understood. The treaties need to be simplified into something that approximates to language that we can all understand and about which we can hope to persuade others.

Among the other issues, I wish to refer particularly to European security and defence policy. Much has been made of the transformation of the world since 11 September. Some aspects of the common foreign and security policy work well, but others require improvement. The policy covers 15 member states, with a population of approximately 370 million. After accession of applicant states, the population will increase to more than 500 million.

European Union states spend about 150 billion euros each year on their military capabilities. That is about half the United States defence budget, although it recognises that there are more limited regional responsibilities. The EU population is 40 per cent. larger than that of the USA, but the gross domestic products of the two regional blocs are roughly the same.

It is inconceivable to us that such a rich and populous region as ours should not make greater provision for its collective security. As the Minister said, now that the arrangements with Turkey over access to NATO assets are moving in the right direction, we are making progress towards achieving the European capability that we need. One by one the difficulties are being overcome. Over the past few months, there has been much rhetoric about standing shoulder to shoulder, but if that is to mean anything, we must be prepared to shoulder the burden of providing for our own security.

The final issue that I want to consider briefly is the EU arrest warrant. Its purpose is straightforward and appealing enough, not least in that it is designed to remove the complexity and potential for delay that is inherent in the present arrangements for extradition which, through bilateral agreements between countries, are often complex. It is logical and desirable to replace that system with a common EU framework. Current procedures are clearly out of date, they are complex and require rationalisation.

However, we are concerned about the breadth of the warrant that has been proposed and, not least, by the fact that the definitions in it are extremely vague. The general headings include "high-tech crime", "environmental crime" and "racism and xenophobia". Three times the proposal has come before the European Scrutiny Committee and it is still not satisfied with the Government's definitions. We understand that the proposal will not be included in the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, but will appear in primary legislation next year. However, the agreements at Laeken in 10 days' time with other EU member states will be reflected in the legislation. As the House has not proved itself satisfied with the proposals as explained by the Government, we believe that it would be better not to sign up to the warrant at the summit. By delaying its acceptance until national Parliaments are happy with it, a better arrangement will come to the fore.

After the euro is introduced in January, the face of Europe will change significantly. In a recent speech to academics and business men in Birmingham, the Prime Minister said:

> "The tragedy for British politics and for Britain is that too many politicians have consistently failed, not just in the 1950s but up to the present day, to appreciate the reality of European integration and in so doing they have failed Britain's interests".

Whether the Prime Minister was talking about the single currency or the agenda for reform and progress, he must not forget those words when he goes to Laeken.

8.55 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Tonight's debate is a classic example of why Parliament is held in contempt by the electorate and hon. Members. Seven Labour Members will not be able to contribute to it, which clearly demonstrates why we need a 10-minute limit on all Back-Bench speeches and a 15-minute limit on Front-Bench speeches. Those hon. Members who cannot contribute to this important debate should be allowed to place their contribution on the record or give it to the Clerk at the end of the day as they do in Congress. We have had a frustrating experience of what should have been an interesting exchange across the Floor of the House. Labour Members in particular have ripped up their speeches in order to squeeze in their remarks, and I shall confine my comments to the forthcoming European constitution for the EU.

A few days ago the EU was savagely attacked for being too bossy, remote, secretive and undemocratic; for failing all its peoples; and because its critics are growing daily, its priorities are wrong and its procedures are inadequate. That attack did not come from *The Sun*, the *Daily Mail* or *The Daily Telegraph*, but from the Prime Minister of Belgium, which holds the EU presidency. He is a convinced integrationist and his opinion was endorsed by a committee of wise people of eminent Europeans, including Jacques Delors.

The Belgian Prime Minister's report urges the EU to reform and reinvent itself, and it is right. Those of us who care about Europe, and I include all hon. Members in the Chamber in that, know that it is time to move on and for Europe to grow up. At the Laeken summit next week, the EU must begin to create a new democratic settlement between its institutions and the citizens of Europe. The United Kingdom needs to be at that table, helping to set the agenda. The British experience of constitution making—our experience of creating the rule of law and of civil liberties, and our distrust of state power—would be useful.

The Prime Minister pointed out in Birmingham the other week that our history in Europe is one of missed opportunities. Another big juggernaut is coming over the brow of the hill; will we miss this opportunity, too? The 2004 intergovernmental conference will follow Laeken and it will commit the EU to a written constitution. People in the House and the UK have nothing to fear and everything to gain from the process. The opportunity should be welcomed by Europhiles and Europhobes alike. Uncertainty and mystery feeds the paranoia of both those groups, as well as the fears of the wider public. A written constitution will reassure everyone.

The EU needs a written constitution, and it is going to get one. Barely a fortnight ago, France and Germany committed themselves to that. It is also a personal project of the German Chancellor. As has so often happened in the history of the EU, a fundamental project is under way and the British Government are faced with a choice between positive engagement and grudging acquiescence. We have seen the results of half-heartedness: our European partners create institutions that do not suit our national needs, and we join them years later, having lost the ability to influence the agenda and the design of the project.

A constitution is part of the answer to reconnecting with our citizens—a plain, honest statement of where we are, rather than an obscure text that requires elite translators to teach us how we are governed. It also presents an opportunity to place an insurmountable roadblock in the way of that tiny minority who want a European superstate. Hon. Members are right to demand assurances on that issue, and it is precisely because we oppose a centralised state that it should be baldly stated on the face of a constitution. Only a written constitution will set clear boundaries to the power of the EU and underpin the authority of national and devolved institutions within the nation states. It can check any appetite, real or imagined, for regulation and interference in our daily lives.

Limiting the tendency to centralise will also require the beefing up of that much abused word "subsidiarity". It will be a key test that the principle of subsidiarity is made clearer and more meaningful in the coming European constitution. It is unacceptable that no regulation, no directive, no act of power by any European institution has been challenged successfully on the grounds of subsidiarity. Subsidiarity must be placed at the head and at the heart of the new European constitution.

I should alert the House to the fact that if that principle is made as clear as I want it to be, it will be rapidly and rightly employed by local and regional government in the United Kingdom. Far from abetting centralisation, such a European constitution will halt it and become the tool whereby citizens are able to reverse the process that has concentrated power in Brussels and in Westminster. Subsidiarity is the antithesis of the catch-all phrase, "ever closer union"—it has become the antidote to executive licence to go further and deeper without specific consent. The phrase "ever closer union" must be struck out of all the drafts, wherever it appears.

Incidentally, it will be of great assistance to the EU if its constitution is written in elegant and inspiring language, not Eurobabble—and briefly, not bureaucratically. To be helpful, I intend to draw up such a constitution and present

[Mr. Graham Allen]

it to the House as a Bill, although I am not confident of out-doing the excellent 300-word distillation achieved by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe.

The EU has already achieved a semi-constitution of sorts, albeit by accident rather than by design. In late-night hurried deals struck in an atmosphere of acrimony and exhaustion, European leaders have often appeared less concerned to establish a wise and happy government for the EU than to satisfy the transient demands of their domestic electorates and media. Their debates are largely secret, unreported and ignored. That semi-official constitution is the playground of cognoscenti of all parties who think that their being involved in the process means that the electorate and citizenship of Europe are also involved.

The result of such methods is clear—the stark report of the Belgian Prime Minister who pointed out that, for all its real achievements, the EU's current governance inspires little loyalty or affection among its citizens. The EU has had ample warning of that alienation in opinion polls, turnouts for elections, the referendums in Denmark and the Irish Republic, and the growth of extremist parties throughout the Union, but all too often the Euro-executive dismiss it as a failure of the people to understand, or the mendacity of the media. That alienation could easily turn into outright hostility as the EU launches its two big projects, the euro and enlargement.

Against that background, any losers and those who fear losing in the EU will not accept decisions that they feel are imposed upon them by remote, unaccountable European institutions.

Without consensus and without citizens feeling ownership, the EU will stagnate. It might even dissolve in bitterness and secession. We will not get such consensus and such ownership across the EU without a contract with our people and without a constitution to provide legitimacy and democracy for the decisions that affect our citizens. To those who formed the current Union, from Schuman to Thatcher, we say thank you. Now, as the Union approaches maturity, we need a new set of people and a new structure. Otherwise, as Jefferson said,

> "we might as well require a man to wear still the same coat which fitted him as a boy."

A constitution is not a panacea, but it gives an open framework in which conflict can be peacefully reconciled. By the United Kingdom engaging in the process of creating a constitution, we will not only serve British interests but safeguard the future of Europe on a basis that is acceptable to our citizens.

I ask the House and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister not to add to the UK's list of lost opportunities, but starting next week in Laeken to seize the opportunity of a written constitution with both hands for the benefit of the people of our country.

9.6 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray): I am pleased to take part in the debate of behalf of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru. I commend the brevity and consideration of Labour and Liberal Democrat Members, to try to ensure that as many Members as possible are able to contribute to the debate. I, too, shall try to be brief.

I thank the Minister for remaining in his place throughout the debate to listen to us all. I am sure that all Members on both sides of the House are grateful to him for that.

I agree with the Minister on some of his key points. His argument in favour of pooling sovereignty both in terms of the European Union and the United Nations was compelling. Perhaps he did not intend that it should sound like a compelling argument for Scotland's direct representation in those bodies. I endorse the views that he propounded regarding security and defence policy, especially in fulfilling the Petersberg principles, and in terms of the eastward enlargement of Europe and the treaty of Nice, which is why both the SNP and Plaid Cymru supported the Government and the passing of legislation earlier in the Session in that regard.

The recent Liege conference was attended by 51 devolved Governments throughout Europe, including those of Scotland and Wales. I commend its findings to Members on both sides of the House. Part of the resolution reads:

> "In the scope of the debate on the Future of Europe, the Presidents of the Regions with legislative power ask to consider the lack of regional participation to the EU decision-making process as a theme to be addressed by the Declaration of Brussels/Laeken as well as by the forthcoming Intergovernmental Conference."

I endorse that view.

I shall restrict my comments to matters of accountability and scrutiny, especially with regard to the reality that we live within a state with four nations and a devolved system of government in three of them. Members will be aware that there are many areas, especially in Scotland, where legislation is passed that involves justice, the environment, transport, agriculture and fisheries matters, which are also decided at an important level at the EU. Indeed 14 of the 22 areas that the Council of Ministers meet to consider are devolved matters. For that reason I want to highlight some concerns in the hope that even within current UK structures, these areas can be improved.

My concerns include establishing key facts to help in arriving at good governance and transparency, the ability to scrutinise Ministers and EU measures and the ability to hold Governments to account. In terms of key facts with regard to decision making, I go back to my previous occupation as a journalist. The first questions that one is always supposed to ask are the hows, the whens, the wheres and the whos. Against the background of both the Council of Ministers and working group representation, unfortunately we have very few answers.

I have tabled a number of questions, as have colleagues from other parties. The answers tend to be along the lines of one given by the Minister, in which he said that the UK Government are working in partnership with the Scottish Executive. Unfortunately, we do not get specific details about how, when and where; we sometimes get details about who is involved, but that is not enough to hold Governments—the UK Government, the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Administration or the Northern Irish Administration—to account.

The Conservative Government gave Scottish Office Ministers the right to attend meetings of the Council of Ministers; the present UK Government are continuing that policy. More than half of the debates held by the Council of Ministers are directly related to devolved matters, but at the moment only 12 per cent. of meetings are attended by Ministers from the Scottish Executive, so I am concerned that there is a gap. The Minister and his Government have had a regular opportunity, in responding to written and oral questions from me, to explain exactly how the system works; that could shed light on the matter and I might not have any more concerns, although I doubt it. For the sake of transparency and good governance, I invite the Minister to shine more light on the way in which the system works.

By contrast, having worked both in Austria and Germany, I know their systems well; for example, the concept of Bundestreue relates to the ability of the länder to influence and bind central Government, who effectively represent their views. The Austrian system of governance involves the provinces through the Verbindungstelle, an office in which various policy positions are brought together and developed. We have had no idea from the Government how that would operate in practice in the United Kingdom. However, a joint ministerial committee, meeting once or twice a year to co-ordinate policy before meetings of the Council of Ministers is not, as I am sure even the Minister would concede, the most effective means of co-ordination.

I know that officials talk to each other, but we do not know how the structure works or how often Ministers meet and discuss issues. That concern has been expressed not just by the SNP, but recently by Jim Walker, the president of the National Farmers Union in Scotland, when giving evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Rural Development Committee; he was anxious about the way in which Scottish agriculture policy was being pursued in Europe.

I am concerned about the scrutiny of Ministers. I do not know whether Members know that there have been at least three instances in which a Minister from the Scottish Executive has represented the UK at a European level without any other UK Minister being part of the delegation. If one wants to scrutinise such Ministers, are they answerable to the UK Parliament? Nicol Stephen, the Deputy Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs, has not, so far as I am aware, given any pre or post-Council evidence to the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee, of which I am a newly selected member. Conversely, no UK Minister who has attended Council of Ministers meetings to discuss devolved Scottish matters has ever given evidence to the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament either before or after such meetings.

That is not good or transparent governance. I have a modicum of experience, having advised members of the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament for the first two years after devolution. The problems of the European Scrutiny Committee are mirrored and amplified in those of its Scottish counterpart. That has a lot to do with the way in which UK Departments and the UK Government disseminate European regulations and directives through the system so that, in Scotland, one cannot achieve effective influence.

Finally, bearing in mind what I have said about the inability to scrutinise Ministers, the inability effectively to scrutinise European Union proposals and the lack of key basic facts to do so, how can we hold Governments to account, whether in the UK, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland? That is simply not possible.

I give a great example. In today's European Scrutiny Committee meeting, we were discussing European arrest warrants and the lack of information that we need. If such information is not available to us a number of days before a key meeting, what is the position of the Scottish Minister for Justice? He probably has as little information as we have had. That is not an effective way to deal with a serious matter. Similarly, the Commission's proposals on fish catches for 2002 came out only two days ago. How can the Scottish Executive even be informed? The Commission cannot work effectively, it is not accountable and there is a lack of scrutiny.

The contributions from the hon. Members for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) and for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on the subject of a constitution were extremely well reasoned, balanced and irrefutable. Regardless of anybody's position on further integration or in favour of more disengagement from Europe, the argument for a constitution is intellectually unassailable. The Scottish National party fully endorses it.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), who is no longer in his place, touched on the issue of the euro. My party is in favour of a single European currency, pending a referendum. As the official Opposition in Scotland, our support is unlikely to be overlooked anywhere as being useful in progressing that argument. A single currency would be to everyone's benefit in Europe, Scotland, the rest of the UK and elsewhere.

In summary, none of the improvements that I suggest in the genuine hope of better governance, scrutiny and accountability in the UK compares in importance with direct representation for Scotland at a European level. At a time of enlargement, the countries of central and eastern Europe are knocking at the door. They want the same rights that other small and medium-sized member states enjoy. I would like Scotland to have that as well. There is no substitute for being at the top table, but any progress would be gratefully received.

9.17 pm

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Because of the short time available, I have deleted from my speech many of the topics on which I intended to speak, such as Afghanistan, enlargement, European defence, and euro notes and coins. I have decided to speak about the debate on the future of Europe, which is on the agenda for the Laeken Council. As many hon. Members know, it has been agreed that a convention will be set up to consider the future of Europe. Its conclusions will be fed into the next intergovernmental conference, which will take place in 2004.

The Nice summit set out several questions which the debate on the future of Europe should address. One concerns the delimitation of powers between the EU and member states. There should be a clear definition of the powers of the member states and of the EU, because an enlarged EU of 27 member states would otherwise grind to a halt.

I foresee a European Union in which first pillar issues are handled as they are at present, with a fairly integrationist agenda. Issues such as the single market, the environment, consumer policy and energy policy would be dealt with through assent, co-decision, co-operation and consultation. The European Parliament and Commission will still have an extremely important role in developing legislation with the Council of Ministers.

[Mr. Mark Hendrick]

Second and third pillar issues should remain mainly the preserve of member states through subsidiarity, but there should be mechanisms to allow for co-operation of an advanced type between member states. The details of possible options for such co-operation will no doubt emerge from the convention process.

The status of the charter of fundamental human rights will be discussed at the Laeken Council. The relationship of the charter to member state law will clearly need to be addressed by member states, as well as the question of how or whether it should be incorporated. The issue of possible overlaps with existing human rights legislation in member states also needs to be addressed.

On the simplification of the treaties—another issue that was raised at Nice—we all know that they are complex documents and that they constantly need to be cross-referenced for sense to be made of them. Any attempt to make them more concise and understandable is clearly desirable. Whether it can be done in 300 words, I do not know.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): Yes, it can.

Mr. Hendrick: We will see, but the simplification process runs the risk of loss of content. Enlargement brings its own problems in that regard. Hon. Members may be interested to know that it has just taken Romania a year to translate the existing treaties.

I turn now to the role of national Parliaments. The phrase "bringing Europe closer to the people" is a hackneyed one that is used by politicians to get across the idea of the need to make the European Union and its institutions more relevant to the public. It is suggested that the involvement of national parliamentarians in the process would somehow achieve that and add to the legitimacy of the European Union. I believe that the creation of an additional chamber of national parliamentarians from EU states would find little favour with other member states and would, in many ways, make the role of the European Parliament more confusing.

However, it is important that the forthcoming convention deals with increasing the involvement of national parliamentarians in the making of legislation by other means. For example, it could deal with methods of enhancing the scrutiny of EU legislation by national Parliaments and ways of making the scrutiny process more open and transparent. Another possibility is the idea of setting up a delegation of national parliamentarians to meet regularly with the Council of Ministers to discuss legislative matters. The issue of more openness in European Council decision making is also a matter for discussion. I am reliably informed that this is the only legislature outside Pyongyang that legislates in secret. Again, I am sure that the convention will propose options on those matters. I look forward to seeing what options are available when it eventually meets.

9.22 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Some comments have been made about the extent to which I would be expected to speak on European matters in my current role. My portfolio as shadow Attorney-General certainly includes a responsibility to examine questions relating not only to international treaties but to constitutional arrangements in the United Kingdom and between the UK and Europe—the matter about which I propose to speak now.

I want first to recall the comments made by the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), who said that the arguments for a constitution were unassailable and cited, for example, the speech of the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), as well as those of other hon. Members. I find that an astonishing idea. The one thing that we can say for certain about the Government relates to a matter that I have raised with the Prime Minister many times, not only at Question Time but after statements and on other occasions. I have asked him many times whether we can have a White Paper—indeed, this issue has been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring)—on the constitutional and political implications of where we are going. Here we are, embarking on a journey towards Laeken and the future of Europe debate. We know that we are being taken into the arena of European constitutional arrangements. Indeed, that has been happening for a long time. We know that there are people who would like such arrangements, because they would enable them to lock everybody in.

A constitution creates an entrenched situation. There is no room for the sort of reform to which the Prime Minister referred in a recent speech. He spoke about repatriating powers to the nation state. The ideas of those of us who have argued for repatriation and renegotiation are therefore being endorsed by those who have an uncontrollable vision of Europe that involves a constitutional arrangement. A huge contradiction is inherent in that view, and it makes me fear for the future of Europe. It means that there is no basis on which to apply subsidiarity to matters covered by the levers of European government and thus enable us to guarantee maintaining control over, for example, our defence arrangements or justice and home affairs.

The European arrest warrant and proposals for an extradition Bill were mentioned today. They will be considered next year. However, the constitutional arrangements that will provide for those measures apply to regulations and the sort of provisions that are included in section 2 of the European Communities Act 1972. At the moment when the Minister and others are considering the need for more information and a wider and clearer debate, we are being led into an arena of obfuscation and denied the necessary information that would be provided in a proper debate in prime time on primary legislation. Yet we are considering the important subject of the abolition of extradition in Europe.

That matter involves not only extradition, but bail and trials in absentia. It also raises the question of who is a judicial authority: is it the state prosecution service by another name in other countries? We have been considering monumental issues in the Select Committee on European Scrutiny. Some questions remain unresolved. Whatever happens on 7 December, there is a scrutiny reserve for good reasons. They are inherent in the democratic accountability to Parliament of its scrutiny Committees, which report to the House and ensure that decisions are not made without the provision of proper information. That cannot happen without debate.

European Standing Committee B dissolved in chaos the day before yesterday. There is no time for a full debate, the scrutiny reserve continues to apply and the decision on the European arrest warrant requires unanimity, yet it will apparently be made on 7 December. Perhaps the Minister will be good enough to listen because I should be grateful if he could tell us what exactly will happen.

The current proposal is that the decision will be made on 7 December, but, as I said, the scrutiny reserve applies and no debate has taken place. Will the Government defer the decision? The Minister appears to be engrossed in conversations this evening. Will he be good enough to tell us whether the Government will make the decision on Friday on a third pillar question that requires unanimity, or will they defer it because scrutiny has not been completed?

There is no point talking about constitutional arrangements when democratic accountability is being infringed in the House. That is a serious matter and I am sure that the Minister, who is a responsible person, understands that. There will be a massive row if the decision is not made according to the proper procedures and with justification.

In the context of the desire to move towards a new constitutional arrangement, I want to refer to the Government's White Paper. I do not know whether hon. Members realise that the preliminary proposals for the White Paper state that the objective towards which the Laeken conference is to be directed is a "laboratory for world governance". That is there in black and white. What on earth is it supposed to mean? There are serious constitutional questions involved here. These are serious issues relating not just to the appearances of subsidiarity, which simply endorse the hierarchy and lock it into a new, enhanced constitution for Europe, but to the central question of democracy.

Labour Members know perfectly well that I have argued over and over again for more democracy and accountability in the European Union. I have not been against the single market. I have been in favour of a reformed arrangement to provide proper governmental and democratic arrangements that ensure that people are properly heard, and that they have an opportunity to have their say when policies are made. I have argued consistently for referendums, for that reason. That is why I have played a part in—as some have kindly said to me—helping the Irish in their referendum. I was very glad to have been able to do that, as I was in Denmark and France before that.

If the Whip system in this Parliament operates, as it has, to prevent the opportunity for proper consideration of some of these matters, it is essential that some decisions should be taken by referendum. I was, therefore, delighted when that opportunity arose and the decisions were transferred down to the people at the grass roots. In the case of the Irish, they had to hold a referendum under their constitutional arrangements. When they did, every citizen was sent a clear, concise, accurate document—like a White Paper, perhaps—to their doorstep, stating what the Nice treaty was all about, and they rejected it. It is a function of a properly democratically run country that people are given proper information.

We have made requests over and over again for a White Paper, and for other information. There has been a fundamental failure on the part of the Government to respond. I am extremely surprised and disappointed that the Minister, for whom I have the highest regard, should be party to these shabby arrangements, including the arrangements in clause 109 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill. He and other Ministers in the Foreign Office must be involved in those provisions to a degree. Those arrangements will be fundamentally unconstitutional and undemocratic.

An interesting paper by a number of political scientists and constitutional experts, entitled "IGC 2000: The Constitutional Agenda", is described as rethinking the European Union. In it, J. H. H. Weiler—a great political and constitutional expert—states on the question of whether there should be a European constitution:

> "a formal process of adopting a constitution is not only pragmatically not feasible but might even be conceptually undesirable . . . Europe may have a constitutional legal order but the problem is that it does not have traditional constitutional legitimation"

because—I am now paraphrasing—in practice, there is not the necessary degree of common consent and democratic grass-roots agreement over what is going on, as exemplified by the results of the recent referendums.

This issue presents Europe with a monumental problem, which is that Europe is sliding down a slippery slope on the pretext of some high-flown idea that it can have a constitution, when in fact it lacks legitimacy at the grass roots. Nothing is more dangerous, either for a nation state or for any putative superstate or federation, than to fall between the two stools of the determination to achieve a greater degree of rule making at a higher level and the lack of consent from the people concerned.

Fundamentally, consent is about freedom. As Vernon Bogdanor said the other day in evidence to the European Scrutiny Committee—the record of which I strongly recommend that Members read—if the European Union does not adopt the principles of democracy and accountability represented by the British system, there will be no real hope for the future of Europe.

9.35 pm

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) for kindly inviting me to wind up the debate. He is a well-known titan of the Dispatch Box, but I am grateful for the opportunity, and I shall enjoy it. I have a sense of deja vu, as I used to wind up debates on Europe a few years ago when I was my party's spokesman on the subject. We have heard a number of thoughtful speeches this evening; I sympathise with those who were not called, but, as we all understand, there were many reasons for that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) touched on some important legal and constitutional matters. The quotation that he read out about Europe's lacking the traditional constitutional legitimacy goes to the heart of the issue. As other Members have pointed out, there is no understanding between the ruled and the rulers in terms of the European Union. That is the fundamental problem. It is not, as some Members have suggested, simply a question of economic tests—say, for joining the euro. The all-important political and constitutional questions that need to be settled with the people of this country must come first; and if the people of Europe have no sense of belonging to the European institutions, those institutions cannot work.

[Mr. Michael Trend]

I was impressed by what my hon. Friend said about the importance of the scrutiny process. I wish more could be done in that respect. He was also right to raise the important question of arrest warrants, which was also raised in the excellent speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory).

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wells referred to the droit de suite, as did the right hon. Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth). I lost track of it some months ago, and was surprised to discover a few weeks ago that it had been slipped through with no chance of further discussion in the House. That is shameful. The droit de suite will have an impact on many people and organisations, including a firm in my constituency. As my right hon. Friend said, it will have serious implications for people running small businesses. It will have a devastating effect throughout the country, and I wish the Government could have found a way of giving us an extra chance to debate it.

When I listened to the right hon. Member for Newport, East, the years seemed to roll back: I agreed with nearly everything he said. I must warn him, however, that his new colleagues listened stony-faced, as I believe the expression is.

In his interesting speech, my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk referred to Belarus, in which I have a personal and particular interest. I now run my party's international office, and, as the Minister probably knows, I am a governor of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. As I think he also knows, I have a special interest in Belarus, and was very disappointed by the recent presidential election there. It was neither free nor fair, and I look to the Government to state that clearly on behalf of our country. Our thoughts must be with the brave democrats who continue the struggle against tyranny and Lukashenko's Belarus. I think it can be said that, following the fall of Milosevic, he is far the most tyrannical leader in Europe.

Will the Minister say what steps have been taken to reconsider the disastrous closure of the British Council in Minsk? I think that that decision needs to be revisited as soon as possible.

Three years ago, when I last spoke from the Dispatch Box, on enlargement, I was fairly pessimistic about progress. I am less so now because I think that the will to get on with enlargement is shared more widely. I also note that many of the applicant countries have made huge efforts to fulfil the requirements that have been placed on them. I am particularly delighted—I think that this is the point that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) was making—that Lithuania and Latvia have moved on so well in the process and are catching up Estonia.

I also agree that a big bang of 10 countries entering at the same time is highly desirable. However, I still think that there are mountains to climb before enlargement becomes a reality. The main problems associated with agriculture and the structural funds remain. With the presidential election in France, where agriculture has suddenly gained a new intensity as a political issue, and with Spain—the largest winner of regional funds—holding the presidency for the next six months, this will not be an easy time for the enlargement process. There are already noises coming out of Madrid casting doubt on the target date for enlargement. One does not have to be a political genius to know what that is all about.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk also mentioned Gibraltar. Many distinguished Labour Members have often debated Gibraltar, and I am sorry that they are not here today; we need to return to that subject. The citizens of Gibraltar have of course been full citizens of the EU for some time, but they have been treated shamefully in the past. I am very pleased that they will now be able to vote in European elections.

I believe, however, that the British Government are playing cruel games with the wishes and affections of the people of Gibraltar. I cannot understand the message that the British Government are trying to send out to Gibraltar. Of course Spain has the presidency next and it would be good if in the next six months we could resolve all our outstanding differences with Spain, but, on Gibraltar, the Government have so far only made a bad situation worse. They have embarked on a process that I think can only end in tears.

The Government have already hugely annoyed the people of Gibraltar by sending out signals that the British guarantee of self-determination has a rubbery rather than a steely quality to it. I think that that feeling will only grow worse in the coming weeks and ensure that the people of Gibraltar say no to whatever question is asked of them.

Therefore, one outcome for the British Government will be to destabilise the Gibraltarians to no practical effect. The other outcome will be to irritate the Government of Spain by appearing to sympathise with their position but then being unable to deliver. As so often, our Government will end up by failing on both fronts. The empty chair is there at the table, but it is for someone who wants to talk about sovereignty. The people of Gibraltar of all parties, all Members of Parliament and all former Speakers have made it absolutely clear—and they believe that the British Government should support them in this—that there is nothing to discuss on sovereignty.

Mr. Bryant: That is not true.

Mr. Trend: We have different opinions on what sovereignty and other such difficult conceptual words mean. If the Government of Gibraltar are being invited to discuss fundamental principles of sovereignty there is no doubt that they do not wish to do so. There are ways in which that could be discussed, and the First Minister of Gibraltar has made that clear. However, if the empty chair is for someone who, as the British Government have made clear, is meant to discuss the fundamental principles, clearly no one from Gibraltar can occupy that chair.

I am very encouraged by the European Union's approach to Cyprus, and I very much hope that minds can be concentrated on finding a just solution to the island's problems as part of the enlargement process. Conservative Members remain committed to Turkey and wish to encourage it in the necessary reforms that will bring it, too, into full membership of the European family. However, Turkey has to understand that it cannot stand in the way and that Cyprus's place in the enlargement process is not negotiable.

Many hon. Members have rightly discussed the world situation and how it will affect the development of Europe. What we have seen in the past few months is a demonstration of how power is really exercised in today's world. After all the grandiose rhetoric about common defence and military structures that we have had to listen to over the years, the EU is not and never shall be the right forum to take action of the sort that the current world situation so evidently requires. Romano Prodi's performance in recent months has shown how tetchy and difficult the Eurocrats can be on that subject. We watched the press conference with Guy Verhofstadt, the Belgian Prime Minister, when Mr. Prodi sulked his way out of the room and told the BBC that the EU needed power in military and foreign affairs because it was powerless in the big united global war. Splendid, let us keep it that way for as long as possible.

The Government know that we wholeheartedly support them in their recent actions, but I also hope that they are learning the lesson that their earlier rhetorical gestures on common policy were mistaken. Once again, we have clear evidence of the close and practical relationship that exists between us and the United States. Moreover we have had an important demonstration of how important flexibility is in defence, and vain rhetoric on the EU's future in that respect has been undermined by the reality of the present situation.

The circus is moving on to Laeken and I wish the Minister a jolly time of it. I do not see anything in the Laeken approach that will cure a problem that has been identified by many hon. Members tonight. Nothing that will happen at Laeken will bring the EU's affairs one inch closer to people throughout the Union, especially after the experiences of Denmark and Ireland, as my right hon. and hon. Friends mentioned. Trying to make some sense of Europe for the people is, as we have long been telling the Government, the real challenge for the EU.

The biggest noise around at the moment, as many Labour Members have confirmed, is the proposed convention. We are told that one way in which the EU can grow closer to the citizens of Europe is through the new convention, but that is nonsense. Instead, the convention will be a chance for Europe's budding Thomas Jeffersons to sharpen their pencils and head for the equivalent of Philadelphia. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), who is unfortunately no longer in his place, is becoming an expert on making new constitutions and I am sure that he would love to take on that task. I disagreed with much of what he said, although I am always interested in how he puts things. We can agree on the analysis of problems without necessarily agreeing on the prescription of the cure.

I have not done this debate for a while, but my sense of deja vu tells me that things have moved on but much remains the same. In particular, as hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber have pointed out, the EU still uses the same tedious jargon, weasel language, skewed language and hectoring tone that have for so long marred its progress. My suspicions also go into overdrive when I am sure that we have been given only half the picture. Romano Prodi recently told the College of Europe that some of his major reforms would consist of technical provisions only. I am sure that that will raise the hackles of my right hon. and hon. Friends. When the Minister said earlier that sovereignty shared is sovereignty regained, I felt a judder inside me and questioned whether that made any sense whatever.

EU leaders, however much they protest the opposite, are responsible for the unnecessary double-speak, muddle and confusion that surrounds their utterances. They are responsible, too, for the arrogant reputation that is synonymous with the EU. When the Irish told Brussels to hold its horses, Prodi went to see them and told them that their views did not matter. Clever stuff. The great paradox of Europe remains the same as it has been for the past 10 years or so. It is the people at the top who are trying to drive the EU too far and too fast who do the damage. It is their closed doors and their private language that alienate ordinary people. It is their indifference to the lack of democratic accountability based on units of government that people understand that prevents sensible progress.

9.49 pm

Peter Hain: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to respond to the debate for the Government.

I begin by welcoming back to the Dispatch Box the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend). I responded to him in his Adjournment debate on Belarus, and I pay tribute to his work on that country. I welcome too his support for enlargement, and wonder why he voted against the Nice treaty when the relevant Bill went through the House earlier this year. Opposition to the treaty would block enlargement and prevent all the countries that he mentioned from joining the EU. There is therefore a degree of hypocrisy and contradiction in that approach.

Whatever the current feelings in Gibraltar, I invite the hon. Gentleman to look ahead at what I think is a great prize for the people there, and for Britain and Spain—an agreement that will give the people of Gibraltar maximum self-government, and all the advantages of being a full part of the European Union. Such an agreement will allow them access to the wider market in Spain, from which they are largely barred at present.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that it was the Conservative Government under Baroness Thatcher who began the Brussels process discussions, which included the issue of sovereignty. He will find that Conservative predecessors of mine, including Lord Tristan Garel-Jones, have consistently been part of that process, and that sovereignty has been on the agenda.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned, in another context, sovereignty in the European Union, and noted my remarks about sovereignty shared being sovereignty regained. I draw his attention to the words of Michael Heseltine in an interview, when he said:

"a degree of shared sovereignty"

was the way that "you enhance sovereignty." That is the exact point that the Government are making, and the hon. Gentleman seems oblivious to it.

The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash)—my hon. Friend—appeared again on the Back Benches and made an eloquent speech. That is clear proof that there is life after death on the Tory Front Bench—but only when people are temporarily reincarnated on the Tory Back Benches. He expressed delight at his participation in the Irish referendum, and gloried in the no vote that was recorded. Our friends in Cyprus, Malta, Poland, Hungary and in all the countries of eastern, central and southern Europe want to join the EU, but his delight obviously

[Peter Hain]

stems from the fact that a no vote prevents them from doing so. The consequence of the failure of any of the 15 EU member states to ratify the Nice treaty, as happened in Ireland, is that those countries are denied the opportunity to enter the EU on target, as they wish to do.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth) made an interesting speech about the euro and mentioned inward investment. I am advised that France has taken over from Britain the leadership in inward investment in manufacturing. Many inward investors—the Japanese in particular—now say that they prefer France over their traditional choices of Wales and other parts of Britain because France is in the euro. My right hon. Friend might therefore want to bear that in mind.

I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) back to European debates. In his eloquent speech, he made the important point that enlargement should go ahead quickly and that the applicants need a firm date to work with. I completely agree with him. Applicant countries should have a firm date and Britain, as champion of enlargement, is committed to setting that date as early as possible in 2004. I also agree that as large a number of countries as possible should come into the EU, as long as they complete all the chapter negotiations required for accession.

My hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) and the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) made some interesting points about the European convention. I shall take note of them and look into them further. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) made a very interesting speech about a written constitution for Europe. I look forward to his Bill as a guide to further progress.

The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) spoke about the Scottish Parliament's relation to the European Union via the United Kingdom Government. However, he conceded that Scottish Executive Ministers represent, and have represented, the UK on a number of occasions. That will continue to be the case, where appropriate, and I welcome it.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) spent some time dwelling on the dangerous consequences, as he saw them, for our relationship with the United States as a result of our approach to Europe and our support for European defence. I have not seen much evidence in recent weeks that the relationship between the United States and Britain or between our Prime Minister and President Bush is on the rocks; on the contrary. However, the Opposition never let the facts get in the way of their argument.

Let me try instead to reassure Conservative Members by quoting a senior British statesman, speaking in London on 13 November. He said:

> "crucial to the modern Anglo-American relationship is Britain's role as a European power—not just a country anchored offshore the Continent, but a full partner in the European Union. Those who argue that Britain should weaken its links inside the EU in order to cosy up more intimately with the United States are ignoring the facts of power. Such a shift would actually reduce our importance in the eyes of American decision makers."

That is absolutely right. I hope that Conservative Members who disagree will take it up not with me but with the person who said it—their very own former Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, now Lord Hurd.

The Opposition have also made a predictable and synthetic fuss about European defence. In reply, I quote Lord Hurd from the same speech, in which he said:

> "we have to press ahead with the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). The partnership between Europe and the United States will only be valid if the effort made by each partner, particularly in military strength, is recognised as substantial by the other."

That is the policy of the Government, but I doubt whether anything that I or Lord Hurd could say would persuade the headbangers on the Conservative Benches.

For the authoritative voice of today's Tory party, I turn to my e-mail in-box. As part of my efforts to explain Europe better, I have instituted an online debate about Britain and Europe on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website. It is a very popular website, and we recently received the following contribution from a Conservative Member of the European Parliament, one Roger Helmer. I am glad that he is keeping out of trouble by sending me e-mails. Mr. Helmer wrote:

> "EU membership is the greatest threat to Britain's prosperity, democracy and security."

This is from a Conservative Member of the European Parliament. He goes on:

> "The great task of our generation is European deconstruction."

He explains:

> "The Treaty of Nice threatens to turn Britain into a mere off-shore province in the new European empire."

He concludes:

> "We must oppose Nice, oppose the Euro, oppose the new IGC".

So he goes on, rather like the man muttering to himself whom we try not to sit next to on the bus. We wondered whether it was a crank e-mail, as we get quite a lot of those, and not only from my friend the hon. Member for Stone. Sadly, it appears to be genuine—cranky, but genuine.

So which party is the Conservative party? Is it the party of statesmanlike Lord Hurd or the party of headbangers, like Roger Helmer, MEP? Or is it the party of the people who write letters in green ink, copied to the Queen and the Pope, about the great global conspiracy that is today's Europe? The answer was given in *The Guardian* this morning by Nick Kent, campaign manager for the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). He said:

> "The party I joined was full of nice old people; today, it is full of nasty old people."

He also said:

> "In truth, no group of 300,000 adults, other than the membership of the Conservative party, would have chosen Iain Duncan Smith over Ken Clarke."

I cannot but agree.

I am practical about Europe. I want to deliver real things for real people: full employment, equal rights, and an end to injustice and poverty. Up and down Britain, people know that Europe is good for their jobs, their security and their future. They may not care for Eurospeak; nor do I. They are not heady about Europe; nor am I. Like the Foreign Secretary and the entire Government, they are practical Europeans.

Practical Europeans want a Europe that works for Britain, which means a Britain that works with Europe and has more self-confidence about its engagement in Europe. Yes, some things that some Europeans say are daft. Some want to take Europe in the wrong direction, but most others want—

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

North Durham Health Care NHS Trust

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Angela Smith.]*

10 pm

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): I am pleased to have an opportunity to raise my concerns about the procedure followed by the NHS Appointments Commission in appointing the chair of the North Durham Health Care NHS trust.

I do not intend in this debate to raise concerns about the operation of the hospital, nor to criticise personally the new chair of the trust, Ms Angela Ballatti. I intend to concentrate on the clear faults in the appointment procedure and on the disgraceful way in which the former chair, Mr. Kevin Earley, has been treated.

Mr. Earley was appointed chair of the trust in April 1998. He and his new board faced a number of challenges, the most demanding of which was the building of a new private finance initiative hospital in Durham—one of the first in the country.

Mr. Earley's term of office came up for review this year. In July, he was asked to attend a meeting for what was described as an "informal chat" with Mr. Peter Garland, the regional director of the northern and Yorkshire health region and Dr. John Marshall, regional appointments commissioner for the NHS commission.

It was made clear to him that his reappointment as chair would not be automatic and that they wanted to "road test" the procedure for the appointment of the trust's chair. A number of points were raised with Mr. Earley: first, concern over the waiting list at the hospital since April 2001; secondly, the quality of the executive management team at the trust; and, finally, concern that Mr. Earley was acting as an executive chair.

In response to those concerns, Mr. Earley explained robustly that the waiting list delays were mainly the result of down time when the new hospital came on stream in April. Until then the trust had met all its targets and the national patient action team was happy with the trust's strategy.

With regard to the comments about the executive team, Kevin Earley pointed out, rightly, that the appointments had been made with the full involvement of the regional health authority. For example, the medical director had been appointed on a recommendation from Ken Jarrold of Durham health authority, whose chair at the time was actually Dr. John Marshall.

On the concern that he acted as executive chair, Kevin Earley reminded Dr. Marshall that on his appointment he had been told by him that, in coming years, he would have to "have his foot on the pedal because the trust had a lot to deliver".

On 31 July 2001, Mr. Earley received a letter from Sir William Wells, chair of the NHS Appointments Commission, telling him that he would not be automatically reappointed, and stating that the post would be advertised, but

> "you will of course be entitled to apply".

[Mr. Kevan Jones]

The NHS Appointments Commission procedure, under the heading, "Arrangements for local chair appointments", states:

> "Regional Commissioners will review appraisal reports and discuss possible reappointments with regional directors. Except where the appraised performance of the incumbent chair is good, vacancies will be advertised".

Well, I have Mr. Earley's last appraisal here, and it states:

> "Overall health of organisation—good
>
> Financial management—good
>
> External profile of organisation—good
>
> Relationship with Chief Executive—good
>
> Effectiveness of Board—good
>
> Management of relationships with media—good."

I could go on.

During Mr. Earley's three years as chairman of the North Durham trust, he was appraised on three separate occasions. At no time were any concerns about his performance raised with him by the then regional chairman, Mrs. Manzoor, who conducted personal interviews after each appraisal. If no concerns were raised at those appraisals, why did the commission think that he should not be reappointed?

To shed some light on that, I have to return to Sir William's letter, in which he states that the views of the regional director, Mr. Garland, would be considered, as well as the appraisals. He goes on to state:

> "In your case the Commission accepted that the difficult relationship with your former Chief Executive led to concerns about the strength of your own leadership skills and relationships within the Trust".

To question that as a reason for not reappointing Mr. Earley, I refer again to his appraisal of June 2000. Under the heading "Relationships with the Chief Executive", it states:

> "have improved many if not most issues viewed from similar perspective—assessment—good".

No concerns have ever been raised with Mr. Earley about his relationship with the former chief executive by the regional chair, who, as I have said, carried out personal interviews after each appraisal. If that is not good enough evidence to show that he should be reappointed, I shall refer to *The Journal*—a Newcastle paper—in which, on 16 November 2001, the former chief executive, Mr. Worth, is quoted as saying that

> "he and Mr. Earley worked well together for three and a half years and believed the two achieved a lot in North Durham".

The reason for the non-reappointment does not stand up to scrutiny. Again, if there were serious questions about Mr. Earley's leadership, why did they not show up in the annual appraisals? Why were those concerns not raised by Dr. John Marshall, the then chairman of the health authority?

Kevin Earley reapplied for the position of chairman when it was advertised this September. In fact, he was shortlisted and interviewed for the post. Again, if the commission had grave concerns about his performance and leadership abilities, as was stated in Sir William's letter, why on earth was he shortlisted and interviewed?

I understand that, following the interviews, the regional NHS appointments commission made a recommendation to the national commission, but it was rejected. It is not known whether a second preference was also nominated, according to the commission's procedures, but no appointment was made as a result of the process. That effectively left the trust with no replacement for Mr. Earley.

The commission's clear conclusion was that, despite an open advertisement, no one from my constituency, from that of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong), or from that of my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) could be found to fill that post. I find that hard to believe or accept.

Given that no appointment was made, I understand that the regional commissioner, Dr. John Marshall, wrote to certain existing non-executive members of health trusts inviting them to apply for the post. I have studied the NHS Appointments Commission's procedures on the NHS executive website and cannot find where the procedure used in this case is laid down. I hope that the Minister will enlighten me in her reply.

The actions by Dr. John Marshall raise serious questions. Who drew up the list of who was to be invited for interview? Where do Dr. Marshall's actions appear in the procedures laid down and what criteria were used to draw up the list? We know that some non-executives on the North Durham trust were invited to apply, because at least one wrote to Dr. Marshall refusing to be considered and strongly criticising the removal of Mr. Earley as chair. We also know that Mrs. Angela Ballatti was asked to apply. She qualified—rightly in my opinion—because she was the chair of the local priority services trust. However, we also know that the chair of the priority services trust in Sunderland, who is a Durham city resident, was not invited to apply.

The list of those approached and the reasons for it need to be made public. More importantly, we need to know why some people were not asked to apply for the post of chair of the North Durham trust. What should have been an open and transparent process has become clouded in secrecy, with the commission hiding behind its so-called "cloak of independence".

The new NHS Appointments Commission was set up to end the accusations of cronyism and, to quote from its website, it was created to

> "ensure that the public, the NHS and Ministers have confidence in the openness, transparency and fairness of the procedures which are used".

We are as far from that position as we could possibly be.

We must ask questions about not only the procedure used, but the people finally appointed. Mrs. Angela Ballatti is a senior tutor in the business school at Durham university and Dr. John Marshall was director of the business school. This, along with the appointment of Sandy Anderson—who worked with Dr. Marshall for 30 years at ICI in Teesside—to the chair of the South Durham Health Care NHS trust makes the perception of cronyism hard to refute.

Mr. Earley was removed without adequate explanation and that has left a stain against his character despite the much good work that he did for health care in my constituency and in Durham in general. The only reason given for his removal was that he did not get on with the former chief executive. We may never know the true reason but, since the controversy surrounding this appointment, Dr. Marshall has at least given some pointers as to where we might find an answer.

In a private meeting with the non-executive members of the North Durham trust after Mrs. Ballatti's appointment, Dr. Marshall said that Mr. Earley's demise had occurred because he had engineered the retirement of the former chief executive, Mr. Worth, so that he could "put his boy in", referring to the new chief executive, Steve Mason. Dr. Marshall could not be further from the truth. Mr. Worth's retirement was agreed with the regional health authority and Dr. Marshall did not object when he was chair of the health authority.

If Mr. Earley committed a crime, it was that of wanting another Marshall—Mr. Charles Marshall—as the new chief executive of the North Durham trust. That proposal was blocked by the regional director, Peter Garland and, on a point of information, the present chief executive did not apply for the post at that time. Mr. Earley had crossed Mr. Garland, so it could be interpreted that Mr. Earley's removal as chair was Garland's way of hitting back at Mr. Earley's defiance.

The NHS Appointments Commission was set up to ensure transparency and fairness. This case demonstrates that, in the appointment of the chair of the North Durham trust, it has failed badly. A chair, who even the Secretary of State for Health agreed to me privately was a good one, has been removed without good reason. Mr. Earley's only crime was that of crossing the NHS's northern regional director.

The NHS appointments commissioner for the region, Dr. John Marshall, clearly has a lot to answer for, but it appears that he is unaccountable. It concerns me that if more decisions and finance are to be devolved to a local level, as was announced last week, there needs to be greater public accountability of those we appoint to run our health service at a local level. Failure to do that will allow local health service civil servants to continue to make mistakes and not to deliver the health care that the Government and the public in North Durham demand. If speaking out and challenging the local civil service results in individuals being removed, we will not get talented and representative people coming forward, and the challenging questions on the health service that the public need to be put will not be asked.

I ask the Minister to examine the issues that I have raised tonight. I will work with Mrs. Ballatti, the new chair, for the sake of my constituents, but I will continue to ask the challenging questions that need asking.

10.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I genuinely congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) on securing the debate. It is clear from the way in which he makes his case that he takes seriously his responsibility to represent the best interests of his constituents in the health service. I recognise and understand his concern that the North Durham Health Care NHS trust should have sound leadership. The performance of any NHS trust depends on the leadership provided by executive and non-executive directors of the board. His constituents rightly expect their local hospital to provide the best service that it can.

The new hospital, the University hospital of North Durham, which has been built on the north end of the existing Dryburn site in Durham city, is operational following a £96 million private finance initiative scheme. It rationalises acute hospital services and centralises in-patient facilities and specialised out-patient services on a single site. Almost £600,000 of additional funding has been allocated to critical care services and £500,000 has been allocated to provide equipment this year in the new hospital. My hon. Friend's constituents now have access to high-quality care.

We heard how Mr. Earley's personal and forthright leadership style gained him support from hospital staff and in the local community. I do not wish to say anything that would detract from his significant contribution to the trust or the community at large over the past three and a half years. However, it does not necessarily follow that his record makes him the automatic choice to lead the trust into the challenges of the next four years. The NHS Appointments Commission, in making the appointment of Angela Ballatti as chair from 1 November, has taken an independent view that North Durham Health Care NHS trust can move forward to even better performance under her experienced leadership. Before I deal with the detail of Mr. Earley's position, I will say why the NHS Appointments Commission was set up and how it operates.

In 1999 Dame Rennie Fritchie, in response to complaints from MPs and interest by the media, announced her intention to scrutinise all NHS appointments. Her report in March 2000 made 28 recommendations for improving the process. She concluded that there was a lack of transparency in the way those public appointments had been made and even that political affiliation had been more important than merit when candidates were considered. The Public Administration Committee became involved and its second report recommended that the Government should consider the possibility of an independent appointments commission.

The Secretary of State for Health took the view that an independent commission was the only way to provide complete reassurance to the public. The commission was set up with a chair, a chief executive and eight regional commissioners. The establishment of the commission means that the appointment of chairs and non-executives to NHS boards is no longer the direct responsibility of Health Ministers. In addition, the NHS Appointments Commission does not consult MPs on the identity of candidates. Instead, it writes to all Members of Parliament whenever a chair post is advertised to give them the opportunity to draw the advert to the attention of anyone who they think is suitable.

Mr. Jones: The process was clearly inefficient in my region, because even though I was elected in June the commission wrote to my predecessor, Giles Radice. I had to point out that I was now the Member of Parliament. Clearly, the commission does not keep on top of who are the Members of Parliament in the northern region.

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend makes an important point. When I met Sir Williams Wells today, I asked that the procedures connected with Members of Parliament be examined to ensure that they are efficient and effective. On occasion, not only have Members of Parliament not been notified that vacancies have occurred and that they should draw the advertisements to people's attention, but they have not been notified when an appointment has been made. I am anxious to ensure that all Members of Parliament are properly notified of appointments: they are

[Ms Blears]

important positions in every community and local Members of Parliament must be kept up to date. I stressed that to Sir William Wells.

The NHS Appointments Commission was established as a special health authority from 1 April this year to take over responsibility for recruitment and appointment of chairs and non-executives. In taking the step of establishing an independent appointments body, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health had the support of the Public Administration Committee and the Commissioner for Public Appointments, Dame Rennie Fritchie. Sir William Wells is the first chairman of the commission.

The NHS Appointments Commission itself is subject to regular audit and scrutiny by the Commissioner for Public Appointments, who has a statutory duty to audit all public appointment files within her remit. She does that by sending in teams of auditors who trawl through the files, examine processes and report on their findings. The commission will be audited annually from 2002. I hope that that reassures my hon. Friend that the proceedings and processes of the commission will be subject to intense scrutiny.

In addition, anyone who thinks that the appointments process is flawed may draw their concerns to the attention of Sir William, who has the power to scrutinise all the papers and the process. He can request the board to re-examine the appointment, and would do so if he found evidence of flawed procedure. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may then take up the matter directly with Dame Rennie Fritchie, who has the power to see all the papers, audit the procedures and report back. The commission would be bound to consider her recommendations and to take appropriate action. We have built in checks and balances to ensure that the commission's activities are subject to proper audit.

Transparency is crucial if the public are to feel that proceedings have been properly conducted. One of the first actions of the commission was thoroughly to overhaul the appointments process. After a comprehensive consultation exercise involving all serving non-executives, new guidance was published that has the full support of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. I understand that copies of the entire process are available in the Library. The process is open and transparent and ensures that appointments are made—and can be seen to be made—on merit alone.

There are safeguards in the system. First, all interview panels must include an independent assessor who has the right to report directly to the Commissioner for Public Appointments if the proper procedures are not followed. Secondly, appointments are not made by any individual alone. Chair appointments are made by the full board of the commission in a collective decision. Thirdly, no chair or non-executive has an absolute right to a further term of appointment. If there is any doubt about their performance, their post will be advertised, but they are entitled to apply and be interviewed along with other candidates. That may appear harsh to my hon. Friend, but the NHS Appointments Commission believes that the process is essential to encourage openness and to ensure that the NHS always has the best leaders available to it.

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): Those who have been rejected must be told why they were turned down. It hardly creates confidence or encourages people to come forward if they are not told.

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point—one that I raised with Sir William Wells today. All unsuccessful candidates should be entitled to proper feedback on their interview, on the process, on their perceived deficiencies, and on where they need to be stronger if they are to be appointed. I have been assured that all candidates are entitled to feedback, both orally from the members who sat on the interview panel and, if they wish it, in writing. It is an important part of the procedure that people should understand where their perceived deficiencies are.

Mr. Jones: That is not included in the procedures that have been laid down, and it is new to me. Mr. Earley has not been offered that option.

Ms Blears: That should be remedied. I undertake to ensure that it is.

My hon. Friend said that in relation to the process concerning Mr. Earley, a decision was made not to appoint any candidate on the first occasion. There was then a trawl or a head-hunting process. My hon. Friend has rightly said that that process of seeking applications is not in the written process that he has examined. Again, that matter needs to be remedied. Apparently, the process is acceptable to the independent commissioner, and it has been used on a number of previous occasions. My hon. Friend is correct to say that the process should be transparent and should be part of the written procedures. I will ensure that happens.

In Mr. Earley's case, there was a panel that consisted of the regional commissioner, another chair and an independent person. At the first session, Kevin Earley was interviewed in accordance with the process. Along with three other candidates, he was assessed as not having the particular skills needed by the trust for the challenges of the future. The details of that interview are in confidence between the commission and Mr. Earley. I do not have them, but he should be entitled to that feedback. I will ensure that he gets it.

Miss Ballatti was appointed by the commission at its board meeting on 12 November. She is already an experienced chair, and she will be supported in her new role by the induction and training procedures. I am delighted that my hon. Friend has said that he intends to work closely with her in the interests of his constituents to ensure that their health services continue to be of the highest possible quality.

My hon. Friend has expressed concern about the role played by Dr. John Marshall in this procedure. I have been reassured by Sir William Wells on behalf of the commission that Dr. Marshall is a man of the highest integrity who has worked in the north-east for more than 40 years in the chemical industry, the university sector and as chair of a health authority. It therefore follows that he knows many local people. It is an asset to have that local knowledge when trying to search out and find the highest quality people to lead the NHS within the region.

Mr. Jones: I accept my hon. Friend's point. However, if we are looking for new people to come into the NHS and into the appointments system, which is what the commission was set up to do, and if we are limiting such people to those who know Dr. Marshall and others who move in certain social circles, we shall not get new blood, which is what the process was set up to achieve.

Ms Blears: I do not think for one moment that I said that candidates should be limited to people moving in the same social circle. I said that sometimes it is an asset for people who are grounded in their communities to be able to seek good, high-quality leaders for the service.

We must be clear that it is an unfortunate fact of life that in any appointment process there will be candidates who are disappointed by the outcome and who will try directly or indirectly to take the matter further. We in the House need to be careful not to become caught up in that process. The independent commission was established to ensure that there is fair play, that appointments are made on merit and that we have transparency.

If my hon. Friend still has concerns, he should take them up with the chair of the commission, Sir William Wells, who I am sure would be delighted to see him to talk the issues through in depth. I recommend that my hon. Friend, and any other Members who remain concerned, take up these matters. They should ensure that their concerns are placed firmly before the commission. It is important to make sure that we all have faith, trust and confidence in the appointments that are made. It is in the best interests of all our constituents to ensure that we get high-quality people into the health service who are able to perform on behalf of their communities and deliver the best services to which all our constituents are entitled.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 6 December 2001

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Public Service Agreements

1. **Mr. Mark Francois** (Rayleigh): What work his Department has carried out to date on the public service agreements that will form part of the 2002 spending review. [18682]

8. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): What work his Department has carried out to date on the public service agreements that will form part of the 2002 spending review. [18691]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): The Cabinet Committee on Public Services and Public Expenditure, which is chaired by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, monitors Departments' performance against their public service agreements. Departments will propose a new set of PSAs covering the period 2004 to 2006 as part of the 2002 spending review decisions, which will be published at the end of the review.

Mr. Francois: The Chancellor's PSAs cover a wide range of Departments, including the Department of Health. From his perspective, can he or one of his Ministers please explain why, if the Treasury's claims that it is putting ever more money into the health service are correct, waiting times in accident and emergency units are going up instead of down?

Mr. Smith: The progress that we are making on the national health service in implementing our public service agreements and targets is evidenced by the fact that, as we said we would, we cut waiting lists by 100,000 and have increased the number of nurses by 17,000 and the number of doctors by 6,700. Also, some 600,000 more operations are taking place in the NHS and we have the biggest hospital-building programme in its history. This Government and this party would not follow the advice of the shadow Chancellor, who describes the NHS as a "Stalinist creation" and wants to bring in charges.

Mr. Robathan: May I quote from objective 1 for the Cabinet Office in the public service agreements for 2001 to 2004? That objective is

> "to work with No. 10, Departments and others to secure . . . information age government."

Given all the fine words that we get from the Government about freedom of information, as they are the only Government who have ever refused to comply with the findings of the parliamentary ombudsman on the code of practice on access to Government information, are not these public service agreements yet another example of fine words but absolutely no substance in reality?

Mr. Smith: Not at all. We are complying with the public service agreements and our requirements under the relevant codes. The evidence is there in the extra investment and extra quality of services that the people of this country are seeing.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I welcome this innovative feature of the spending review, which was introduced in 1998. However, we are aware that not all the money allocated last year was spent. Indeed, I think that £7 billion had to be spent. Can my right hon. Friend give me an assurance that the public service agreements will help that money to be spent, so that we can get delivery on the ground? There was also a plethora of targets. Can he assure us that we have targets not merely for the sake of targets, but for delivery at the end of the day?

Mr. Smith: On the architecture of the public service agreements, I echo what my hon. Friend says in welcoming this innovation, as did the National Audit Office, which described the introduction of public service agreement targets and, in particular, the move to outcome-focused targets as

> "an ambitious programme of change which puts the United Kingdom among the leaders in performance measurement practice."

I also agree with him that it is delivery on the ground that matters. That is why we realigned the targets more closely with the key priorities in the last spending review and are working with the delivery unit in No. 10 and with the Departments to ensure that promises made are promises kept.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): What prospect would there be of delivery on any single one of these public service agreements if it were Government policy to get public spending down to 35 per cent. of gross domestic product?

Mr. Smith: There would be no prospect of such progress. Of course, that is the policy of the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard).

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): How astonishing it is, in view of the importance of the question, that the Chancellor of the Exchequer should run away from it and leave it to the Chief Secretary to answer. In relation to achieving the aim of the public service agreement on health, what importance do the Government attach to their policy of raising spending on health care to the European average by 2005?

Mr. Smith: It is very important indeed. That is why that policy was set out by my right hon. Friend the

Prime Minister in Question Time last Wednesday and yesterday, and by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in Monday's debate on public services. It is the Government's policy.

Mr. Howard: In that case, will the Chief Secretary answer one of the questions that I asked the Chancellor on Monday, namely, does that mean the European average as it was in 2000, as it is in 2001 or as it will be in 2005?

Mr. Smith: If I recall correctly, the most recent figure for the European average is from 1998, when it was 7.9 per cent. The Prime Minister committed us yesterday to achieving 8 per cent. in 2005. We shall achieve that target.

Mr. Howard: Is that the sum of the Government's ambition—to reach by 2005 the European average as it was in 1998? Does not that show the utter confusion at the heart of the Government's policy on health? Is not it extraordinary that they make a song and dance about that target when people in this country are dying from illnesses that they would survive if they lived elsewhere? Is not the meddlesome Chancellor at the heart of the mess?

Mr. Smith: I think that the shadow Chancellor is trying to rerun Monday's debate when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) comprehensively demolished him. When challenged on whether he would keep the NHS free at the point of need, he would not confirm that. He remains committed, as he said in the last Parliament,

> "to reduce the proportion of national output taken by the state towards 35 per cent."

That would inflict incalculable damage on our national health service, which the right hon. and learned Gentleman described as a "Stalinist creation".

Working Families Tax Credit

2. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): How many people in Wales receive the working families tax credit. [18683]

7. **Harry Cohen** (Leyton and Wanstead): What assessment he has made of the impact on child poverty in *(a)* London and *(b)* other parts of the United Kingdom of the working families tax credit; and if he will make a statement. [18688]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Seventy-six thousand families in Wales and 95,000 families in London are among the 1.3 million United Kingdom families who benefit from the working families tax credit. Together with other policies, it has taken 1.2 million children out of poverty.

On Monday, the House will debate the Tax Credits Bill, which will create from 2003 the working tax credit and the child tax credit. Final decisions on that will be announced in the Budget. I can confirm that tax credits will disregard maintenance payments for the working tax credit, and that therefore work will pay even more.

Mr. Edwards: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the WFTC has been a valuable instrument in enabling people to get off benefit and into work, and an important measure against child poverty, for which the Government have not had the credit that they deserve?

Some small employers, who employ two or three people, have approached me. They are conscious of the problem of administering the WFTC and believe that it might discourage some small employers from taking on, for example, single parents. Will my right hon. Friend consider the administration problems for small employers?

Mr. Brown: That is precisely why the new integrated child credit will streamline the procedures. On my hon. Friend's first point about the success of the WFTC, not only have we taken 1 million children out of poverty, but it is our target to take another million out of poverty in this Parliament. We also aim to ensure that work pays for people who take up jobs.

There are 170,000 more single parents in work and many more people have been able to take up work because they know that it will pay more than social security benefits. Other countries around the world are considering the policy to ascertain whether they should adapt the same policy.

I am surprised that the Conservative party, which opposed the minimum wage and the new deal, also opposes the WFTC. After all, Ronald Reagan said of a similar system in the United States:

> "It was the best anti-poverty, the best pro-family and the best job creation measure."

Mr. Speaker: I call Harry Cohen.

Hon. Members: Where is he?

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Gibb.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): What is the Chancellor's assessment of the burden on small businesses of paying the benefit through the payroll system? Would not it be better to pay it directly to the homes of those entitled to it?

Mr. Brown: The regulatory impact survey has been applied to the benefit. The hon. Gentleman should take into account the fact that the measure benefits businesses, which are thereby able to get people to take jobs that they would otherwise not accept. It backs up the minimum wage and makes work pay. It pushes up the wages and take-home pay of the employees especially of small businesses, which might not otherwise be able to attract people. Like the earned income tax credit in the United States, the WFTC has widespread support. Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain are considering the WFTC and France has already introduced a version of it. It is the modern way of combining efficiency in business with fairness for business. It is time that the Conservative party, which opposed the minimum wage and the new deal, started supporting the WFTC.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Will the Chancellor admit that 43 per cent. of children in London are living in poverty, that London has a higher percentage of families living in poverty than any other region, and that the initial analysis of the impact of the working families tax credit on households in receipt of housing benefit shows that families in London receive less benefit from his policy than families in other regions? As he considers the new policy of an integrated child credit, will he ensure that families and children in London do not lose out?

Mr. Brown: It is true that a report is being prepared on the situation in London. There are 95,000 families in London receiving the working families tax credit, which is a smaller proportion of the population than in the rest of the country. We are examining how to develop the integrated child credit and the employment credit in the future, but the fact is that 95,000 families in London are better off than they would otherwise have been because there is a Labour Government who have adopted the working families tax credit.

Barnett Formula

3. **Hywel Williams** (Caernarfon): What plans he has to review the method of calculating the Barnett formula. [18684]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): The Government's spending plans have been agreed for the years through to 2004, including allocations for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Those allocations are governed by the statement of funding policy incorporating the Barnett formula, and that remains the Government's policy.

Hywel Williams: Lord Barnett has said recently, in evidence to the Treasury Committee and in a debate in another place, that the Barnett formula should be replaced by

"the Barnett Formula Mark II"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 7 Nov 2001; Vol. 628, c. 228.]

based on an assessment of need. Will the Chancellor accept that, in the eyes of the people of Wales, the legitimacy of the present formula will continue to decline so long as it is based not on actual need but on an historical assessment of need?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman would do well to remember that, as well as the increase of almost £2 billion that the National Assembly for Wales received under its Barnett formula allocation, Wales received nearly £100 million a year extra in support of its objective 1 status, which was secured thanks to the efforts of this Government. That is proof of the Government's commitment to Wales. In addition, over the spending review period, Wales shared in the £44 billion increase in non-devolved spending areas such as the police, defence and welfare to work. So, Wales has had a good deal from the spending review, unemployment has fallen there, and we are getting more people into jobs.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): When my right hon. Friend has a chance to look again at the Barnett formula, will he take special account of the needs of areas such as London, where even constituencies such as mine have pockets of deprivation and a need for further measures to overcome social exclusion, especially among the ethnic minority community? What my constituents will notice this year, however, is that, despite a global recession, the Government have been able to deliver a 5.1 per cent. increase in the local government grant. That will help Merton council to keep the streets clean, to work better with the community and to keep the council tax down, in stark contrast to the years in which there were cuts and more cuts under the Tories.

Mr. Smith: I understand my hon. Friend's concerns. When we discuss these matters, it is important to remember that, as well as the allocations covered by the Barnett formula, there are other measures that the Government have in place, such as the new deal, the working families tax credit, the child tax credit, the pension credit and the recently announced stamp duty exemptions, all of which help to target extra assistance on the most disadvantaged people in the most disadvantaged areas. My hon. Friend's constituents who are in particular need will benefit from that programme of tax credits, and from the Government's resolve to tackle poverty and get another million children out of poverty.

Manufacturing

4. **Mr. Hugo Swire** (East Devon): If he will make a statement on his latest assessment of the state of UK manufacturing. [18685]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The Government's latest assessment of developments in the manufacturing sector was published in detail in the pre-Budget report. To support manufacturing, not only are interest rates the lowest for 40 years but on Tuesday we published our proposals for a research and development tax credit, and yesterday the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced a new best practice initiative involving £20 million. That follows our announcement of further cuts in small corporation taxation, and cuts in capital gains tax, which match the lowest corporation tax rates that this country has seen.

Mr. Swire: Three hundred and fifty thousand manufacturing jobs have already been lost since the right hon. Gentleman became Chancellor. Given that manufacturing investment fell in the last quarter at the fastest rate since the 1970s, how many more jobs does he expect to be lost in manufacturing under his chancellorship?

Mr. Brown: We are doing everything in our power to work with manufacturing industry, and I must remind the hon. Gentleman that more than 1 million manufacturing jobs were lost at the beginning of the 1990s, during the recession in which the shadow Chancellor was Employment Secretary and presiding over 15 per cent. interest rates.

Around the world, as the hon. Gentleman understands, United States manufacturing output has been cut by 6 per cent. There has been an 11 per cent. cut in Japan and cuts of approaching 20 per cent. in Singapore and the Asian economies, which are big manufacturing economies. Here, according to the figures published this morning, there has been a 3 per cent. reduction for manufacturing.

The difference between us is that we are prepared to take action to achieve what we can with the research and development tax credit, permanent capital allowances, the work of the regional development agencies, the new regional venture capital funds that are being set up and our sponsorship of the new manufacturing apprenticeships in manufacturing industry.

The division between the two sides here is that we are prepared to take the necessary action. Unfortunately, under the shadow Chancellor's plans the Conservatives would cut public expenditure by £50 billion, so they would be unable to help with training, investment, the regional venture capital funds and the permanent capital allowances.

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): My right hon. Friend is right not to take any lessons from the Conservative party on cuts in manufacturing jobs, having suffered the Thatcher years, but may I remind him that there are some short-term manufacturing difficulties post-11 September, particularly in the British aerospace industry? Can he give some short-term moneys to those companies to help them through what I am sure is a blip? There is no doubt that there are difficulties at the moment and they need to be addressed.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who takes a keen interest in the fortunes of manufacturing industry in his constituency and his region. Yes, we accept that we need to do more to help the aviation industry because of the events of 11 September. Yes, we have given extra assistance to companies in the aerospace industry. The new orders announced for some aerospace companies, including that from the Lockheed Martin consortium, will bring new jobs and new work to those areas, which is important for the long term.

I must tell my hon. Friend that output in food and drink, chemicals, cars and transport is up—our big problem is the information technology and computer sector, where there have been falls of nearly 20 per cent. in America and other countries, and also in Britain—so the manufacturing picture is not as bleak for some sectors as it is presented from the other side of the House.

It is important that we do what we can to help manufacturing industry and one way we have been able to help is getting interest rates down seven times this year. They are now 4 per cent., but 10 years ago, in a similar world slowdown, they stood at 15 per cent. under the shadow Chancellor's policies.

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): The Chancellor is somewhat selective with his figures. Is not it a fact that the internationally exposed sectors are all in trouble in this country and have been since well before 11 September, that engineering and allied industries are experiencing a fall in output of nearly 10 per cent. compared with just a year ago and that nearly 400,000 people have lost their jobs in those sectors since 1997? He has said on at least a couple of occasions, but not in this place, that he believes that the fundamentals do not justify the current exchange rate. Does he still take that view and is not that the real background to many problems in manufacturing?

Mr. Brown: In answer to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, yes. In answer to the second part, a number of problems affect manufacturing industry, as he describes. We are dealing with world trade, which rose by 12 per cent. last year, but is rising by only 1 per cent. this year. It is hardly surprising that what he calls internationally exposed industries are affected by a slowdown in world trade.

I must tell the hon. Gentleman that, although the IT sector in particular has been hit because of what has happened to the American IT industry, car output and that of the transport sector in Britain have been going up. Over the past year, the increase for cars is 7 per cent. That is a means by which we not only sell to the rest of the world but provide for the domestic market.

The question is, do we have a Government who are prepared to take action where they can to help those industries that are in difficulty? The answer is that we are doing everything we can with permanent capital allowances, help for new investment, help for training and the work of the regional development agencies, which, as Conservative Members have acknowledged, help in individual industries. Where there are redundancies, the rapid reaction forces are moving in to help. People get jobs as quickly as possible. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) laughs at the rapid reaction forces. Of course, under the Conservative party there would be no help for people who are made redundant. He wants to abolish the new deal; he thinks it is a waste of money.

The Conservatives would not have implemented the minimum wage or the working families tax credit and the hon. Gentleman would do nothing to help those people faced with redundancy. The difference between us is clear: we are on the side of people facing difficulty, but the Conservatives would do nothing to help.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree that in less than three weeks there will be a real opportunity for British manufacturers to export across Europe? A single eurozone will make it very easy for small and medium-sized as well as large enterprises to export in a single currency.

Is it not a shame that yesterday, when the euro preparations group discussed preparations for the euro in the House with manufacturing leaders from the south-west, London and Northern Ireland, the Conservatives again refused to take their place at the table?

Mr. Brown: Given that 50 per cent. of our trade is with the euro area, it is important for us to maximise the advantages. That is one of the reasons why more than a million business leaflets have been produced to help small businesses prepare for the introduction of the euro. We will continue to do what we can to work with business during the preparations.

I agree with my hon. Friend that it is unfortunate that every political party in the House, from the smallest to the largest, has been prepared to join our euro preparations committee—an all-party committee of the House—except one. The one party that refused—I see an Opposition Member nodding, thinking about why it should have joined—is the Conservative party.

That is because the Conservative party appears to oppose the euro in principle. When the shadow Chancellor was Foreign Secretary, he said he would never say never; but when he was standing for the leadership of the Conservative party, he said that his position on a single currency was that he was opposed to it "in principle".

Even if the economic benefits were proven, the shadow Chancellor would be opposed to the euro in principle. That is the state into which the Conservative party has fallen.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): The Financial Secretary has confirmed something that I raised on 19 July—that, in addition to the direct costs to industry of the climate change levy, there will be VAT windfall gains of £30 million per annum which will not be recycled in national insurance.

Is the Chancellor satisfied that effectively bribing industry with about two thirds of its own money and the token appointment of yet another tsar are the right policies for the industry in the face of a 4.2 per cent. fall in output over the past year—not a 3 per cent. fall; the latest statistics show a 4.2 per cent. slump—and the worst recession for industry since 1991?

Mr. Brown: I was wondering when the hon. Gentleman would appear. The Flight memorandum that we discussed on Monday had to be discussed without his being able to play a part.

The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that when we announced the climate change levy we cut employers' national insurance contributions in every company in the country. We therefore recycled the revenues gained from the levy: there is no gain to the Treasury. We have also set up a renewables fund to help people progress to more energy-efficient industry.

As for the hon. Gentleman's general position and his expression of concern about manufacturing industry, we must remember that his is the party which not only brought us 15 per cent. interest rates and lost us a million manufacturing jobs, but would refuse to do anything—through public expenditure or public investment—to help manufacturing industry. And as for the policy on Europe and helping manufacturing industry—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think we will move on now.

Tax Credits

5. **Mr. Stephen McCabe** (Birmingham, Hall Green): If he will make a statement on how integrated tax credits will support families. [18686]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): In 2003, the Government will be introducing a new credit for families with children, the child tax credit. It will provide a seamless stream of support for families, integrating the income-related elements of support for children, paid directly to the main carer. The child tax credit will be paid to families with children, whether the adults in the family are in work or not. It will build on the foundation of child benefit.

Mr. McCabe: Does my hon. Friend agree that integrated tax credits represent the single greatest advance for ordinary people since the introduction of family allowance itself? Is this not the essence of Labour in action—a Government who believe that those who can work should work, that their children should enjoy the fruits of their honest toil, and that all children have the right to grow up free from the scourge of poverty? Are not those who seek to frustrate such measures committing a direct assault on the interests of ordinary people and their children?

Dawn Primarolo: My hon. Friend is right and I am sure that he would be surprised if I did not agree with him. The Opposition presided over a massive growth in child poverty and unemployment, and the key aspects of the Government's policy in tackling poverty are, first, to deal with low pay; secondly, to deal with the problem of workless households; and thirdly, investment in education and health, which will tackle all the elements of poverty in our society and ensure that children and their families are lifted out of that poverty.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): Does the Minister agree with Andrew Dilnott of the Institute for Fiscal Studies that it is remarkable that the Treasury has yet to publish estimates of its two new tax credits, even though in a previous precedent it did publish estimates of the cost of the new tax credits? Why has it failed to do so in that case?

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear that I do not agree with the gentleman he mentioned. The Tax Credits Bill, which will be debated by the House on Monday, will put in place the framework for a clear, simple, transparent method of delivering income to families, especially those in greatest need. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has said, the question of rates and tapers will be a subject for the Budget statement.

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): Is my hon. Friend aware that in areas such as my constituency, where the cost of living is high and unemployment is low, families who struggle on low incomes have a harder time of it than those in many other parts of the country? Does she agree that the seamless and common framework of assessment for the new credit will remove the stigma attached to receiving benefits that does exist, especially in such areas as Reading, East?

Dawn Primarolo: The child credit will be paid to families with children regardless of whether the adult is in or out of work, thus removing the stigma. It will also ensure that those families have one point of application for those payments. It will be precisely calculated to ensure that those with the lowest incomes will get the maximum benefit. It is strange that on such an important change to the system of support for families, especially those with children, the official Opposition apparently do not have any views.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): My hon. Friend will be aware that my constituents welcome the child tax credit, but I am concerned by the shadow Chancellor's view that £50 billion could be wiped off—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister will not be able to answer that point.

Dawn Primarolo: I am sure that the House has noted that in the cuts that the shadow Chancellor wishes to see, both in the public sector and in benefits—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Railtrack (Successor Company)

6. **Mr. A. J. Beith** (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Whether the borrowings of the successor company to Railtrack will be accounted for as public borrowing. [18687]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): I see no prospect of such an outcome.

Mr. Beith: Is it not a condition of Treasury agreement that that borrowing should be off the Government's books? How, then, could the permanent secretary go around the City telling people that the successor company would have a BBB star rating? Is not that an implicit guarantee?

Mr. Smith: As public sector net borrowing is, as it says, borrowing by the public sector, and as we do not foresee the successor company—whatever it is—being in the public sector, I see no prospect of the outcome being counted as public sector borrowing.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): So far as the impact of the dismantling of Railtrack on public borrowing is concerned, the Chief Secretary oozes smug complacency. Given that the Confederation of British Industry, the Ernst and Young ITEM Club, Franklin Mutual, Legal and General, PricewaterhouseCoopers and the state of Wisconsin, to name but six, have all warned that the Railtrack fiasco will make it more expensive to attract private capital, why does he not now accept that present policies risk the possibility of financial famine and the virtual certainty of increased borrowing, higher taxes and further damage to a transport system which is already described by the Government's own advisers as the worst in the European Union?

Mr. Smith: On smug complacency, the hon. Gentleman would do well to look in the mirror. As for the impact of what has happened at Railtrack on credit ratings, I shall quote the view of a leading credit rating agency. Standard and Poor published a document on 23 October that dealt with precisely these matters, in which it stated that

> "the Railtrack situation had no direct credit implications for rated PFI projects".

Moreover, the Government are attracting private investment into public-private partnerships and private finance initiative projects of all types. That includes our commitment to invest in our railways, in line with the 10-year plan that the Government have set out.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): If Railtrack's credit rating is so good, why did the Minister for Transport recently suggest that the Government are considering reducing expenditure on the roads programme to subsidise expenditure on rail? Is that correct? If it is, by how much will expenditure on roads be reduced, and what will be the damage to the roads programme?

Mr. Smith: I am confident that our plans for rail can and will be financed within the 10-year plan that we have already set out, and out of the £180 billion that the Government have committed to transport. In contrast, the Conservative party and the shadow Chancellor at the time of the general election explicitly refused to match our commitment on transport investment.

Manufacturing

9. **Paul Holmes** (Chesterfield): What representations he has received on the change in output in manufacturing industry over the last year. [18692]

11. **Mr. Mark Field** (Cities of London and Westminster): What recent representations he has received from United Kingdom manufacturing exporters; and if he will make a statement. [18694]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): The Chancellor and other Treasury Ministers frequently receive representations from manufacturers and all areas of business on a wide range of economic issues. We listen carefully and value their insights—as we did, for instance, at yesterday's manufacturing summit.

Paul Holmes: At meetings with union representatives and managers in my constituency of Chesterfield, I receive representations regarding the destruction of manufacturing industry. This year alone, three major traditional manufacturers—Sterling Tubes, Chesterfield Cylinders and Dema Glass—have either gone into administration or been closed down altogether. Those firms have told me that the overvalued pound against the euro cripples exports. Managers from Toyota at Derby have said that they can see no point in expanding that successful plant while there is no prospect of Britain entering the eurozone. The people to whom I have spoken want to know when the Chancellor will do something about ending the pound's ludicrous overvaluation compared with the euro.

Ruth Kelly: The Government's policy on the euro is clear. The most important thing that we can do for manufacturing is to provide a stable economic climate. By making the Bank of England independent and putting in place tough new fiscal rules, we have taken the necessary measures to ensure that. Artificially to manipulate the exchange rate of the pound as the hon. Gentleman suggests would be ludicrous. Quick fixes are not the solution for manufacturing—the solution is a stable economic climate. The Government are prepared to take the action that manufacturers so desperately need. That is why we held the manufacturing summit yesterday, at which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions announced a further £20 million to help spread best practice within manufacturing.

Mr. Field: The Chancellor assured us last week that we could expect overall growth in the economy to be 2.25 per cent. in 2001. However, after four consecutive quarters of technical recession in the manufacturing sector, will the Economic Secretary say what level of growth in that sector she anticipates in the forthcoming year?

Ruth Kelly: As the hon. Gentleman should be aware, we gave those figures in the pre-Budget report. We are expecting an increase in manufacturing output during next year. Of course, an open economy like the UK's cannot insulate itself from a global slowdown, especially when that slowdown affects countries such as the US, Japan and Europe. However, this country is better placed than any other in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to weather that international storm. That is why we are confident that manufacturing will continue to prosper in the future, and why we are taking measures now to ensure that manufacturing productivity and growth increase.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): Does my hon. Friend agree that the future of manufacturing depends, crucially, on the rate of innovation? In that context, what responses have been received from business and industry for the proposed research and development tax credit for larger companies?

Ruth Kelly: The research and development tax credit, which the pre-Budget report announced would go out to further consultation, has been widely welcomed, particularly by the Confederation of British Industry. Digby Jones has said that it will make a very useful contribution. Of course, innovation is vital in raising productivity, particularly in the manufacturing sector. That is why we propose to extend the research and development tax credit throughout industry, with big companies benefiting as well as small and medium-sized enterprises. It is why we put in place 40 per cent. first year capital allowances for investment in plant and machinery. It is also why we are giving 100 per cent. capital allowances to all small firms that invest in information technology. The only way to enhance our productivity and close the productivity gap with our European and United States neighbours is through innovation and skills.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): At the strategic level, does my hon. Friend accept that all the many welcome measures taken by the Treasury over the past four years to help small and medium-sized manufacturers may have sidelined the big companies which, after all, provide the growth and activity for those smaller companies? Does she therefore agree that the proposal for the new research and development tax credit for larger companies is a very welcome sign of a more inclusive approach to what I call the whole manufacturing family?

Ruth Kelly: Certainly, the extension of the research and development tax credits to all companies, large or small, will be welcomed across industry, and has already been welcomed by the CBI. Furthermore, our corporation tax reforms, which have been taking place over the five Budgets since the Government came to power in 1997, have slashed the corporation tax bills of manufacturers across the board. We now have the lowest corporation tax rates in the history of the United Kingdom. Overall, the United Kingdom has the lowest corporation tax rate of any major industrialised country. That is good news for manufacturers, big or small.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): The Economic Secretary will know that aerospace is an important part of our manufacturing base and has, historically, made a massive contribution to exports. She will be aware that, sadly, in recent months there have been about 40,000 redundancies in the industry, in firms such as Rolls-Royce and BAE Systems. Do the Government have any plans to assist the industry during its current problems so that it will have a skilled work force when there is an upturn?

Ruth Kelly: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the Government are committed to the future of the aerospace industry and have been helping the sector through direct assistance and also by means of the rapid response taskforce, which assists people who become unemployed. Of course, the aerospace industry has been particularly hard hit following the events of 11 September. We must now ensure that it has an environment in which it can restructure and develop. We are committed to working towards that. It is not all gloom and doom on the aerospace front, however. Recent contracts that have been won, such as the Lockheed Martin contract, will bring some welcome help to the employees and the company involved.

Environmental Protection

10. **Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): If he will make a statement on the measures in his pre-Budget report which enhance and protect the environment. [18693]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): In keeping with the Government's commitment for taxation to reflect environmental impacts, the Chancellor announced in his pre-Budget report a series of environmentally based measures and consultations designed to protect and enhance our environment.

Paddy Tipping: The pre-Budget report contains important measures for moving towards a more sustainable energy policy, but will my right hon. Friend tell us when the long-awaited report on combined heat and power will be published so that the agreed targets can be met? Will he look closely at proposals put to him on coal mine methane development? If we could harness that we really would be in a win-win situation.

Mr. Boateng: We are considering carefully with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what support might be offered on combined heat and power. DEFRA will be publishing a CHP strategy in the coming months. We are committed to CHP, which has an important role to play. We shall certainly also take into account the outcome of the performance and innovation unit's energy review.

On coal mine methane, we await a response from the industry to our request for information on the potential environmental benefits of that form of power. Also important is energy from coppicing, in which Members on both sides of the House have a particular interest, and we believe that the climate change levy exemption and the renewables obligation will provide a significant stimulus to that renewable form of energy.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): If the Minister is so pleased with the Government's green record, can he explain why last week the Government's own greening government report, produced the day before the pre-Budget Report, revealed that all Departments had signally failed to reduce greenhouse emissions? The increase in energy was as great as 77 per cent. in the Department of Health, while the Minister's own Department has increased energy consumption during the past year by as much as 23 per cent., as well as failing to reduce hardwood usage and failing on recycling targets. Is it not time that the Government put their own house in order, rather than preaching to others and piling millions of ill-targeted taxes on to businesses?

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman is plain wrong in his view of the impact of those taxes on businesses. He knows—as do Members on both sides of the House—that the climate change levy was devised and crafted with the closest co-operation of business. He also knows of the real benefits that have been gained by business as a result of the climate change levy, but he is absolutely right to point out that Departments should take a lead in this area. We are determined to do better. There is no room for complacency. This is a challenge we all face together.

World Development Goals

13. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What recent discussions he has had with other Finance Ministers on progress towards a meeting the 2015 world development goals. [18696]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): I used recent international meetings to push for greater efforts to achieve the 2015 goals. We have proposed a $50 billion international development fund under a new compact between developed and developing countries, and I hope that our proposal will engender an all-party consensus in the House.

Helen Jones: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply and for the personal interest that he has taken in the matter—it is a refreshing change from the previous Administration. My right hon. Friend will accept that achieving many of those targets will depend on an increase in aid, among other things. Can he tell me when he expects this country's aid budget to reach the target of 0.7 per cent. of gross domestic product? That is something that many of my constituents, even in the poorest areas, would like to see, as a sign of our commitment to the worst-off people in the world.

Mr. Brown: I thank my hon. Friend. I know that she takes a tremendous personal interest in both the debt relief campaign and the work on international development led by churches and others in her constituency. When we came into power the development aid budget was 0.27 per cent. Under this spending round, it is rising to 0.33 per cent. In the pre-Budget statement, I said that we envisaged a substantial increase in overseas development in the next spending round and a rise in the proportion of aid in our national income. That is why we made the proposal for an international development fund involving $50 billion. Its aim would be to halve poverty between now and 2015; to cut infant mortality by two thirds; and to ensure that every child in the world enjoyed primary schooling by 2015, instead of the present situation in which, this morning, 120 million children were not able to attend school.

We are asking other countries to join us in that. Negotiations will take place in the run-up to the finance for development conference. That goes hand in hand with our proposals on debt relief, where 24 countries now enjoy up to $50 billion of debt relief.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer support the views of the senior management of the International Monetary Fund, especially Ann Kruger, the vice-president, who argued last week that seriously indebted developing countries should enter the equivalent of bankruptcy proceedings to facilitate a rapid write-off of commercial and official debt? Do the British Government agree with her?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is confusing two debates that are taking place. One is about whether, in our crisis prevention and crisis resolution measures, we as an international community look to a new system of international bankruptcy proceedings. The managing director of the IMF, Hans Kohler, has suggested that we need to consider that issue in far more detail because our crisis resolution measures are not good enough.

How we can help those countries that do not have a sustainable exit from debt relief is a separate issue. The answer is that other countries should follow what we have done, which is to provide 100 per cent. debt relief for debts that were incurred in the past, and that we do more through the international institutions to reduce debt. That is how we expect to proceed. Twenty-four countries now have debt relief. Perhaps another 10 could receive debt relief if they moved out of conflict. Under our proposals, it is possible for $100 billion in debt relief to be provided.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): I welcome the Chancellor's commitment to reducing debt. However, is he aware of my concern and those of other debt campaigners that the problem for those countries that are currently going through the heavily indebted poor countries initiative, and those that would wish to do so in the near future, is that even the World Bank has suggested that their future economic sustainability may mean that they will not be able to meet their current targets? Will he ensure that that issue is raised in future discussions with other Finance Ministers? Will he use his influence with the IMF and the World Bank to ensure that those programmes work for the poorest?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is chairman of the all-party committee on such matters. The work that has been done by all hon. Members is much appreciated. We agreed at Ottawa that there would be greater flexibility in the award of debt relief to countries, especially taking into account the fall in commodity prices that has affected Africa in particular. We therefore agreed that, at the point of completion, there will be more flexibility to enable countries to get a sustainable exit from the debts that they have incurred.

The fact of the matter is that four years ago only one country was likely to receive debt relief; now, as a result of a decision made on another African country last week, 24 have got debt relief. The next stage is for post-conflict countries to get the debt relief that they are due, which would mean that we would achieve our target of $100 billion in debt relief. I agree with my hon. Friend, however, that more will have to be done if we are to have a virtuous circle of debt reduction, poverty reduction and sustainable development, and that is why the focus must now also be on the 2015 development targets.

Euro

14. **Mr. Ian Taylor** (Esher and Walton): What are the latest estimates of Treasury expenditure on business euro preparations for the 2001–02 financial year. [18697]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Some £10 billion—*[Interruption]*—£10 million, and the Opposition will be happy to note this, has already been spent on business euro preparations. Some £23 million has been spent to adopt euro-compatible systems in the Inland Revenue and the Department for Work and Pensions. A copy of the Treasury's fifth report on euro preparations, which was published on 4 November, has been deposited in the Library.

Mr. Taylor: The Chancellor may overspend if he put £10 billion into the problem, but £10 million is too little. Does he agree that there will be a real competitive challenge to industry and traders in this country on 1 January—that 80 per cent. of the single European market, which is the home market for British business, will have one currency? There are 13 million visitors from the eurozone to this country. It is urgent that British companies not only accept notes and coins in euro denominations, but look at their marketing strategy and prepare themselves for what will be the dominant currency in our home market.

Mr. Brown: That is precisely why, in the most practical way, we have done what we can to help British businesses to prepare. We have published 425,000 fact sheets on euro preparation for businesses; we have written to 1.5 million small firms to inform them about the needs that will arise from the euro; we have published more than 50 business case studies showing how the euro can be adapted; and we have issued a euro preparations leaflet to 1.6 million small businesses. In addition, a leaflet is being distributed at ports and airports explaining to travellers to and from the United Kingdom how the euro will work.

We are working with all the sectoral bodies in our euro preparations committee—which includes the Bank of England, the chambers of commerce, the Confederation of British Industry and many other organisations—to produce material for clients in different sectors. In addition, there is a telephone helpline available for businesses inquiring about Europe.

I may add that we are encouraging people who have old coins and notes in foreign currencies that will be converted into the euro to give them to charity, if they are prepared to do so, and we are giving tax relief for that.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): Retailers, banks, manufacturers and exporters are already having to spend huge amounts of money to get ready for the introduction of euro coins and notes. However, the real advantage to those businesses will occur only if we are in the eurozone and have the advantage of lower interest rates and still lower costs to business. Should not real preparations be made now to build up the campaign to explain to the British people and to British business the full advantages of joining the euro?

Mr. Brown: It is precisely to inquire about all the advantages of the euro that the five tests will be applied. The technical and preliminary work that is being undertaken in the Treasury will lead to an assessment within the first two years. The issues that must be examined and on which an objective assessment must be made include the effects on employment; the effects on investment; the effects on the flexibility of our economy; the effects on different sectors, including financial services; and whether there is sustainable and durable convergence. I believe that most businesses think that these are the right tests to make.

It would be wrong to do what the Opposition do and rule out the euro on principle as a matter of economic dogma even if it were found to be in the national economic interest to join. The shadow Chancellor, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), shakes his head, but in 1997 he said that he was against the single currency "in principle". Does he still hold that view?

Productivity

15. **Mr. Win Griffiths** (Bridgend): What steps he is taking to encourage businesses to raise productivity levels. [18699]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): The creation of a sustainable, stable macro-economic framework since 1997 has provided the foundation for productivity growth in UK firms. We have a long-term ambition to ensure that Britain achieves a faster rate of productivity growth than its main competitors, thereby closing the productivity gap. The Chancellor's pre-Budget report takes us a step nearer that ambition.

Mr. Griffiths: I thank my right hon. Friend for that response. When he considers the efforts of small and medium-sized companies to increase their productivity, will he examine the issues surrounding the charges for authorisations under integrated pollution control? A small company in my constituency, Abril Waxes, has found that it has to pay £7,000 for its authorisation, which might be the same as that paid by a company such as BP. Will he consider a system of sliding scales based on output for such charges?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend takes a very close interest in these matters and I am grateful for his support for our objectives. He makes a fair point and I will ensure that officials consider his proposal and get back to him on our likely capacity to be able to introduce such a measure.

The pre-Budget report sought to help small businesses through the simplification of VAT and by further reforms to the business tax system. I hope that they will assist the sort of firm that he rightly said has particular concerns about compliance costs.

Child Poverty

16. **James Purnell** (Stalybridge and Hyde): What measures he is taking to tackle child poverty. [18700]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The Government are committed to abolishing child poverty within a generation and halving it by 2010. As a result of tax and benefit changes announced in the last Parliament, there are now 1.2 million fewer children in poverty than there would otherwise have been. In addition, the Government have put extra funds into services specifically available for children, such as sure start, neighbourhood renewal and the children's fund.

James Purnell: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does she agree that ending child poverty also depends on making work pay? Does she remember the shadow Chancellor campaigning relentlessly against the minimum wage in the 1992 election and claiming that it would cost up to 2 million jobs? Does that not show the essentially right-wing instincts of the Conservative party and the fact that it cannot ever be trusted on child poverty or—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is a new Member, but Opposition policy has nothing to do with the Paymaster General.

Dawn Primarolo: Poverty is complex and multi-dimensional, as my hon. Friend will realise. To tackle child poverty, it is necessary to deal with low incomes through the minimum wage and the tax and benefit changes that the Government have introduced. We need to tackle the problem of workless households by ensuring that people can get into work, stay in work and keep more of the money that they earn. The working families tax credit is an example of how we do that. We must also invest in public services—in particular, education and health—to give the best start to our children and to ensure that they are able to develop their potential without the scar of poverty destroying their lives.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): May I ask the Leader of the House to give us the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 10 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Tax Credits Bill.

TUESDAY 11 DECEMBER—Estimates Day [1st Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on the staging of the world athletics championships in the United Kingdom followed by a debate on waste management policy.

Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

At 10 pm the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates.

WEDNESDAY 12 DECEMBER—Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund Bill.

A debate on International Terrorism on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Consideration of Lords amendments to the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill.

THURSDAY 13 DECEMBER—Remaining stages of the Animal Health Bill.

The House may also be asked to consider any Lords messages that may be received.

FRIDAY 14 DECEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the following week will be as follows:

MONDAY 17 DECEMBER—Remaining stages of the International Development Bill *[Lords]*.

TUESDAY 18 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning (Amendment) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 19 DECEMBER—Motion to approve a statutory instrument. Details to be announced.

Motion on the Christmas recess Adjournment debate.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for the next five weeks will be:

THURSDAY 13 DECEMBER—Debate on the report from the Health Committee on public health.

THURSDAY 10 JANUARY—Debate on the report from the Science and Technology Committee on wave and tidal energy.

THURSDAY 17 JANUARY—Debate on child health and maternity.

THURSDAY 24 JANUARY—Debate on the report from the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee on walking in towns and cities.

THURSDAY 31 JANUARY—Debate on Gibraltar.

The House will wish to know that on Monday 10 December there will be a debate relating to the European arrest warrant and the surrender procedures between member states in European Standing Committee B. This rearranges the debate adjourned last Monday.

[*Monday 10 December 2001:*

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Union Document: 13425/01, European Arrest Warrant. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Reports: HC 152-vii (2001-02) and HC 152-viii (2001-02).]

[*Tuesday 11 December:*

Winter supplementary summary request for supply (HC 392). Vote on Account (House of Commons) (HC393). Vote on Account (National Audit Office) (HC394). Vote on Account (Electoral Commission) (HC 395)]

Mr. Forth: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the business for next week and beyond. On his last point, you will recall, Mr. Speaker, that in response to points of order raised by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), at column 185 of *Hansard* on 4 December you helpfully invited the hon. Lady in particular to follow up the important constitutional issue that arose following what my hon. Friend called "a shambles" in the European Standing Committee last Monday? Based on what that Committee said—or, strictly speaking, was not able to say; it has yet to reach a decision—and what was said in the equivalent Committee in another place, the Government are surely unable to take a position on European arrest warrants in the Council of Ministers, which is meeting even as we speak.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will give an absolute undertaking that Her Majesty's Government will make no commitment on that matter until the proper parliamentary process has been completed. As the Committee will not meet again until next Monday, I hope that he will say categorically that the Government will not take a position on behalf of this country in that Council of Ministers before the Committee concludes its deliberations and the parliamentary process is completed. It is an important matter, and I am sure the Leader of the House, with his well-known respect for the parliamentary process, will readily be able to give that guarantee.

The Leader of the House has so far shared his views on what he chooses to call the modernisation of the House of Commons only, we are told, with the parliamentary Labour party. Before he shares his views with the rest of us—I do not know when that will be—will he guarantee that his proposals will strengthen the House of Commons and Parliament vis-à-vis the Government and reduce the Government's stranglehold on our parliamentary process, which they are seeking to tighten? Moreover, will he guarantee that nothing that he does will give Members of Parliament the opportunity to reduce their role in this place, or allow them to bunk off rather than be here fulfilling their parliamentary duties? Those undertakings will be very important when we all come to consider the proposals, as I hope we will eventually be given the chance to do.

Finally, may I draw the Leader's attention to early-day motion No. 529?

[That this House is deeply concerned by the contents of the Press release entitled 'Labour Thugs Attack MP', issued by the Labour honourable Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham on 4th December, in which he complains of 'an intimidatory move' by the Labour honourable Member for Bradford South, 'prodding . . . in the back' by the Labour honourable Member for Lewisham West,

and 'expletive name-calling' by the Labour honourable Member for Harwich; agrees with the Labour honourable Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham that 'It is time that New Labour was exposed for its Stalinist tendencies and desperate methods of trying to intimidate its own MPs'; and whilst, not sharing the honourable Member's view on Afghanistan, calls upon the Government Chief Whip to discipline those members of her office who have infringed acceptable methods of dealing with one of their own back bench colleagues.]

I am sure that the Leader has memorised it, but while he is waiting for his Parliamentary Private Secretary to give him a copy, I can tell him that it concerns a press release entitled, "Labour thugs attack MP". [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh no."] Yes, this is a very serious allegation, which must worry you, Mr. Speaker, as it does the rest of us. The MP concerned is the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden), and he has made serious allegations about which we are all most concerned. He says that he has been both verbally and physically attacked by members of the Government.

It is one thing for the Government to hold the House in contempt; we have almost got used to that. But it is quite another if the Government are now so desperate that their Ministers—Whips, after all, are on the payroll and have ministerial boxes and cars—are now physically and verbally attacking an independent-minded Member simply because he takes a view that is different from, and independent of, that of the Government. If the House of Commons is about anything, it is the ability of Members to take an independent view and to be accountable to their electorate and no one else. Here we have another direct threat against Members' independence, and I hope that you agree, Mr. Speaker, that it is urgent that we debate the matter. Let us have it out in the open and hear what the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham has to say, and then let us decide how we, the House of Commons, can protect Labour MPs from their own Government.

Mr. Cook: On the right hon. Gentleman's first point, may I say, Mr. Speaker, that I read with care your words inviting my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) to raise the matter with me this morning? I was delighted to see her in her place when I entered the Chamber. The right hon. Gentleman has slightly stolen her thunder, but since he has asked the question, I may say to him that there is no question of those matters being agreed by Her Majesty's Government in any meeting in Brussels until the meeting on Monday 10 December. In practice, we anticipate that the issues will be resolved at Laeken, not at the Justice and Home Affairs Council, and the Laeken meeting will take place after 10 December.

The forthcoming paper on the modernisation of the House will be circulated to members of the Modernisation Committee this weekend, and discussed at meetings of the Committee next Tuesday and Wednesday. I hope that it will be available to all Members of the House next Wednesday.

Mr. Forth: Will the Leader of the House guarantee that?

Mr. Cook: I certainly give the right hon. Gentleman that guarantee. However, I also want to point out that before the Modernisation Committee takes forward that programme of work, it is important that it has before it the views of all Members of the House, which is why it is important that the document should be shared with all Members.

I am very pleased to give the right hon. Gentleman the guarantees that he asked for. The whole purpose of the exercise is to make sure that Parliament is able to do its job more effectively and able to scrutinise legislation more effectively, and that it has Select Committees that can scrutinise the Executive more effectively. It is important that we get across the message that the modernisation of Parliament is not about making life easier for MPs; it is about making the job of the MP more effective and more rewarding. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will be delighted to hear, and I look forward to his support in this matter, that the total impact of my proposals on the sitting hours of the House will be to increase, not diminish, them. I know that he personally will fully support me on that.

On the other matter that the right hon. Gentleman raises, I accept responsibility for many things, but not for what happens in the Strangers Bar at 3 am. My rare experience of being in the Strangers Bar at 3 am is that it is a place for robust exchange of views, and I should not have thought that the right hon. Gentleman would be surprised or dismayed by that, but there is a categorical denial of any physical violence.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I am delighted to hear that European Standing Committee B will have an opportunity to look again at the very important European arrest warrant. Does my right hon. Friend accept that that is an extremely far-reaching measure? It is not simply a matter of a small adjustment; it will affect many aspects of British law. Before we accept the right of a foreign Administration to issue a demand for arrest on matters as wide as crimes of homosexuality and abortion, does my right hon. Friend agree that we should debate the consequences and the implications on the Floor of the House of Commons, where all hon. Members can be aware of what we are being committed to?

Mr. Cook: I am quite sure that all hon. Members are well aware of the proposals of the Justice and Home Affairs Council. They have, after all, been debated during the passage of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, and will no doubt be debated again when we consider statutory instruments under that Bill when it becomes an Act. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her welcome for the fact that there will be a debate in the Standing Committee. That debate will be timely, before any decision is taken. I would not disagree with her that important and serious issues are involved. It is precisely because of the need for co-operation across Europe and with our immediate neighbours to defeat terrorism that we are taking the measure.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): In the context of the improved scrutiny that the House should undertake, does the Leader of the House recall the infamous memo from the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), in which he advised his colleagues to "bunk off"—to use his own expression—on a regular basis? Does the Leader of the House also recall that late on

Tuesday night we missed the right hon. Gentleman in the Chamber, when he, too, seemed to have bunked off at an early hour?

With regard to modernisation, does the Leader of the House recognise that we have a problem? Members of the Select Committee have been sworn to secrecy about the ideas that we are currently discussing, yet the briefing which emerged from the meeting of the parliamentary Labour party last night, most of which seemed to be erroneous, puts us in the awkward position of not knowing whether we are allowed to discuss those matters with our colleagues or with the media. Can the Leader of the House release members of the Select Committee from that vow of secrecy? We recall that on many occasions in this place, members of Select Committees have been strongly criticised for disclosing matters that were being considered by their Committees.

In particular, can the Leader of the House give an undertaking that, as part of his proposals, he will examine the vexed issue of the rationalisation and regularisation of the allocation of Opposition Supply days and the way in which subjects for debate on those days are chosen? He will recall that over the past week or so, considerable confusion resulted from the failure to give us information in good time so that we could prepare for those debates.

Mr. Cook: I hope that the paper on modernisation will be circulated to members of the Modernisation Committee in the course of today and that it will be available for the weekend. The normal rule to which the hon. Gentleman refers is correct. A Select Committee would be expected to proceed with its papers on the basis of discussion only within the Committee.

We must be mature and recognise that if we are to discuss the modernisation of Parliament, changes in the working practices of our colleagues, and the right of the House to carry out effective scrutiny of legislation, we cannot do that in conditions of secrecy. It is important that we share that with colleagues, and that they can offer their own input. That is why we intend to release the document after it has been discussed in the Committee next week. I leave it to the discretion and good faith of members of the Committee as to whom they consult and the conditions on which they consult them before we meet to discuss the paper next week.

On the views that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) expressed to the Conservative party, I well recall his proposal that Conservative Members should divide themselves into teams, each of which would turn up on one day of the week.

Mr. Forth: It never happened.

Mr. Cook: Yes, I regret to say that the right hon. Gentleman's proposal failed to be implemented. The rest of us were rather looking forward to the outcome, with only a fifth of Conservative Members turning up on any one day.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): On an issue not raised by the two Opposition parties today, should not there be a statement in the House next week about why the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards did not have the opportunity of having her contract renewed, like her predecessor? Is it not clear that her successor, whoever that may be, will be under tremendous pressure, rather like Mrs. Filkin has been? If her successor carries out his or her duties in the same conscientious and honourable way as Mrs. Filkin, the feeling may be that that successor will not have his or her contract renewed. Is there not a case for the appointment to be made by an outside body, not by us? That form of self-regulation is almost becoming a farce. Why should not the Committee on Standards in Public Life do the appointing? I must tell my right hon. Friend that the whole shabby business is regrettable and has reflected no credit on the House of Commons.

Mr. Cook: I cheerfully say to my hon. Friend that I am open to bids from other Committees to take that burden upon themselves. I am certainly not fighting to keep it for the Committee on which I serve.

David Winnick: Outside bodies.

Mr. Cook: The Standards and Privileges Committee is not an outside body. I remind my hon. Friend that the procedures of the House are clear; when an appointment is proposed, the nomination will come before the whole House of Commons on the Floor of the House and it will be for the whole House to approve or reject it. I think that I am correct in saying that it will be an amendable motion, so it will be open to my hon. Friend at that stage to table an amendment to test the opinion of the House on whether the present commissioner should be reappointed.

I do not think that it will help my hon. Friend's cause of ensuring proper inviligation of the standards and conducts of Members of Parliament if he starts a campaign to decry the process of appointment. It is in the interests of everybody in the House to attract a quality field and approach the task of finding the best possible candidate to become commissioner.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): Will the Leader of the House find an opportunity for an early debate on health so that we can ask the Government whether they support a hypothecated health tax, like the Secretary of State for Health, or whether they oppose such a tax, like his very best friend the Chancellor?

Mr. Cook: I have no doubt that the House will have the ingenuity to ask those questions on many future occasions.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): Will my right hon. Friend find time soon to debate the guidelines currently followed by Customs and Excise on personal imports of tobacco and alcohol? Under the guidelines, my right hon. Friend will be aware, Customs and Excise have not only made large seizures of alcohol and tobacco, but impounded motor vehicles, which are then sold. The European Commission has declared those guidelines unlawful. May we therefore have a debate or statement to clarify the position on the validity of those guidelines?

Mr. Cook: I remind my hon. Friend that everything that Customs and Excise does is done under United Kingdom law, with the authority of the House and, indeed, the elected Government. Of course, I appreciate that the matter is of concern to people who have been stopped by Customs and Excise and had property

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confiscated, but the country faces a major problem of tobacco smuggling. It is important for all of us in the House to send a strong message to Customs and Excise that we welcome its vigilance against illegal smuggling.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): The consultation period on the Government's proposals to reform the House of Lords runs out at the end of January. May we have an assurance that there will be a full day's debate on them before that period expires?

Mr. Cook: I am pleased to give the right hon. Gentleman that assurance. I anticipate that that debate will be held in the first week after the recess, subject to progress on business.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): After more than 14 years of persistent rebellion in the House, never once have I had any physical or verbal abuse from the Whips. I am wondering whether I do not go to Strangers Bar enough or whether people are not taking me seriously.

My question to my right hon. Friend refers to early-day motion 532, which deals with a mineral planning guidance note:

[*That this House welcomes the gains made in the revised version of Mineral Planning Guidance Note 3 (MPG3) which can and should be used by planning authorities to prevent dangerous forms of open cast mining; is disturbed that these gains stand to be lost entirely by favoured changes which are due to take place to MPG ll, which itself is supposed to mitigate the environmental effects of mineral extractions, including open cast mining; notes that the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions is currently placing an entirely unjustified reliance upon a deeply flawed survey from Newcastle University which restricted its examination of the effects of dust particulates to PM 10 size, measured within the limited distance of l km of mineral extraction operations, when the professionals conducting the survey must have been aware that fine particulates travel exceptional distances and that PM 2-5 particulates could easily have been measured at no additional costs to their study; is disturbed to discover that such an inept and incompetent study is being used for the benefit of open cast mining interests, although many reputable alternative surveys have reached different conclusions; and calls upon the Government to commission its own detailed and rigorous research into such matters before the revised MPG 11 is adopted and published, so that environmental, health and communal interests are placed to the fore.*]

Improvements proposed by mineral planning guidance note 3 have made it much more difficult for opencast mining applications to be granted. Currently, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is investigating MPG 11, which is supposed to mitigate the environmental effects of mineral extraction. However, from correspondence that I have had with the Department, it appears to be taking too much into account a survey conducted by Newcastle university, which was published in 1999 by the Department of Health and does not take seriously the impact of coal dust on young people. It is clear that, at some point, we shall have a statement on new MPG 11. Can representations be made to ensure that that is not dumped on us, thereby undermining the situation achieved by MPG 3?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Far be it from me to bully the hon. Gentleman, but I think that that question went on a bit too long.

Mr. Cook: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) for confirming what I have long supposed: that the Government Whips treat Labour Members with respect to their person if not always with respect to their opinions.

My hon. Friend is correct that the Department is conducting a review of planning guidance on opencast mining. The review can reflect the evidence to which he referred and can also take full account of the early-day motion that he and others have tabled.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Can the Leader of the House remember on which day he was quoted referring to the whispering campaign against the current Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards? If he cannot remember, it was on 20 August, on page 3 of the *Financial Times*. The Leader has also told the hon. Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) that he wants to have a quality field of candidates for the next term of office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. Will he therefore, perhaps in next week's debate, follow up on those remarks by saying whether he remembers his words of 28 June 2001, when he said that the current Parliamentary Commissioner is "zealous . . . extremely zealous"?

Is the Leader trying to ensure that the field is less zealous by associating himself with a cut in the commissioner's days of service per week from four to three, in the mistaken belief that Sir Gordon Downey worked three days rather than four days per week? Will he please also give the House an opportunity as soon as possible to debate and vote on early-day motion 513, which states:

[*That this House has confidence in the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and invites Elizabeth Filkin to accept reappointment on the terms of the initial contract working four days a week.*]

As I understand it, such a debate and vote are the only way in which the House can offer reappointment to the commissioner on the terms that she is currently on and that Sir Gordon Downey was on.

Mr. Cook: On the hon. Gentleman's last point, I remind him that Mrs. Filkin applied for a job and that the job description said that it would be for three days; that is the basis on which she was chosen. Subsequently, it was negotiated that she should be paid and employed for four days. It has always been open to her to pursue that course, and it has always been open to any candidate who has been appointed to secure an extension of the three days. That is precisely what we did last time.

The hon. Gentleman is correct that Sir Gordon Downey was employed for four days a week. It is also the case that, before he retired, he wrote to the authorities indicating that, in his view, the job merited three days a week, not four. The job description for his successor was drawn up on that basis.

I have of course studied the early-day motion with care; I always pay respect to early-day motions. Quite often, they provide a useful expression of a weight of opinion in the House and often attract a very large number of signatures. I noted with care that the hon. Gentleman's early-day motion has been signed so far by 18 hon. Members, and therefore does not attract the priority for debate that many others do that demonstrate a much larger body of opinion behind them in the House.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): Hon. Members on both sides of the House were very grateful that, yesterday, you, Mr. Speaker, were able to take a private notice question on the middle east from the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell). However, given the very serious nature of events in the area, will the Leader of the House try to find time as soon as possible for a full debate, in Government time, on the situation in the middle east, particularly in relation to the west bank and Gaza? Although hon. Members have been able to address those issues in debates on international terrorism, I hope that the Leader of the House will agree that we deserve time to debate Palestine and the problems there outside of that context. I do not think that we have had such a debate in the past year.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises an issue that is of deep concern to many hon. Members. He is also quite correct that there is an opportunity to raise those issues in the course of our exchanges on international terrorism. There will be another full day's debate on that subject next week, which will be the sixth such full day's debate since 11 September. There have therefore been many opportunities for hon. Members to raise those issues of concern. I underline the Government's deep anxiety about the present situation in the middle east and our appeal to both sides for restraint and a return to the negotiating table. I know that this is a matter of deep concern and priority for my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. I am sure that he and his team will continue to do all that they can to ensure that Britain and the European Union play their part in trying to bring both parties back from the brink.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Does the Leader of the House accept that the House of Commons Commission is not an all-party body, as it was described by the Prime Minister yesterday—a number of parties in the House are not represented on it? Will he ask the Prime Minister not to describe it as such in future? As I understand it, the Leader of the House said earlier that we could have a debate on the Floor of the House about the appointment of the next Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. Should not we have a debate on what happened to our current commissioner before we have a debate on the next one, either through early-day motion 513 or by some other means? How many signatures does he require that motion to have before he will agree to the democratic aspect of a debate on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman is correct: his party and the other minority parties do not have direct representation on the House of Commons Commission. However, the Commission embraces representatives of the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative party. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) serves on the Commission—indeed, I think that he did so even before he held his present position—although I must confess that it was not entirely clear to me in respect of some of the questions asked during Prime Minister's Question Time yesterday whether it was understood in his party that he is a member of the Commission and has played a full part in all the decisions that we have taken.

I do not believe that the issue has lacked adequate ventilation in Parliament or the press. There is no question of the matter being dealt with secretly. After all, the advert itself is a public document by definition. I urge everybody now to focus on the important task ahead of us, which is to ensure that we get a person of calibre, ability and commitment to carry out the job properly.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Will my right hon. Friend put paid to the nonsense that is being circulated today to the effect that any people other than hon. Members can come into the Chamber when the House is sitting or into Committees when they are doing business? Should not he be introducing measures that encourage hon. Members to be here more as legislators, instead of encouraging them to be back in their constituencies acting as social workers and parish council mayors? Can he give me an assurance that when these matters come before the House, they will, as House matters, be decided as usual by free vote? Will he put them forward separately and not as a full package?

Mr. Cook: I rather thought that my hon. Friend's earlier observations sounded a little bit like an editorial in *The Guardian*. I was rather surprised that he should express himself in such terms, as I know how much he values his constituency work, having visited him there. It is important that the House should strike the right balance. We are indeed here to legislate and scrutinise Government, but we are here also to represent our constituents. We cannot carry out that proper job of legislating and scrutinising Government if we do not have adequate contact with our constituents and pay adequate attention to their views. I know that he does that, so I am rather surprised by his comments. As to when and how the House considers the issues to which he refers, we are still some months away and I agree that the matter is one for the Modernisation Committee to resolve. I do not imagine that there will be one composite portmanteau or resolution. Even if we dealt with the matter on one day, I imagine that a number of different issues would have to be addressed.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): Will the Leader of the House provide some Government time to review the progress that they are making on their policy on planning? In particular, are the Government considering the impact on national heritage sites, where planning appears to be confused? In my constituency, between Hampton Court station and Hampton Court palace, there is a site that provides scandalous evidence of the failure of both owners and planners to come to any terms. As a result, the public constantly see the mess that is on the site when they leave the station to visit one of the finest palaces in this country. It would be useful to know what the Government are thinking about how to get proper planning quickly on such sites.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman raises an important planning issue. I hesitate to express an off-the-cuff

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opinion about such an historic site, which he has the distinction of representing. I shall draw the matter to the attention of the Minister in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who is responsible for planning.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I am mindful of my right hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard). However, despite the good progress in shaping an inclusive, post-conflict Government for the people of Afghanistan, does he agree that the prospects for renewing or retrieving the middle east peace process have become very bleak this week? Does he also agree that it is essential for Europe, the United States and the international community to show the same determination as they displayed in Afghanistan in putting pressure on both sides in the middle east conflict to come back to the negotiating table? We are in danger not only of losing the possibility of a long-term settlement, but of not finding a way back to the peace process at all.

Mr. Cook: I agree very much with my hon. Friend. The Government will endeavour to achieve the outcome that he seeks. However, I would take a step back from the suggestion of putting pressure on either side. It is important to lobby, to try to bring both sides together and encourage them to reach agreement. It is also important to recognise that what we ask of them is in their interests. We are not asking them to do something as a favour to world opinion; we are asking them to return to the negotiating table and exercise restraint on violence for the sake of their people. The only way in which to secure a permanent peace in the middle east is through a negotiated agreement. It will not be achieved by helicopter gunships on one side and suicide bombers on the other.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Each time a Minister comes to the Dispatch Box, confusion reigns about when the Government will implement their election pledge to increase national health spending to the European average. Earlier, the Chief Secretary, aided and abetted by a nodding Chancellor of the Exchequer, suggested that we would achieve the European average of 1998 in 2005. Is not it time that the Leader of the House asked the Prime Minister to make a statement on health? The Prime Minister pledged that he would take personal responsibility for the NHS; he should therefore answer questions on it exclusively.

Mr. Cook: I can only remind the right hon. Gentleman that the Prime Minister answers questions in the House every week and that he has answered that specific question twice in the past two weeks.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): A few weeks ago, I asked my right hon. Friend whether he would arrange a debate on the Auld report's recommendations for the reform of the criminal justice system. He gave me a sympathetic, but non-committal reply. Has he any firm proposals for such a debate during the consultation period, which ends at the end of January next year?

Mr. Cook: I cannot commit myself to a debate by the end of January. We have already made one commitment for January, when there will be a heavy volume of legislation to tackle. However, we attach great importance to the Auld recommendations, and hon. Members will have to consider them in future in the context of legislation. If the opportunity arises, it would be appropriate for the House to express its view on the matter.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): When the Leader of the House presents the Modernisation Committee recommendations next week, I hope that he will not use "family friendly" as a smoke screen for changes that the press suggest are geared towards clockwatching earth mothers. He knows that if hon. Members clock off at 5 pm, only very few will go home to the bosom of their family. Most of us live many hours' journey from our families. Will he bear it in mind that many hon. Members would be footloose and fancy free in the city from 5 pm onwards? I cannot believe that that is in the family's interest.

Mr. Cook: Nor do I imagine that London would welcome clockwatching earth mothers being footloose in the city. Let me repeat my comments of last week. The idea that the House can ever agree to hours of 10 am to 5 pm is garbage. I never proposed that, although the newspaper that suggested that I had done so reported last weekend that I had withdrawn the proposal in the face of criticism. I am wearily reconciled to the ways of the press, and I am happy to bear an allegation that I withdrew an idea that I never proposed.

We need to find hours that will enable the House to be effective. Much of the debate about the hours of the House focuses too much on the end of the evening, when we go home. There is a much stronger case for focusing on the earlier part of the day when we do not sit, and for asking why we do not begin our proceedings until 2.30 pm, three days a week.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): As the Leader of the House may be aware, Dovecotes primary school in Pendeford in my constituency is this year one of the 20 most improved primary schools in the country. I am sure that he will agree that the hard-working staff, head teacher, pupils and parents of Dovecotes primary school deserve the House's warm congratulations on their magnificent achievement. Does he also agree that the latest statistics are a welcome step towards a more sophisticated analysis of work and achievement in our education system, and represent a move away from the simplistic raw tables of bare results? Will he find time for the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to make a statement to the House next week on the achievements of so many schools around the country, including Dovecotes?

Mr. Cook: I congratulate my hon. Friend on having a primary school in his constituency that is in the top 20 in Britain. That must be a source of satisfaction to him as a Member of Parliament, and a source of pride to his constituents and to the head teacher.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): May we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Defence on what has been dubbed "operation homework", in which the Ministry of Defence supplied information to one Master

Euan Blair on the arguments in favour of the nuclear deterrent? If the Secretary of State has more important things to do, may Conservative Members, in the spirit of Christmas, offer free tuition to Euan on the merits of nuclear deterrence? We would be quite happy to teach him about that subject now, just as we had to teach his father about it 15 or 20 years ago.

Mr. Cook: I expressed admiration for the hon. Gentleman at the last business statement, and he subsequently rebuked me for undermining his status and street cred among hon. Members on his own side. This week, for balance, I must tell him that I cannot think of anything more sad than those who have lives so empty that they worry about such trivia.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House will be aware of the concern throughout the House about the continuing use of the Barnett formula. Would it be possible to have a debate on that in the near future? In the context of Northern Ireland, while we appreciate the extra money that has been coming forth at different levels throughout the nation, we are concerned that, according to the Executive in Northern Ireland, the health service there will get worse if we continue to use that formula.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we are providing substantial additional resources for the health service for the whole of the United Kingdom, and that embraces Northern Ireland. I assure him that I follow closely the Barnett formula, and we shall ensure that it applies in a way that reflects the principles behind it, and the changing population statistics, which undoubtedly have a legitimate impact on the arithmetic involved. Our wish is to ensure that health standards across the whole of the United Kingdom are raised, whatever an area's allocation may be under the Barnett formula.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): May I press the Leader of the House a little more about the European arrest warrant? He helpfully said earlier that this would not be agreed before the European Standing Committee had reconvened on Monday. However, in yesterday's debate on the European Union, the Minister for Europe said:

> "Already we have agreed that there will be a common European arrest warrant."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 388.]

That conflicts with a motion passed by the House on 17 November 1998, which clearly states:

> "No Minister of the Crown should give agreement . . . to any proposal for European Community legislation or for a common strategy, joint action or"

political agreement before the scrutiny process is completed. Will the Leader of the House give an absolute assurance that the letter of this resolution of the Commons will be adhered to in full, particularly as Ministers are always boasting that the House is to become more involved in European Union matters?

Mr. Cook: I have already given an undertaking to the House, on the authority of the Home Office, that that matter will not be agreed to until we have had our debate in Standing Committee on Monday, because it will be resolved at the Laeken summit, not at the Justice and Home Affairs Council, although it has been discussed there. The right hon. Gentleman is well aware of that fact and that there is broad agreement that there should be a Europe-wide arrest warrant so that we can expedite and make more efficient our own action against terrorists who pose a common threat to each of us. That has been well reported and extensively debated in the House, but the technical steps to put the matter into effect will not be agreed to until after Monday.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Has the Leader of the House had a chance during his busy week to read the report of the excellent debate in the other place on clause 110 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill? In the work that the Modernisation Committee is doing, will he bear in mind that that clause, which will have a fundamental effect on British criminal law, was not even discussed under the terms of the guillotine in this House? Will he ensure that that never happens again?

Mr. Cook: Following 11 September, I very much hope that the House does not find itself in such a position ever again. This is emergency legislation. It is important to show our constituents that we can scrutinise legislation adequately and thoroughly, and that we can act expeditiously when that is necessary for the safety of our constituents. That is why we want the Bill to become an Act before the end of the year. Three months after 11 September, the hon. Gentleman's constituents would find it odd if the House of Commons had not provided a legislative response to that danger to ensure that they are safer.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House have expressed concern at the way in which the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards undertook her duties. Equally, other right hon. and hon. Members have expressed their support for her reappointment. In answer to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), the Leader of the House said that the matter has been ventilated widely in the press and in this place. That is true of the press, but not very true of this place, and most of us have no information apart from that which we can gather either from the press or from our colleagues.

Would not it help the House to publish in full the allegations made by the parliamentary commissioner and the reasons for the House of Commons Commission choosing to readvertise the post rather than reappoint her, so that we can have a debate based on fact, not backstairs rumour and gossip?

Mr. Cook: I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's closing point. Mrs. Filkin made general observations that excited much comment in the press, but when she was interviewed on radio yesterday and asked to provide chapter and verse for the allegations, I was struck by the fact that she produced none and said that she was referring to stories told to her by journalists.

I welcome the statement made yesterday by the Speaker and I look forward to Mrs. Filkin's response detailing the allegations that she has made. I say to the hon. Gentleman that I and the other members of the House of Commons Commission are not clear about what she may have been alluding to in those allegations. Having made them, I hope that she provides detail to the House, the Commission and

[Mr. Cook]

the press, because it is not fair to the civil service generally to refer to a named civil servant and then decline to name that civil servant.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Macclesfield borough council's housing officers have approached me on a serious matter that is developing as a result of the reference point rent system, which relates to housing benefit allocation. Where housing rents are high, it appears that the system does not enable sufficient housing benefit to be awarded to allow poorer people to retain their accommodation. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the appropriate Minister to make a statement so that the House may refer to the problem, which is occurring in an increasing number of constituencies?

Mr. Cook: It is indeed of serious concern to many. There is a real dilemma for all of us: we want to ensure that people can occupy the accommodation that they require irrespective of their income, but we do not want to return to past circumstances in which landlords have felt free to exploit the housing benefit system by charging unreasonable rents. A balance must be struck. I shall, however, invite my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): When the Prime Minister was questioned about Mrs. Filkin yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, he replied that that was a matter for the House. Will the Leader of the House grant the House a debate so that it can express its opinion? Such a debate would give us an opportunity to express the feeling of many of us that this is a job not for a civil servant or, indeed, a self-publicist, but for a judge.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman characteristically provides a new angle on the search for a successor to Mrs. Filkin, and the House of Commons Commission will take his proposal on board. It seems to me, however, that the logical next step in the process is for Mrs. Filkin to reply to the letter sent to her by Mr. Speaker inviting her to explain the allegations that she has chosen to put in the public domain. When that has been done, Mr. Speaker and the Commission must consider what is the next appropriate step; but I look forward to the reply.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Leader of the House will be aware that on Tuesday I presented the Health (Patients' Rights) Bill. The gist of it was that patients who had been waiting too long for treatment in the NHS should have a right to treatment overseas, or in the private sector.

I was delighted to see the Secretary of State for Health on the airwaves this morning, apparently adopting my proposal as Government policy. I am always happy to be as helpful as possible to the Secretary of State. Could the Leader of the House bring forward my Bill's Second Reading, scheduled for 18 January, to next week? We could then have a debate in Government time, and the Secretary of State, instead of merely saying that he wants to offer patients that right, would be able to give them a statutory right to treatment within a maximum period.

Mr. Cook: I would not wish to withdraw from the hon. Gentleman the satisfaction he evidently feels about the fact that what he proposed one day became Government policy the next. I know, however, that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has been working on the matter for some time. His announcement was one of a series made by the Department of Health about the need for us to ensure that patients have a right to operations and, when those operations are cancelled, a right for them to be replaced within 28 days. We will continue to work on that within the targets of the national plan, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will wish to support and encourage us as we proceed towards our joint goals.

Health Authority Resource Allocations

1.18 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the resources that will be available to local health services in all parts of England next year. Today I am allocating revenue resources to local health authorities for the financial year beginning April 2002. I have written to all Members today, giving information about the health authorities in their constituencies.

The national health service is currently the fastest growing health care system in any major European country. Under this Labour Government, it is growing twice as fast as it grew under the last Conservative Government. With the additional resources announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer last week, it will grow by a further 6.8 per cent. in real terms next year.

As the House knows, however, that follows decades of underfunding. No one should believe that a few years of extra investment, even on this scale, can put right decades of underinvestment. The NHS plan that we published last year is, rightly, a 10-year programme of investment and reform.

Major problems remain in the health service, of course, but there is progress too. Last year there were almost 5,000 extra heart operations, and waiting times for treatment are falling. Because prevention is as important as treatment, the number of cholesterol-lowering drugs being prescribed has risen by a third in just one year. Nine out of 10 cancer patients are now being seen within two weeks; many used to have to wait for months. The maximum waiting time for any hospital operation is already down from 18 to 15 months in three quarters of NHS trusts, and all trusts will be in that position by next spring.

This is the first year in 30 in which the number of general and acute beds in our hospitals is rising rather than falling. Ten new hospitals are already open, as part of the biggest hospital-building programme that the NHS has ever seen. Most important of all, the NHS today has 17,000 more nurses and 7,000 more doctors than it had when we came to office, with thousands more to come.

There is a long way to go, but the people working in the NHS are doing a great job to improve services for patients. Now we can build on the progress that they are making.

Last year at this time, I indicated that all health authorities could expect to receive a minimum revenue increase of 6 per cent. in 2002-03. That 6 per cent. is more than health authorities received in four of the last five years under the Conservatives. In fact, I am now able to go further than I was planning to do at this time last year. Rather than growth of a minimum of 6 per cent. next year, I can tell the House that no health authority will receive less than 9.3 per cent. growth next year.

The next financial year will be the last under the existing formula for deciding how NHS resources are distributed to local health services. From the following year, there will be a new formula and, subject to Parliament, resources will go directly to locally run primary care trusts for the first time, as part of the Government's wider programme to devolve ever more power and resources to the NHS front line.

The resources that I am allocating today for 2002–03 are being distributed according to the existing formula. As the House is aware, that formula has been widely criticised for failing to get health services to the areas of greatest health need. It has also been criticised for failing to reflect fully the additional costs that the NHS has to bear in those parts of the country where labour market and housing costs are highest. Last year, I announced two major changes better to reflect health needs on the one hand and labour market costs on the other. I am building on those changes for the year ahead.

First, health inequalities scar our nation. Poverty and deprivation bring not only excess morbidity and mortality, but extra costs to local health services. Next year, for the first time, I have reflected in the formula the costs associated with tackling high rates of infant mortality alongside the costs associated with conditions such as cancer and heart disease. The resources to tackle health inequalities within health authority budgets will therefore rise next year by 14 per cent. The £148 million that we are making available to recognise the areas of greatest health need will benefit towns and cities in the north and midlands as well as the poorer parts of the south of England.

Secondly, I am increasing the resources available within health authority budgets to help the local NHS in those parts of England where living costs are highest. This year, for the first time, we introduced cost of living supplements for 100,000 qualified nurses, midwives, health visitors, therapists and radiographers who work in the highest cost parts of the country. In London, staff receive up to £1,000 a year on top of their salaries and London weightings. Elsewhere, they receive up to £600 a year more. Those cost of living payments are already helping the NHS to recruit and retain staff.

I have received a number of representations from right hon. and hon. Members, and from local health services, from areas where the supplements are not yet available. I have decided, first, to increase to more than £100 million the resources allocated to fund the cost of living supplements. They will continue to be paid to the areas currently receiving them. However, I have decided that from next year, in addition, the scheme will be extended to cover East and West Kent, North and South Essex—*[Interruption.]* I am glad to see that the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) is pleased for once—Northamptonshire and East Sussex, Brighton and Hove. Every health authority in London and the south will now receive extra resources in recognition of the higher costs that they face.

Every part of the country will benefit from the significant increases in funding for health authorities that I am announcing today. The average health authority budget will rise by £39 million or just under 10 per cent. Health authorities will be expected to work with local primary care trusts on deciding how best those resources are spent. Within those allocations there are extra funds for cancer, heart disease and mental health services alongside new resources for information technology and for primary care.

In addition, more than £400 million will be available to secure extra capacity to treat more NHS patients. It will be for local health services to decide how best to spend those resources, but they may be spent in NHS hospitals, in the private and voluntary sectors, and in community and social services.

[Mr. Alan Milburn]

The extra resources will need to secure improved services in the priority areas that count most for patients—better emergency care, shorter waiting times for treatment, and improvements in cancer, heart, mental health and elderly care. By the end of the next financial year, we expect nine in 10 NHS patients to be able to see a GP within 48 hours, and the maximum waiting time for a hospital operation to have fallen from 18 months today to 12 months. That is still too long, but it is the shortest maximum waiting time in the history of the NHS and a staging post towards shorter waiting times still.

Investment alone, however, will not secure the improvements in care that staff are striving to achieve and which patients rightly want to see delivered. The NHS will need to use these extra resources to drive forward the NHS plan reform programme. There are now national standards for the first time, and an independent inspection regime to assure them. There are more freedoms and more rewards for the good hospitals, alongside more help, support and—where necessary—intervention for the worst. Resources and power are being devolved to front-line services and staff, and there is now a more sensible relationship between the public and private sectors which means that we can provide more NHS care for more NHS patients.

These reforms are about putting the patients first. Our aim must be to create a more decentralised, more diverse and more responsive health service, capable of offering patients better services and greater choice.

Today, we are publishing proposals that will for the first time give patients an explicit choice over where they are treated in the NHS. As we said in our election manifesto, the investment and reforms that we are making mean that, by 2005, every patient needing hospital treatment will be helped by their GP to choose not just the date but the location of that treatment. The resources that we have now mean that we can make a start next year on introducing this new system, under which patients will be choosing the hospital, rather than hospitals choosing the patient.

We will start with those patients who have been waiting longest for treatment, and with those who have the most serious clinical conditions. Today, as the House is aware, thousands of patients have been waiting for a heart operation for more than six months. Waiting times are shortening, but they are still too long.

Therefore, I can tell the House today that, from the middle of next year, every patient in England who has waited for a heart operation for six months will be able to choose between hospitals—in the public sector or the private sector, in this country or abroad—that can do the operation more quickly. The choice will be theirs.

The initiative for heart surgery marks the start of a wider programme to improve patient choice and speed up treatment. Other pilots will be developed over time.

We will be discussing these proposals with patient, professional and health-care organisations so that the proposals can guarantee high clinical standards for patients and good value for money for taxpayers.

Many patients may choose not to exercise a choice. Many will prefer to wait at their local hospital, even if that means a slightly longer wait. Some patients will prefer to travel to get faster treatment, but the point is that, for the first time, the choice will be the patient's. Moreover, that choice will no longer be between waiting longer for treatment or paying for treatment.

There are two distinct views about the future of health care in our country. The Opposition seem to believe that more and more people should have to pay for more and more treatments. In contrast, the Government say that patients should be able to choose without having to pay.

The principles of the NHS are the right principles for Britain. They are that treatment should be free at the point of use, paid for through general taxation, and supplied according to need rather than a person's ability to pay.

The investment and reforms that we are making will create a service delivering quicker, higher-quality care for millions of NHS patients. The resources that I have announced today will mark a further step towards a better and faster health service—a national health service for all the people of our country.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that statement, and I am glad that it was he who made it. No one was sure whether he would deliver it, or whether it would be the Prime Minister or the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as it is increasingly unclear who in the Government makes health policy. However, I am not sure whether the Secretary of State's function today was to be piggy in the middle, or tethered goat.

Given the publicity from the Secretary of State this morning, people will be surprised to discover that the promises on a six-month waiting maximum and the choice to be available thereafter will apply only to heart patients. That is welcome, but it is rather different from the spin being applied this morning by Ministers and members of the press. It is more about saving Ministers' skins than patients.

In 1998, the Chancellor told us that Labour would be spending £21 billion extra over the next three years. Indeed, the Prime Minister told us in July last year that the NHS had already benefited from the biggest sustained increase in its history. Has anyone noticed any difference? Patients are waiting longer to see their general practitioner, to be seen in accident and emergency departments and to have operations. Now we are told that simply spending more money will make a difference.

In his spending statement last year, the Secretary of State said that improved co-operation between health and social services would mean

> "lower rates of delayed discharges from hospitals in all parts of the country."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2001; Vol. 356, c. 807.]

Yet, by the Government's own admission, the number of delayed discharges—or blocked beds—has soared. There are nearly 6,500 blocked beds in England alone. Some 15 per cent. of all beds in Birmingham are blocked, with 19 per cent. in Hampshire and 18 per cent. in Brent and Harrow.

Last year, the Secretary of State told us that the increased money would mean real progress in the Government's NHS targets. Waiting to be seen in accident and emergency departments would take an average of 75 minutes and the maximum wait for out-patient appointments would be three months. Yet the Audit Commission tells us that not only are things getting worse, since 1998 they have been getting much worse. There are now 400,000 people on the waiting list for the waiting list. No progress has been made. The Labour party chairman said that, under Labour, the NHS is going backwards.

Last year, the Secretary of State said that £4 billion more would be available for front-line services. Some £3,732 million was made available. However, pay review body staff costs came to £500 million and to £250 million for non-pay review body staff. Medical price inflation was £300 million, the new pension contribution rates cost £372 million and the waiting times initiative came to £400 million. The maximum amount that was available for front-line services was £560 million. Indeed, if the national service frameworks cost more than the estimates, there may well have been a negative figure for core functions.

That is why the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) said in *The Guardian* today of the Government's spending:

> "where is the evidence it will make the difference they want and not simply be frittered away, as many will fear, on bureaucracy and burgeoning wage bills?
>
> The government's political difficulty is that both this confidence and evidence have not been helped by a perception . . . that the government's response to underfunding is to say it will simply spend zillions more taxes on a system that looks as yet completely unreformed."

Can the Secretary of State answer some specific questions? How much does he estimate, in today's settlement, for the costs of change? The Bill reorganising the NHS, which is passing through the House, will cost money. How much? What estimate is in the settlement for pay effects for the next year? What estimate is there for the cost of drugs currently being approved by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence? What estimate does he make for the cost of reducing working hours for doctors? What estimate does he make for the costs of waiting time initiatives? What cost does he estimate for the national health service frameworks? How much does he estimate will be spent by the NHS in the private sector in the coming year in what he describes as a more sensible relationship with the private sector? The Prime Minister has not been very good at his sums this week. I hope that the Secretary of State will do better when he gives us answers to those questions.

We can have no longer have confidence in what the Secretary of State promises. He talks about decentralisation, yet is centralising the financial relationships. He talks about choice, yet his party abolished extra- contractual referrals and fundholding, which gave genuine choice. He talks today of more money, yet 40 per cent. of NHS hospital trusts in England are forecasting a deficit this year, with their financial position likely to worsen in 2002.

Before the Labour party came to office, it promised that things could only get better. In the NHS they are actually getting worse.

Mr. Milburn: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman—for what, I do not know, but at least for only a brief series of questions. I will run through the issues that he raised.

On delayed discharges and bed blocking, the hon. Gentleman is aware that we have allocated a further £300 million for social services. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions was able to announce further rises for social services for the next financial year. The interesting question for the hon. Gentleman is whether he is prepared to match those funding increases. He certainly failed to come up with the answer to that question before the election; perhaps he can do so now.

The hon. Gentleman asked where the money went during the last financial year. It has gone on paying for more staff, better wages and more buildings. An extra £300 million is being made available for new drugs for cancer and heart disease. We are making efforts to get rid of Nightingale wards in our hospitals. More operations are being carried out and waiting times are falling. There are improvements in cancer and coronary heart disease services. For the first time in 30 years, there are more hospital beds and a huge hospital building programme.

The hon. Gentleman asks about the overall costs of our programme for change—devolving power from health authorities to primary care trusts. In fact, that will save money: £100 million, which we will invest in child care services. He asks how much money we shall be committing to waiting times initiatives—as he calls them—and to building up NHS capacity in order that NHS hospitals can perform more NHS operations on more NHS patients: the amount will be about £400 million.

The hon. Gentleman asks about the role of the private sector. As he is aware, I announced at a recent meeting of the Select Committee on Health that we would be doubling the amount of money available for the NHS to contract with private sector hospitals to carry out more NHS operations. If local primary care trusts and strategic health authorities want to do more, that is a matter for them. The hon. Gentleman constantly urges devolution, so I hope that he will support it when it happens.

However, the hon. Gentleman did not express in his statement the attitude of the Conservatives towards the national health service. He did not say whether he supports the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Home Secretary who called the national health service Stalinist. Is that the hon. Gentleman's view? Does he believe that the national health service is Stalinist? I remind him what the national health service is: the national health service—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The Secretary of State should be answering the questions, not asking them.

Mr. Milburn: I have answered a load of questions put by the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox). I have answered the questions about NICE. I have answered the questions about how much money will be going into waiting initiatives—*[Interruption.]*—how much money is being invested in waiting.

The most basic question—the hon. Gentleman will not ask it because he dare not—is whether the Conservatives would match our spending plans. The answer to that question is that they would not, because they do not want to build up the national health service—they want to run it down.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): The poor health of my constituents has been cited in several reports—from the time of the Black report to the present day. My right

[Dr. Brian Iddon]

hon. Friend knows that I have constantly made representations to him and his predecessor about the fact that the Wigan and Bolton health authority was second from bottom on meeting funding targets in 1997. The position has not advanced greatly since then. Can my right hon. Friend give my constituents an assurance that those gross inequalities in financing will be addressed as a result of the excellent statement that he has just made?

Mr. Milburn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. He has been a constant advocate of reform of the formula—rightly so. We all recognise that the current formula is far from perfect, although I suspect that it will be difficult to find a perfect formula. However, the changes that we have made mean that this year the Wigan and Bolton health authority will receive an increase in funding for local health services of 10.17 per cent.—the largest increase for any health authority in the north-west. I hope that that is a step towards addressing the concerns that my hon. Friend has constantly raised.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The additional funding announced by the Secretary of State is welcome. It is right that such increases should come from general taxation and not from an increase in charging—either from new charges or an increase in existing charges. An honest approach would have been for the Government to say before the election that tax rises were needed, rather than skulking back just afterwards with that admission.

Is the right hon. Gentleman concerned that the only taxes that the Government have said that they will not put up to pay for that much-needed investment are fair taxes—direct taxes—and they will instead use indirect, regressive and stealth taxes?

I cautiously welcome the changes in the formula, because health inequalities need to be tackled and we need to ensure that living costs are recognised, but the Secretary of State seeks to have it both ways. He says that he wants to delegate more power to local primary care trusts, while taking a huge centralising decision yesterday so that all the guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman ought now to ask a question.

Dr. Evan Harris: Can the right hon. Gentleman defend his statement that he is decentralising when the Minister in the House of Lords announced that the first call on all this funding will have to be to pay for the NICE guidance? Does he recognise that maximum waiting times are arbitrary and that they create clinical distortion, as they force more urgent patients to wait longer while treatment is given to the politically prioritised patients, who are embarrassing to the Government? Of course, patients should not wait long, but that should be a clinical decision, not a political one.

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that giving patients choice is of limited value when they do not have quality services to choose from, when they do not have access and when it is not fair? He talks in his document about patients choosing not to choose and preferring not to travel, but he will know that some patients are too sick to take up the option of travelling that he wants to provide.

Can the right hon. Gentleman guarantee that the private sector will provide value for money, when he has to pay over the odds for agency-based staff and more expensive private sector staff? Does he recognise that there are no doctors and nurses hanging around waiting to do that work in the private sector? They will be recruited from the pool of doctors and nurses serving the NHS, further limiting capacity.

Finally, at the last Health questions, I asked the right hon. Gentleman how he will guarantee the quality of treatment abroad. How will he provide for relatives to travel abroad? Who will patients sue? Who will the Government blame? How will consent be given in other languages? The document gives no answer, except that suitable arrangements will be made to enable a relative or friend to accompany the heart surgery patient abroad. That is a new kind of rationing—people can be visited by only one friend or relative.

Mr. Milburn: That was pretty tame stuff. I am surprised by the hon. Gentleman's position on NICE and the financing of drugs, because I understood that the Liberal Democrats were concerned about the fact that NICE had sometimes made recommendations and not every health authority had taken them up. He is either against the lottery in care or he is not. Which is it? *[Interruption.]* He says that he is against the lottery in care. That is good news, so I look forward to hearing him support the Government's proposals.

On maximum waiting times, the hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that patients' biggest concern about the NHS today is not the quality of care that they receive when they go into hospital, or even when they go to their GP's surgery, but the wait for treatment. It is proper that we address that. Of course, the most serious and urgent conditions should come first. That is why we have taken the right step, through the choice initiative, which is to make choice available to the patients who suffer from the most serious clinical conditions: those waiting for heart operations.

In my discussions with constituents and when right hon. and hon. Members have raised the issue, I have been struck too many times by the very real dilemma faced by people who have a bit of savings. Those who have bothered to save all their lives and then realise that they need a heart operation face the awful dilemma of either having to wait for treatment or to pay for it. The only choice that they have right now to get a shorter waiting time is to opt out of the NHS.

I believe profoundly that people should have the choice of being able to stay in the NHS, rather than having to leave it. Yes, that is new, it will be difficult to do, and the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) asked about the maximum six-month wait and so on. That is what we need to achieve, but we shall start with the heart patients and test other approaches and pilot schemes in other parts of the country in due course. We have to get it right. It is right to take a cautious approach but I hope that patients will welcome our initiative, which will be introduced from the middle of next year.

The hon. Gentleman is right to ask about value for money and the private sector. The answer is that we need to negotiate a good deal on behalf of patients and taxpayers, and that is precisely what we shall do. However, I could not stand here as the Secretary of State for Health and say that, for some ideological reason, we cannot use private sector capacity to treat NHS patients even if that capacity means a better deal for them. We are taking the right approach because what counts is the interests of patients. Their interests should come first.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituents in Gravesham will certainly welcome his statement, especially his extension of the cost of living supplement to Kent? He will know that that will provide us with a real opportunity not only more properly to reward the staff who work so hard in the service, but to compete effectively with London boroughs in the recruitment and retention of staff.

My constituents will also welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend has shown clearly that he sees the NHS as a service with a future that is worth investing in as a publicly funded service free at the point of use and not as a Stalinist creation to be privatised and impoverished.

Mr. Milburn: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. When I referred in my statement to the representations that I have received, I was thinking of him and Members on both sides of the House who have made representations about Kent, Essex and other places. It is right that we close the gaps in the cost of living supplement.

I represent a north-eastern constituency, and I know that the cost of living there is different from that in the south-east. I also know that there are huge inequalities in parts of the north and the midlands that do not always pertain in all parts of the south, so it is important that we get the balance right.

On my hon. Friend's more general point, there is a big debate taking place in the country and it is the right debate to have. We recognise that, for decades, the NHS has not had the resources that it needs, and we need to plug the gap. The question is how best we do that. Labour Members say that the best way is investing in the NHS and reforming it. We do that through general taxation. People will conclude that the Labour party and this Government are the party of choice for patients in the NHS while the Conservative party is the party of charging for patients.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to pass on to all the staff in the NHS—the ancillary, nursing and medical staff—our thanks for what they do for 365 days a year? Will he also acknowledge that the pressures on patients are also pressures on staff?

As we do not yet know the allocations for our areas, we cannot talk about them even though, given the Secretary of State's description, we await them with interest. However, we know that he is not announcing new money today, because it was announced last week by the Chancellor and in the public expenditure statements.

How soon does the Secretary of State believe that there will be a significant change in the performance of health authorities with patients waiting more than a year for treatments? I think that I am right in saying that 19 out of the 20 authorities with patients in that position are, in effect, Conservative areas. For example, in the West Sussex and West Surrey health authorities, one in 10 patients wait more than a year. However, 19 out of 20 authorities where no one waits more than a year are Labour areas. I do not wish to make a party point about that, but how soon can that discrepancy be changed? It is not the politicians but the patients who suffer.

My final point is that, although we often talk about hospitals—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had more than his share of time. Before I ask the Secretary of State to reply, may I remind the House that this is a very important statement. An awful lot of Members wish to contribute and many of them will be disappointed unless everyone asks one question briefly. I hope that the answers will be brief too.

Mr. Milburn: I shall be very brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley) has not yet received the letter that explains the increases for his area. In West Surrey, the increase will be 9.57 per cent. and, in West Sussex, it will be 9.58 per cent. I think that he will agree that it is a pretty large increase in funding.

The hon. Gentleman raises considerable issues about how best we distribute NHS resources. We are trying to resolve the tensions by making major changes to the formula for the next financial year, and we are undertaking a fundamental review of the existing formula as a whole. I hope that the review will be concluded later next year, so that it can be implemented from the 2003-04 financial year. The review will need to pay particular attention precisely to some of the issues that he rightly mentions, such as how we get money to the areas of health need while recognising that different parts of the country have different health costs to absorb.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, especially the increased funding and the review of the formula on which it is based. He will be aware that Barnsley health authority is the lowest funded in Trent and one of the lowest funded in the country, despite our levels of need. Does he know that Barnsley faces a £2.1 million shortfall in April next year? Will he reassure me that today's settlement will allow Barnsley health authority to deal with that shortfall and have the money for the new initiatives that it wants to introduce?

Mr. Milburn: Yes, I very much hope so. In fact, Barnsley will receive an increase of 10.05 per cent., which is the second largest in the Trent region. I know that there are funding pressures on the NHS; as my hon. Friend knows, there always are. I hope that the statement, the allocation and the guidance that we will issue to the NHS will give enough room for local flexibility so that decisions can be made locally on how best to spend the considerable resources for the benefit of the community that he represents.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Can the Secretary of State tell me why he has rejected and ignored the petition presented to the House by me on behalf of thousands of health workers in Christchurch, Bournemouth and Poole, which asks for the cost of living supplement to be extended to cover that part of south-east Dorset? Does he recognise that his announcement worsens

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

the situation in which a nurse who lives in Christchurch, where housing costs are much higher than they are in Salisbury or Southampton, has a financial incentive to work in those cities rather than at the local hospital?

Mr. Milburn: I understand the concerns of the hon. Gentleman, his constituents and NHS staff who work in his area, but we have to proceed a stage at a time. This is the first year in which we have had cost of living supplements. We have not had them before, and certainly not under the Government of whom the hon. Gentleman was a member. We are extending them next year. They will continue to be evaluated and we will consider making further changes to them. The geographical coverage of the supplements and the professional groups who benefit from them will be extended if there is a good case for doing so.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): My right hon. Friend will know that south Cheshire, as an area that has been consistently underfunded for many years, will welcome the settlement. Will he ensure that if private health care facilities are used, and support for travel and other facilities is provided, the costs will be transparent, so that taxpayers know whether they are really getting good value for money or whether that money should have been spent in NHS facilities?

Mr. Milburn: Yes, there should be transparency. I am aware of the deficits and the problems that have been long apparent in south Cheshire. That is why this year we increased next year's funding by 9.86 per cent., which is a substantial increase in resources for my hon. Friend's health authority area. I am sure that that money will be used to good effect.

On the use of the private sector, we need to ensure that we get the best value for money, but it is also worth recognising, as I am sure that my hon. Friend does, that NHS hospitals often do not have the spare capacity. As a consequence, the patient and the Government face a dilemma: should we tell patients to wait longer or say that we will use the spare capacity for the benefit of NHS patients? I think that patients will conclude that the latter course of action is the right one to take.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I am increasingly worried by the number of letters and calls that I get from my constituents, especially those who live in the area served by the Royal United hospital of Bath, where the normal waiting time for orthopaedics is 18 months. Although the extra £400 million is extremely welcome, will the Secretary of State explain whether that is additional to the normal allocations and, if not, will it be targeted at specialisms and areas that place the greatest stress on the system? In providing the element of choice, which he suggested in his statement, how will he avoid the pitfall that occurred in the education system, with people being displaced from their local and regional hospitals in favour of people from elsewhere?

Mr. Milburn: On the amount of money that is available to tackle waiting lists and the expansion in capacity, the £400 million is embedded in health authority allocations. Each health authority will get a fair share of that and be able to make use of it. We can use that money to increase capacity in a number of ways: to create additional operating theatres or beds, to employ additional staff and to make operations and treatment available outside normal working hours. There is capacity in the NHS and outside it, and it is right that we use that to carry out more NHS operations and thereby reduce waiting times.

The hon. Gentleman made a good point about choice. It is right to offer patients greater choice because, as he acknowledged, some hospitals have long waiting lists and others have short ones. The problem for patients is that they cannot exercise choice and, in effect, the hospitals choose the patients rather than the other way round. That is precisely what we want to change, and we will do so gradually, in a way that tackles precisely some of the problems and challenges that he raised.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): May I tell my right hon. Friend that the so-called burgeoning wage bills mentioned by the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) are, in my constituents' opinion, much-needed pay rises to improve recruitment and retention of essential staff? How is my right hon. Friend progressing with his plans to set up fast-track elective surgery units throughout the country? Does he have any plans to build one in north-west Kent to service my area?

Mr. Milburn: I knew that there would be a sting in the tail. My hon. Friend is right—we cannot have it both ways. We cannot complain about some NHS resources going into pay packets. Few right hon. and hon. Members regard NHS staff as overpaid. Most NHS staff did not enter the service to make a mint; indeed, I know of no member of staff who entered the NHS with that aim. People enter the service for other reasons, and it is right that we reward them properly. We must have a fairer pay system to make sure that rewards go to the right staff.

Diagnostic and treatment centres are very important because, as my hon. Friend is aware, they will separate elective work from emergency work so that we can protect planned operations and, indeed, emergency work. Those centres are planned for different parts of the country. We will be inviting expressions of interest, not only from the NHS but from the private sector, so that we can locate those centres in parts of the country where we know that we need to do most to reduce waiting times for treatment.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Secretary of State will be aware that the statement deals particularly with England and Wales, but this is a national health service, and the principles set out in his latest publication will be applied throughout the kingdom.

I thank the Secretary of State for the extension of patient choice. Relatives have been able to travel to visit those who have had operations, and most patients who have had serious operations do not want many visitors but relaxation and rest. May I press him to consult the Chancellor and those dealing with the devolved regions about the fact that the amount of money going to health care is going down, as a percentage, under the Barnett formula?

Mr. Milburn: Those issues are properly the responsibility of the Assembly and of my right hon.

Friend the Chancellor. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support for the extension of choice. That is an important principle, and we will consult on it with patient and professional groups and the NHS to ensure that we get it right. That change will not happen immediately, but the policy will be gradually introduced from the middle of next year. It will make a fundamental difference to the relationship between patients and NHS services. The NHS is there to serve the patient, and for the first time patients will have the opportunity to choose the NHS service.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): I should have thought that the statement would receive lavish praise from everyone in the House, but it should especially be praised by those of us with constituencies in east Kent. It recognises the additional costs in east Kent and even indirectly recognises the fact that many of my constituents can get to France more easily than they can get to London.

My only concern, which I would like my right hon. Friend to clarify, is that social services tell me that they do not get access to much of the funding going to health authorities, and yet it is their care for the elderly that could do most to unblock beds. Will he ensure that we strike the right balance between money going to social services and that going to the NHS?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes an important point. He will know that resources for social services are to rise by 6.5 per cent. in cash terms for the next financial year, and that health services and social services now have the legal powers to pool their budgets or to form a single organisation. I would encourage more health services and local social services to do that—to pool their budgets, co-operate rather than compete with one another, and consider the possibility of forming local care trusts.

Like all of us, my hon. Friend recognises that our constituents do not care whether the funding comes from the health service or from social services. All they want is the package of care. Too often, health services and social services have been nudging resources and responsibilities backwards and forwards, when they should have been concentrating on the needs of the patient.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Although I welcome the extension of the cost of living supplement to Kent, does the Secretary of State realise that all the options for east Kent's acute hospitals involve breaking up our cancer centre? Under any of the four options, complex chemotherapy will not be possible in Canterbury, as it is now, and radiology in the brand new linear accelerator will not be provided with the kind of medical cover that is available at present. Does he intend east Kent to become the first region to have its cancer centre closed?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman has raised such issues with me before, and he knows that they are a matter for consultation. It is inappropriate for me to comment on them now. We will await the results of consultation, he will make his representations, as will others, and Ministers will make the appropriate decision. I am glad that he welcomed the increase in funding—an increase of 9.85 per cent. He should talk to those who represent his party on the Front Bench and ask whether they would be prepared to match those increases. I suspect that they would not.

Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): First, at my local hospital, Chase Farm, there is a support group called Heart Throbs, who do fantastic work supporting people who need heart operations and their families throughout the process. The group will be extremely pleased with the news today about heart operations, as a number of its members have not survived while waiting for them.

Secondly, we often hear managers in the health service knocked, but many areas of the health service are under-managed. That prevents us from achieving the capacity necessary to provide the hospital services that our patients need. Some of the financing being made available today will rightly be spent on managing our health service. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should pay tribute to the health service managers who choose to work in the NHS rather than in any other office, because they are committed to the NHS?

Mr. Milburn: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's local voluntary organisation, which is clearly doing a good job of work. She will see in the consultation paper that we issued today our plans to involve the voluntary sector—such as those organisations offering care and support for heart patients—in the new initiative to offer choice to people. If people are to exercise choice, it is important that they do so in an informed way and that the options are fully explained to them. One of the best ways of doing that is by involving the voluntary sector, not just the statutory sector.

On my hon. Friend's second point, NHS managers do a brilliant job of work, sometimes in difficult circumstances. As we delegate and devolve resources and responsibilities from Whitehall and from health authorities to local primary care trusts, it will be important that the trusts have adequate management resources to ensure that they can fulfil their responsibilities and give local communities the services that they deserve.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): What satisfaction does the Secretary of State take from the ambition expressed by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in the House earlier today to match by 2004 the European average health expenditure as it was two years before the end of the last century?

Mr. Milburn: I take some satisfaction from it because it is an ambition to expand the NHS, while the hon. Gentleman's policy is to contract it.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and congratulate him on securing a great deal from the Treasury; that must have been pretty difficult—*[Laughter.]* Opposition Members obviously have no experience of the Treasury; at any rate, they are out of touch with it.

What guarantees can my right hon. Friend give my constituents that, this time, more of the extra money going in reaches the front line? That will mean that my constituents will not have to wait, either to see a GP or for an out-patient appointment with a consultant.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. The settlement is very generous indeed and

[Mr. Milburn]

the extra resources available for the next financial year will make a real difference to patients and the NHS. As he said, it is important that the resources get to the front line and make a difference. When he sees the planning guidance issued to the NHS to accompany the announcement of the resources, he will see that it is a slim document with a limited set of priorities for local health services. They should have the flexibility to concentrate on the things that matter to patients: making sure that emergency services are available for people when they need them; getting accident and emergency waiting times down; and ensuring that the waiting times to see GPs and consultants are brought down. As he knows, those are ambitious plans, but we can achieve them only if we keep investing in and reforming the NHS.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): Does the Secretary of State believe, in connection with today's spending announcement and, indeed, future spending announcements, that spending on health would be better financed either wholly or partly by a hypothecated health tax?

Mr. Milburn: I am a keen supporter of funding the NHS through general taxation.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): My right hon. Friend's statement will be most welcome in my constituency, following the statement earlier this week by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Building on capital investments in mental health, oncology, day surgery and so on in the area, today's statement is a tremendous step forward.

I should like to ask my right hon. Friend about the plans for next year that he mentioned. As he is aware, in some polarised areas, the formulas that distributed money through the old standard spending assessment were hugely problematic because they dealt with averages rather than pockets of deprivation. Will he ensure that his new formula on distribution to primary care trusts does not make the same mistake as the Tories' SSA formula and addresses the needs of deprived communities?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. It is important, as we put the new formula in place, that cash goes to the areas of greatest health need; we must do that. We have already made a health inequalities adjustment to the existing formula. I expect precisely the same considerations to be embedded in the new formula. It is important that health authorities, given the resources that are available to them this year, apply an appropriate pace of change policy to their local primary care trusts and the money that they get, so that we can begin to close the gap between those PCTs that are over capitation and those that are under capitation. In that way, we can get a fairer settlement, not just for health authorities but for the new PCTs.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): Today's announcement will be welcome in North Yorkshire. Can my right hon. Friend tell the many people in my constituency who have difficulty finding an NHS dentist whether it will help them, in conjunction with the new PCT that will be set up at the beginning of next April?

Mr. Milburn: Substantial extra investment is going into North Yorkshire for investment in health services; there has been an increase of 9.84 per cent. for 2002–03, which is a big sum of money. It will be for local PCTs and the strategic health authority to decide how best to deploy that money. Some of it is earmarked for national priorities which, we believe, are patients' priorities: waiting times, primary care, and investment in cancer and coronary care. But the overwhelming bulk of resources will be deployed by local PCTs and health authorities. They must address the pressing health needs of their local communities. If there is a need to invest in dentistry, they will have to look at that.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement and for the massive cash injection that he has given to Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority, which serves my constituency. Some years ago, after years of being starved of resources by the Tories, that health authority published an annual report entitled "The River Runs Dry", simply to get its message across. He is absolutely right to say that, as we build capacity in south-west London by investing in more nurses, doctors and surgeons, it is vital that we take forward fundamental reform of the way in which the NHS identifies and responds to health care priorities and needs in our local communities.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a special responsibility on some of the new organisations that are being called into existence by his reforms within the NHS family—such as the Nelson and West Merton primary care trust in my community—to work with community health trusts, which will be wound up because of the reforms? We must ensure that the new organisations pick up the good experience and expertise within existing organisations and, at the same time, develop their own best practice and spread it to other organisations in the local health community.

Mr. Milburn: I very much agree with my hon. Friend's comments. Substantial investment—about 9.8 per cent. growth in the next financial year—is going to the local health service in his area. It is very important that that money is used wisely and well. We shall seek particularly to ensure that strengthened partnerships between local primary care trusts, local government and the private and voluntary sectors provide first-class services to patients.

The national health service cannot do it alone. As we know, health and social services are two sides of the same coin, and the work of the national health service—in conjunction with that of the private, voluntary and local government sectors—is equally important in resolving some of the health inequality and deprivation problems that exist in my hon. Friend's constituency, as they do in all hon. Members' constituencies.

Point of Order

Mr. James Wray (Glasgow, Baillieston): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have a complaint about the scandalous and irresponsible reporting of the BBC's "Watchdog" programme. Today, it has issued a press release naming and shaming Members of Parliament. However, I am just back from Europe, where I have been working as part of my job as a full member of the Western European Union and of the Council of Europe, addressing issues such as space application, migration and demography. We have also been dealing with the events in Chechnya, in other European countries, and in every other country where there are human rights violations and stress.

My voting record is low because I am sent to those various countries in Europe. One of the nice aspects of that work is that, every year, I receive a letter from the Prime Minister telling me that I am very hard working. The bad thing is that I am now being prevented from doing that job, which the BBC does not think is important. I am therefore resigning as a full member of the Council of Europe and the Western European Union. I cannot take scandalous reports saying that I am not known in my constituency, when the fact is that I have had the second highest constituency vote in Glasgow. The scandalous reporting of the BBC's "Watchdog" is preventing me from doing my job.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I heard what the hon. Gentleman had to say, but the occupant of the Chair is not responsible for controlling the behaviour of broadcasters. However, he has had the opportunity today to put his position precisely on the record.

BILL PRESENTED

NORTHERN IRELAND ARMS DECOMMISSIONING (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Secretary Reid presented a Bill to provide for the extension of the amnesty period fixed by section 2 of the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act 1997. And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday next, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed [Bill 63].

Common Fisheries Policy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

2.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): As the House knows, it is customary to hold a fisheries debate each year before the December Council, which decides the total allowable catches and quotas for the following year. This is an important occasion that affords an opportunity for comment by all hon. Members from fisheries constituencies as well as those with a more general interest in fisheries management. I am very pleased that the House authorities have allowed us to have a full day's debate on the subject.

I should first make it clear that this is not a scrutiny debate and that some important European Scrutiny Committee recommendations for debate in Committee remain outstanding. Therefore, although this is an opportunity for a general annual debate, there will be further opportunities in that Committee to debate other aspects of fisheries management. I am sure that hon. Members will welcome the opportunity to discuss those issues in detail.

Before outlining the Commission's proposals for next year's TACs and quotas, I shall open the debate in the traditional way by reflecting on the dangers faced by fishermen at sea. This year, nine fishermen have lost their lives while at sea. Although that is an improvement on last year's truly appalling figure of 33 fatalities and 39 losses of vessels, it is nevertheless nine too many. I am sure that the whole House joins me in expressing sympathy to the relatives and friends of those who have been lost.

Training can help to instil a culture of safety. I know, however, that the industry has been concerned about the cost of training courses. I have therefore taken the decision that, for the next three years, fishermen should be able to attend basic safety training courses free of charge. The courses have been free since April. The grant aid comes from our new financial instrument for fisheries guidance schemes, with funding both from the EU and the fisheries Departments in the UK. It is important that all fishermen who are eligible take advantage of those courses, and I am sure that the various fishermen's organisations will be encouraging them to do so. Fishing remains a very hazardous occupation and it is important that all within the industry work to improve the safety culture on board fishing vessels. The Government will certainly play their part in working with them.

As for developments in the past year, the Commission has issued its Green Paper on common fisheries policy reform, about which I shall say a few words later. Additionally, the European Court of Auditors has published a detailed report on third country agreements, which I think are of some interest to hon. Members. Recovery programmes for cod and hake were also introduced.

Following the pressure that has been applied for years in our debates, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea has issued its advice earlier this year than in the past, which I think that hon. Members will find most welcome. Additionally, for the first time, I organised a press conference to make the advice public and to discuss it in detail. We and the Commission have

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

been pressing for the advice to be produced sooner. In previous years, it has sometimes not emerged until November; this year, it was available in October, which gave us valuable breathing space to analyse it. Unfortunately, the Commission has been late in producing its TACs and quotas, which were made available only on 4 December. Nevertheless, I am glad that they are available in time for this debate so that hon. Members can discuss them.

We have also been able to provide the House with a document outlining the approach to the proposals, and I shall refer to what has been proposed and will listen with interest to hon. Members' comments. As hon. Members will appreciate, however, more work will have to be done in formulating the United Kingdom's response between now and the Fisheries Council on 17 and 18 December. As they will also appreciate, I shall need an opportunity to discuss the proposals in some depth with the fishing industry, to hear its views and to listen to its priorities.

Hon. Members should also be aware that the Commission has to await the completion of various third country negotiations before it can finalise its proposals. The main case in point is the European Union-Norway fisheries agreement, which has not yet been finalised primarily because of the very difficult negotiations on the linked issue of blue whiting.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): We always enjoy the Minister's annual presentation on fish. He mentioned third country agreements. Is he concerned, as I am, about the Spanish-Moroccan agreement, which has not yet come into effect? If it does, the Spanish will want to come north rather than south.

Mr. Morley: I was going to touch on some of those issues later. However, the Spanish-Moroccan agreement is dead. The Moroccans made it very clear that they were not prepared to agree to the negotiations or to the proposals that were on offer. I think that they want to take control of those waters and are not really interested in a deal with the Spanish. Consequently, about 300 boats that previously fished in those waters have nowhere else to go. I realise that the hon. Gentleman is concerned about the North sea and the fishing areas in which our own fleets operate. However, there is no chance of those boats fishing in other waters because most of them are designed for that particular fishery, which is a predominately coastal squid fishery. Those boats will therefore be decommissioned and a financial package has been agreed for the Spanish Government to take them out of their fishing fleet. It will also mean that some thousands of fishing jobs are lost in that country.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): The whole House is grateful to the Minister for securing this debate at this time. He has encountered difficulties in respect of such debates and this is a valuable opportunity. I should like to press him on something that he said about scrutiny. He is right that the Norway bilateral agreement will not be secured until the end of the month. Will he use his good offices early in the new year, when the House returns after the Christmas recess, to ensure that a European Standing Committee can debate the outcomes when they are all known? That will enable hon. Members to consider the totality of what faces the industry next year. If he could say something encouraging about that, it would help us during this debate.

Mr. Morley: That is a very reasonable point. I shall certainly discuss the matter with the Committee. I am very willing to participate and give hon. Members the opportunity to consider the issues.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I congratulate the Minister on securing a full day's debate. Such a debate has been a long-standing ambition for him and a number of other hon. Members, so let us give him credit where credit is due for getting it out of the powers that be in this place.

The North sea has a number of stocks that are undergoing a strong recovery, as we know from scientific advice. It is to be hoped that the TAC that has been agreed will reflect that recovery and increase fishing opportunities. However, if the TAC for cod remains very low, it might be impossible for fishermen in a mixed fishery to take up opportunities in respect of haddock and other stocks. What thought has the Minister given to that problem and how does he see a way forward on ensuring that the maximum fishing opportunities are available to fishermen in the North sea?

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman is right that that is a potential problem. I shall comment on it when I deal with the Commission's proposals, its reasons for them and the reaction of the UK Government. The problem to which he refers relates to managing a fishery where some stocks are in severe trouble—there is no doubt that the cod stock is in trouble—but other stocks are not. Of course, that is in the nature of a mixed fishery, and I shall speak about the matter in a moment.

Let me spell out the Commission's broad approach. First, with regard to stocks for which the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea recommends a recovery plan—predominantly cod and hake—the Commission proposes to treat 2002 as the first year in a long-term process of reductions in fishing mortality and TACs. The stocks approached in that way include cod in the North sea, as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) mentioned, as well as cod in the Irish sea, and west of Scotland, northern hake and nephrops in southern waters. The latter is a stock in which the UK has no interest.

A second category of stocks is subject to the same approach. These stocks are not recommended for recovery plans by ICES as they are not considered to be in a dire state, but are regarded as being fished outside safe limits and have very low biomass levels. We cannot ignore that scientific advice. Stocks that fall into this category include western channel sole, Irish sea haddock and west of Scotland whiting.

The third category—this is the difficult one identified by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan—covers stocks that are associated with those in the first and second categories. It could include, for example, species caught with cod and hake. With regard to such stocks, the Commission proposes to reduce TACs as a complementary measure. It made an attempt to do the same thing last year, although in that event it recommended a blanket 20 per cent. cut. We strongly argued against such a cut because we did not feel that the science justified it. The Commission then reduced that figure to 10 per cent. This year, it has adopted a more flexible approach, but many of the cuts that it is suggesting again relate to stocks that are not in difficulty, but are linked with stocks that are.

As I think the hon. Gentleman was suggesting, the matter needs to be carefully thought through. Account must be taken of the fact that we operate in a mixed fishery and that there could be a danger of displacement if fishermen are cut off from particular stocks that are not in difficulty and then move on to other fishing. Those issues are serious and not easy to resolve. In some cases, however, I do not think that the Commission itself has thought them through clearly, and we will have to discuss them in some detail at the Fisheries Council.

Andrew George (St. Ives): The Minister rightly said that the first category included stocks that are in a very severe state. In certain areas, they are on the verge of collapse and will be destroyed if we do not take the necessary measures. However, with regard to hake, for which a recovery programme is being implemented, does he accept that fishermen are concerned that catches in area 7—where hake catches are still relatively good and catch sizes are reasonably large, although not by any means acceptable—are different from juvenile hake catches in area 8? There is considerable concern about the catching of juvenile hake by fishermen in other nations. As hake is a migratory stock, such fishing will clearly have an impact in area 7, so in the area where it occurs an increase is needed in minimum mesh sizes and minimum landing sizes should be increased by up to 40 cm.

Mr. Morley: I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman. Indeed, I concede that fishermen in the south-west are saying that there has been unacceptable juvenile mortality further south in relation to the hake fishery. It is for that reason that we agreed last year, as part of the hake recovery plan, that mesh size in the bay of Biscay would increase from 17 mm to 100 mm. That is a very big jump. It does not significantly affect our industry, which has traditionally used larger meshes, but is designed to reduce juvenile mortality. I agree that such reduction is one of the top priorities—indeed, it is probably the top priority—of the hake recovery plan.

The total spawning biomass of hake is at dangerous levels. In that respect, we must have an eye on overall fishing mortality. That is where the impact of our own industry comes into play, even though it is catching bigger fish. Minimum landing size is an issue, but it cannot be increased unless mesh size is also increased. That is rightly being done and I set great store on it following my discussions with fishermen in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

The overall picture is one of seriously diminishing opportunities for a range of stocks, although there are one or two bright spots. When the EU-Norway talks are completed, we expect some increases in a range of quotas, although that does not go all the way in mitigating what the Commission is proposing. However, we must accept that the reductions in opportunity were inevitable to some degree. We cannot ignore the stark scientific assessment of some stocks, although I must point out that I am disappointed—the industry has already spelt out its disappointment—with some of the proposals, which seem to be inconsistent, to move away from the scientific advice that is available and to propose TAC levels without any clear basis being apparent. I have always tried to be consistent and I told the industry that when scientific advice makes it clear that we have to take action on reducing catches, we must take that action, even though it might mean difficult and painful decisions. On the other side of the coin, if proposals go beyond the scientific advice, we should question them very closely and demand justifications.

Some of the TACs that have been proposed do not seem to take account of the difficult and painful measures that the industry has already taken in good faith. It has taken such measures in the Irish sea and deserves to be congratulated on its co-operation with us on the Irish sea cod recovery programmes. There is a call for a blanket cut on a number of stocks of real economic value, despite a lack of scientific advice, while in one or two cases scientists have recommended increases. We need to challenge such proposals and I can assure the House that that will be one of my objectives in the Fisheries Council.

One of the prime examples of proposals that need to be considered further relates to nephrops. The Commission has proposed what seem to be inappropriate cuts that are designed to complement cod recovery. Again, the matter is linked with by-catch issues. By-catch problems are very serious—if the science and evidence exist. I am convinced neither of that nor that the Commission has understood our research, which we presented to it to back up our argument.

Angus Robertson (Moray): Does the Minister know that Spain is in a similar position to Scotland and other parts of the United Kingdom on nephrops? Is he optimistic about an opportunity to find commonality of interest between Spain and various parts of the UK on nephrops in the Council of Ministers?

Mr. Morley: Spain has an interest, but it is in different stocks. Our interests are mainly in the Irish sea and the North sea, where Spain does not have a quota for nephrops. However, I agree that one or two other countries have a joint interest with us on such issues.

We have always been responsible and argued on the basis of science. On last year's 10 per cent. reduction, we presented the Commission with scientific evidence to support our view that the cod by-catch in the North sea nephrops fishery was low and did not justify such cuts. We intend to challenge the Commission's scientific analysis on the basis of our considerably detailed work.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks about the Irish sea fishing communities, which have genuinely worked together. Will he consider the results for the past two years of the cod recovery programme in the Irish sea? Many Fleetwood fishermen do not believe that they have been given the time or the chance to prove its success. Instead, savage cuts have been introduced without consideration of the programme and how we can build on the past two years.

Mr. Morley: I accept my hon. Friend's comments. The industry has been responsible and has genuinely

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participated in the recovery plans, and we appreciate its input. There are encouraging signs for cod, and it would be helpful if the industry could experience some benefits from its sacrifices. We will argue for that strongly with the Commission.

We have asked the industry for its reactions to the proposals. We will take time to examine them all in detail and consider their implications. As I have said, we intend to work with the industry and other member states to ensure that we bring about a fair, effective, reasoned and reasonable end to the negotiations, which will be difficult.

The attitude in the Council of Ministers has changed for the better. There is a much more serious attitude towards following the science. The Commission is not in the game of bumping up figures arbitrarily so that they can be negotiated down and presented as an improvement. It will not be easy to get the Commission to move from the proposals because it is adamant that it is in the business of sustainability and protecting fish stocks. We share that ambition, but I repeat that the proposals must be based on good science, and a case has to be sound to convince the industry, which will ultimately have to make sacrifices for the recoveries. Persuading the Commission of that view will be one of our primary objectives in the negotiations.

Deep water species and TACs are of interest to some hon. Members. Last year, we rejected the idea of quotas for a range of species, although we accept that there is serious anxiety about the state of deep water stocks. We support management that is based on effort-control regimes rather than on simply allocating quotas. We believe that the latter would encourage increased fishing to bump up track records on quotas.

It should also be taken into account that some of the deep water fisheries are used by non-EU fleets. It would therefore be better to bring them under the control of regional fisheries organisations—the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission in the case that we are considering—to ensure proper management of the stocks.

The Government generally support third country fisheries agreements because they maintain traditional fishing opportunities for EU distant water vessels and provide socio-economic benefits for some regions that depend on fisheries. They also allow third countries to realise the value of fisheries resources that they do not wish or are unable to exploit. However, there is an important caveat. Third country agreements should provide value for money to the Community, promote environmentally sustainable fishing, which means proper enforcement and management, and be coherent in the context of Community development objectives for third countries.

Some agreements need to be examined closely for their benefits. We benefit from third country agreements such as the Greenland fishery agreement, which is especially important to the UK. We must ensure that the Community does not export its surplus fishing capacity to developing countries, which are often unable to monitor fishing effectively and/or do damage to marine ecosystems. For many developing countries, fish provides a substantial and vital source of protein. Fishing agreements must not jeopardise that source.

Developing countries increasingly want to develop their fishing industries, and we should support that. There are opportunities for co-operation and joint agreements between EU member states and fleets and those developing countries.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): I acknowledge the importance of the Minister's last point. However, if we are to have sustainable fisheries in our waters, the Government must recognise that they are part of the problem because they license more capacity than the waters can sustain. They should consider ways in which they can be part of the solution, and decommission the excess capacity so that there is a balance between our fishing fleet and sustainability.

Mr. Morley: That is a fair point, and I shall deal with this year's decommissioning round shortly.

The Commission has produced a Green Paper on the review of the common fisheries policy. Hon. Members are familiar with its contents. It goes a long way towards tackling many anxieties that hon. Members have expressed over the years and proposes the sort of changes to the CFP that we support. The Green Paper pulls no punches; it is a frank and well-balanced critique of the CFP. It points out its deficiencies, including poor stock conservation, the use of often inappropriate subsidies, and uneven control and enforcement, while making a strong case for a common policy on fisheries conservation, which is important in EU waters.

Recent difficulties in fisheries management mean that I am more convinced than ever of the need for a common conservation policy. We cannot manage fish stocks unilaterally.

Mr. Salmond: The Minister is enthusiastic about the Green Paper. I understand that because it is probably the best document from the Commission on fishing for a generation, although there is nothing much with which to compare it. None the less, his enthusiasm is noted. Is he enthusiastic about the Green Paper's reference to substantially enhanced payments not only for decommissioning but for tie-up funding? If he supports large parts of the document, will the Government consider that aspect of the Green Paper?

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman knows my views on tie-up money. Although I have an open mind about any approach, we must consider carefully the most appropriate use of public moneys, the priorities for its use and the justification for schemes. I remain to be convinced that tie-up grants are the best way forward. I suspect that the debate on that will continue.

I want some elements of the CFP to be retained. I am sure that that applies to other hon. Members. For example, the case for the six and 12-mile limits is so overwhelming that I have argued for them to be made permanent. They are important for safeguarding the needs of the inshore fleet. We need to take its needs into account. The limits also make sense from a conservation perspective. No one supports the end of relative stability, including the Hague preference. They are important elements of the CFP, which offer security to the industry, especially in difficult times. The Commission and other member states also support relative stability and I am confident that that will continue into 2003 and beyond.

Andrew George: Does the Minister agree that, following the publication of the Green Paper, future debates on fishing in the House should be considerably more mature? We spent much time in the past speculating on whether we would be able to retain the six and 12-mile limits and relative stability. We can now move forward and stop wasting so much time speculating on dire scenarios.

Mr. Morley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. There are far too many scare stories about what is going to happen after 2002. I suspect that, when we reach agreement, some of the darker stories that we have been hearing will be shown to have been yet more of the Euro-myths that we have had to listen to for many years.

We are arguing strongly for greater involvement by the fishing industry in the way in which the CFP operates—but not only the fishing industry. No one would dispute that the industry is the primary stakeholder in the policy, but there is also a role for environmentalists, consumers, sport fishermen and members of the general public, who have an interest in the health of our seas and in marine biodiversity.

One of the strengths of the new Department in which I serve—the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—is that sustainability is at the heart of everything that it does and of all the policies that it is trying to develop. There is no contradiction between the objectives of environmentalists—healthy and strong marine biodiversity—and of the fishing industry, which has every interest in marine conservation and biodiversity.

For the House's information, the timetable for the review has shifted slightly in recent months. The European Parliament has been unable to complete its report on the CFP, and the Commission rightly wishes to hear the Parliament's opinion before proceeding. I therefore expect the Commission communication to be produced in January next year. The communication will set out recommendations for subsequent legislative proposals for decision by the end of 2002.

We do not yet have a full idea of the proposals that the Commission intends to produce, but it has said that we should expect them to cover multi-annual TAC setting—a policy that has been raised many times in debate, and one that the UK strongly supports. The proposals could also cover access, fleet structure, control and external issues. That shows that the Commission is moving in the right direction, and I shall offer it every encouragement in its efforts to forge a new, more meaningful, more flexible common fisheries policy that takes much greater account of the regional differences between the various fishing fleets of the European Union.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): With regard to the proposals from the Commission, has my hon. Friend been able to determine what level of consultation will take place in our fishing communities around the coast—the key stakeholders that he mentioned earlier? Such consultation would enable our fishing communities to feel that proper account had been taken of their feelings in relation to the Commission's proposals.

Mr. Morley: I know that my hon. Friend has been very much involved in this process, and that he is anxious to ensure that the views of the industry are fed through. He will be pleased to know that a series of seminars and conferences has been held around the country, to allow fishermen to express their views on the common fisheries policy and the post-2002 reforms. The industry has been very active in that process, and has made a range of proposals. The joint document produced by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation was extremely well argued, and it is clear from the Green Paper that it strongly influenced the way in which the Commission was thinking. That is a good example of the way in which the industry can feed through its ideas.

On decommissioning, one of the key problems faced by the fishing industry is the imbalance between the size of the fleet and the stocks available to it, as was mentioned earlier. To help the industry to address the problem, we have introduced a £6 million decommissioning scheme in England, which, taken with the schemes run by the devolved Administrations, means that £36 million of public funds have been made available to the industry this year for decommissioning.

While decommissioning has an important role, it should be seen as only one tool. The downside to decommissioning is that it takes vessels out of the fleet, which has an impact on regional ports. So, although there is an important role for decommissioning, we should not regard it as the only fisheries conservation management tool. It is one of a range of measures that we need to introduce. There is, however, no doubt that taking some of the capacity out of the UK fleet helps the viability of those who remain in it.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House whether he was shocked by the fact that the decommissioning scheme introduced in Scotland has been oversubscribed by 100 per cent. in the north-east, an important area in which many of the newer, larger boats are based? Is that not a shattering blow to the Scottish fishing industry? Does he agree that it does not augur well for the future?

Mr. Morley: We need to be fairly shock-resistant when dealing with fisheries. I was not altogether surprised, because decommissioning has been very useful to the industry, not only in helping people who want to leave the industry. The evidence of the previous decommissioning schemes shows that a lot of the decommissioning money has been recycled in the form of investment in the industry. I am sure that some people see the decommissioning scheme not as a way of exiting the industry but as a way of reinvesting in different parts of it. I suspect that that is one explanation of the high level of interest in it.

Mr. Salmond: Is not the key to the effectiveness of the decommissioning scheme—which was long resisted by the previous Conservative Government—the question of whether the quota allocation of the decommissioned boats remains in the sector? Would it not be the worst of all possible ironies if boats were decommissioned, whether in the north-east of Scotland or elsewhere, and their quota allowed to leak outside their area or outside the country?

Mr. Morley: This is a difficult issue, and I have discussed with hon. Members before, both in the House

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and in Committee, how we should try to keep a fisheries quota within the region in which it has operated. I would very much like to do that. Unfortunately, all sorts of legal difficulties are involved in achieving that in practical terms. There has always been movement of quota around the country, and there is a need for some flexibility in the buying or leasing of quota, as that helps the producer organisations to manage their fisheries. The producer organisations are very well organised these days, and they are looking for opportunities to buy quota in their areas. That will keep the quota in the region and will be to the benefit of their members. I would be glad to see that, and I hope that it will happen.

Andrew George: Following the intervention by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), may I ask the Minister whether he is prepared to intervene on the referral of the Shetland and Orkney quota schemes—and, by implication, the new Duchy quota scheme—to the European Commission? Those schemes support new entrants to the industry and protect quota in vulnerable fishing communities. That referral will clearly have a detrimental effect on the Duchy quota scheme in Cornwall, as it will delay its implementation. Will the Minister express a view on that matter and, if he is concerned about it, will he intervene to ensure that the investigation is completed as quickly as possible?

Mr. Morley: Yes, I shall be happy to give my personal view on that. It is a very good idea for local communities to come together in a co-operative way to ensure that their quota is kept in the area and managed for the benefit of the region. I must make it clear that state aid rules apply to this issue, and I would not want unfair subsidies going to one region to the detriment of another. That would not be fair. As I understand it, both the Duchy Fish Quota Company and the Shetland scheme are based on commercial operations, and the quota is leased at a commercial rate. I also understand that there are no plans to restrict this in a discriminatory way. On that basis, they seem to meet state aid rules. We take an interest in the matter, although it is one for the Commission. We shall certainly examine the Commission's concerns, but as long as state aid rules are not breached, there is no reason why the schemes should not continue to operate.

Mr. Steen: Has all the decommissioning money for the past couple of years been spent in the south-west, especially in Brixham? Was it at Amsterdam that the Minister negotiated to ensure that 50 per cent. of the foreign catch is landed in English ports, and does that help?

Mr. Morley: The decommissioning scheme was a UK scheme. It was not restricted to any one region and all the money was fully utilised. I think that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the Amsterdam treaty negotiations, which do not relate to the economic links conditions that we have negotiated and successfully applied. He may be interested to know that I shall say a few words about the outcome, although I want to conclude soon.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): My hon. Friend has been very generous in giving way to so many Members. I agree with the previous intervention by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on decommissioning, but he made an earlier intervention on tie-ups. My clear impression of the joint meetings that the industry had with us down here is that it believes that decommissioning is a much better answer than tie-ups. Decommissioning is a long-term solution to the industry's problems, whereas tie-ups pour money into a potentially bottomless hole.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is right. There were differences of view in the fishing industry, but there is a strong school of thought that decommissioning is a greater priority for available funds.

Mr. Salmond: I have here the Scottish Fishermen's Federation brief for this very debate. It expresses firm support for tie-ups as part of fisheries management policy, so I wonder whether the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) managed to attend the meeting at which he thinks the federation said something that it most certainly did not say.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman is experienced enough to know that there was a difference of view in the Scottish industry over tie-up grant. He will find that there was a slight difference of view between the west and east coasts. I must move on.

On stock recovery programmes and technical measures, the UK has played an important development role and there is a great deal of scope for dealing with some of our conservation problems. We intend to take the measures forward in conjunction with the industry. On quota management generally, I appreciate that the reductions in total allowable catches and quotas for 2001 have resulted in many fishermen eking out their allocations and making difficult decisions about what to catch and when, although many have been successful. I am also pleased that good prices in general have helped in that respect.

We have tried to help the industry out through quota swaps and the Department has a good record of managing our fisheries effectively. Nevertheless, it is important that all sectors play their part in ensuring that measures designed to conserve fish stocks are respected.

Fixed quota allocations have been reviewed and they seem to be a success—that is certainly the conclusion of the review. They have achieved greater stability and have greatly facilitated the process of securing extra quota through quota swaps, both in the UK and internationally through the Department.

Economic links were referred to by the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen). Those arrangements are a further example of how we have tried to address a particular problem realistically and pragmatically. Last year, I informed the House of the economic links arrangements and the benefits that they have brought. The first full year in which they were used was 1999: landings in the UK by foreign-owned, but UK-registered, vessels increased by 70 per cent., an additional £3 million was spent on goods and services in our ports and more than 300 tonnes of valuable quota—sole, predominantly—was made available for redistribution to our inshore fleet.

I am pleased to tell the House that the benefits achieved in 1999 were maintained in 2000, and I am hopeful that the trend will continue throughout this year.

The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that the trend in respect of foreign-owned, but UK-registered, ships has been downward in the past couple of years.

On grant aid, the principal aim of DEFRA is sustainability in environmental, economic and social terms, and one of our objectives is to promote sustainable management and prudent use of natural resources, domestically and internationally. Our sea fisheries are an important national resource, so we have involved the industry in the priorities that we want, and the schemes that we have identified for the financial instrument of fisheries grant programme involve such matters as increasing the value of fishermen's catch by helping them to maintain the quality of fish at sea and in port.

There are grants to help fishermen to transfer their fishing from pressure stocks to others, and that includes grants to switch to more environmentally friendly gear. There are also grants to help the processing industry to develop new markets, improve efficiency and minimise waste. I encourage all in the industry and environmental groups to consider how they can make the most of the grant aid available.

We have also encouraged the industry to benefit from adopting electronic working. DEFRA and other fisheries Departments want to encourage the industry to explore the possibilities, including electronic marketing and electronic transfer of information, with which it is becoming increasingly involved.

We commissioned a report on the impact of e-commerce on the UK fishing industry, using independent consultants, and in October we presented the findings to an industry seminar, sponsored by the Department of Trade and Industry and organised by the Sea Fish Industry Authority. We also showed what a Government web portal for the industry might look like. The feedback is encouraging and we shall want to consult the industry further on the report's recommendation on how best to take the matter forward.

I do not underestimate the difficulties for the industry in the forthcoming Fisheries Council negotiations. Some cuts are justified on the science and some present difficulties, but we must remember that stocks need to be protected. We must achieve sustainable fisheries management and stocks that are below their safe biomass must be rebuilt.

It is fair to say that some decisions should have been taken years ago, as some catches have been unsustainable for a long time. It will take years to achieve recovery for those stocks, but it can be done. I emphasise yet again that I have been consistent and that I have followed the science. That consistency also means that we should challenge cuts that go beyond the science, and I shall ensure that that is done in the forthcoming negotiations.

The new atmosphere in the Fisheries Council means that the posturing of old has gone. We must concentrate on sustainability and responsible fisheries management, but I emphasise once again that the Commission is deadly serious about its proposals. The negotiations will not be easy and the Commission will not simply roll over because we disagree with it. We must make a strong and robust scientific case to the Commission, and we will.

There are bright spots. We expect some stocks to increase and I am pleased that prices generally have been good. Consumers are prepared to pay a good price for a top-quality product. The inshore sector has done well, particularly with shellfish, but clearly I recognise that there are problems in the industry. They key one is sustainability and the need to put in place management for the long-term, for the sake of the marine environment and a viable, sustainable, financially secure future for the industry. I believe that we can do that.

2.58 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I welcome the debate, although I do not know how many fishing debates the Under-Secretary has introduced and wound up. He seems to have been fisheries spokesman man and boy, in opposition and in government. He probably feels that way too.

Lawrie Quinn: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Winterton: I am delighted to give way so early in my speech.

Lawrie Quinn: I thank the hon. Lady. Perhaps I may offer some information. During a search on a website, I asked that very question and the answer is 191.

Mrs. Winterton: I am grateful for the information. The Minister looks very well on it: he is obviously eating a lot of fish, as I did at lunchtime.

Let me echo what the Minister said, and express our deepest sympathy for the families of the nine fishermen who lost their lives this year. We must also not forget those injured at sea during the past year.

As an island nation, we have a particular affinity with the sea and respect those

"that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters".

For centuries, fishermen have braved the elements around our shores and further afield, and pitted their skills against the harshest and most unpredictable of elements, the sea. We politicians have added to the stress that they experience, not least by imposing stifling European Union regulations. While it is difficult now to find a customs officer, a coastguard or even a policeman around our harbours, fisheries officers can be found checking boxes of fish. That contrasts with the situation in the Scottish fisheries department, which allows over-quota landings to be policed by the pelagic sector itself.

Mr. Salmond: I think that we missed the full import of the hon. Lady's attack on the Scottish pelagic sector, which is generally recognised to be one of the most successful management regimes ever, and the most responsible. Will she explain in more detail why she is developing this anti-Scottish attitude? I should have thought that her party was in enough trouble north of the border.

Mrs. Winterton: Let me tell the hon. Gentleman that he is talking to someone who is half-Scottish. He will have to do a damn sight better than that. Perhaps I should remind him of the minutes of the meeting of the pelagic sub-committee of the Shetland Fishermen's Association, which took place on 21 September. I shall quote from

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them—and I am sure that, when I have done so, he will say how pleased he is to have been put right.

The section from which I shall quote is headed "Control and enforcement" and it states:

> "Josie Simpson reported his disappointment at a recent pelagic enforcement and monitoring committee meeting where it was made clear the fisheries department intend to leave it up to the industry to clean up over-quota landings."

Will that do for the hon. Gentleman, or would he like me to quote more? There it is, in black and white.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Winterton: I want to make some progress. The hon. Gentleman will probably want to intervene later, when I start dealing with the part of the world that he represents. *[Interruption.]* I know that he represents Orkney and Shetland. I shall deal with issues relating to that area later: that is precisely what I meant a few minutes ago. I wish that Labour Members would not get so excited. They should settle down and do a bit of listening.

The fishing industry's problem was summed up in *Fishing News* a few weeks ago. The Minister asserted:

> "A single European fleet is just not going to happen. The UK will never agree to it".

That is in the same vein as the Prime Minister's description of the European Union in a speech he made in Birmingham on 23 November. He said:

> "We have a vision for Europe as a union of nations working more closely together, not a federal superstate submerging national identity."

It appears to me, and to many others, that perhaps neither gentleman has studied existing European Union treaties, especially in relation to future fisheries integration.

The statement in *Fishing News* continues:

> "Spain is totally isolated on this approach, which also fuels arguments for EU permits which we would strongly resist."

The permit system—or call it what you will—is already an obligation under the treaty of Corfu. It is required to be operating before the end of 2002. Spain—this answers a point raised by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) earlier—can veto any issue when a discriminatory transitional derogation is sought, which includes the six and 12-mile limits. The Minister expressed support for that.

The situation today is exactly the same as that which was clearly explained here, during debates in 1971 and 1972, by Labour Members—the now Lord Healey, and the late Lords Shore and Jay. The Commission's press release of 4 December confirms its intention to

> "reduce the TAC for associated stocks".

That, and

> "reducing fishing effort, that is time spent at sea by fishing vessels",

will be controlled by special fishing permits.

The Prime Minister said:

> "The tragedy for British politics—for Britain—has been that politicians of both parties have consistently failed, not just in the 1950s but on up to the present day, to appreciate the emerging reality of European integration. And in doing so, they have failed Britain's interest".

There is some truth in that statement—the Government do fail to see the reality of fisheries integration—but, as usual, what the Prime Minister says and what he does are opposites. The experience of fisheries integration over the past 19 years has created the greatest social and environmental disaster that mankind could devise, the price of which our fishermen pay every working day of their lives.

Mr. Morley: I shall not defend the workings of the current common fisheries policy, which certainly need to be changed. Let me put the hon. Lady right on one point, however. I refer to the assertion, well known in the fishing industry, that we will all have to have European fishing permits. The permits required by the treaty of Corfu are already in effect, and apply to western waters management. They have not been used to supersede national permits or control, and they will not be: there is no reason why they should be.

Another issue that often causes concern is coastal limits. It is not true that there is a veto. Unless anyone challenges them, coastal limits will automatically be "rolled over" after 2002. Even if they are challenged, qualified majority voting will be involved—and I have no doubt that a qualified majority is in favour of retaining coastal limits.

Mrs. Winterton: I am sure that the fishing industry will be glad of those assurances—assurances about a matter that is yet to be decided. The Minister referred to qualified majority voting; I am pleased that he is confident of obtaining support in the numbers he requires, but I must admit to remaining concerned about the position. I shall wait to see whether he can deliver what he says he can deliver, but I believe that the case that I have presented is absolutely correct.

The Prime Minister surely cannot believe that wiping out the British fishing industry and marine stocks is in Britain's interests. No wonder the Liberal Democrats' spokesman for environment, food and rural affairs challenged the Government to put the environment at the heart of policy in an article in the September edition of *The Parliamentary Monitor*. Unfortunately, the Liberal Democrat policy proposes a lot of mini-CFPs. We can only conclude that both the Liberal Democrats and the Prime Minister indirectly support the dumping of dead prime fish back in the sea—which will cause pollution—the breaking of the marine food chain, and the marketing of baby fish in southern Europe.

The present quota system has one more year to run. The system, which is in itself a derogation from equal access to a common resource, will have run its course on 31 December 2002. Today's debate takes place just before the Minister goes to negotiate the new TACs, and other matters, at the Council of Fisheries Ministers. As he said, the Commission has already announced further devastating cuts to quotas as a basis for discussion—cuts that fall below even what scientists have recommended.

There is an established pattern to those negotiations, which means that whatever concessions the Minister can wring out on behalf of the UK will be considered to be an improvement on the worst case scenario. Let us not be fooled. The situation is dire and we are witnessing the slow death of our industry by a thousand cuts.

The Minister has told us in the past that fishermen have to accept the continuing cuts in quota in the name of conservation. How, therefore, can the Commission justify the cutting back of quota for dover sole by 40 per cent., or 320 tonnes, in area 7E of the south-west coast of England, while allowing an increase in plaice quota of 6 per cent., or 330 tonnes, for the same area of sea, in order to conserve fish? It is well known that the species are caught together in the beam trawling fishery, just as cod and coley are caught in single and twin demersal trawls.

The direct result of those quota decisions will be yet further dumping. That unhappy practice, together with juvenile discards, was highlighted more than a decade ago by the industry and included in the Commission's 1991 report. Since then, little progress has been made because of the rigidity of the system. I hope that the editorial comment in last week's *Fishing News* is correct and a more balanced view will be taken. The editorial stated:

> "There can be no greater indictment of the European Commission's failure to run the CFP properly than its own report on enforcement of fishery regulation.
>
> The inadequacy and patent lack of uniformity in the enforcement regimes across the EU have been apparent for many years. The Commission has been aware of these failures for years but they have still not been addressed."

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): The hon. Lady mentioned a time a decade ago. According to my maths, the Conservatives were in government then. Why did they not do anything about it then?

Mrs. Winterton: The hon. Gentleman is new and perhaps he does not understand the cause of the problem, which is the rigidity in the system. It is the Commission that runs the policy and it is for the Commission to enforce it. *[Interruption.]* I have just read him a bit from *Fishing News*. Perhaps he read it, or perhaps he would like to go to the Library and read it again. If he did, he would see who is to blame.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, Central): The hon. Lady may have forgotten that there was a Conservative Government 10 years ago, but I hope that she has not forgotten that it was the Conservative Government who took us into the CFP in the first place.

Mrs. Winterton: No, how could I have forgotten that? I am not trying to make cheap party political points—*[Interruption.]* I am trying to get to the truth of why our fish stocks are as low as they are, why our fishermen are going out of business because it is too difficult for them to continue and what we will do, in this country and elsewhere, to encourage good environmental management and to ensure that the ecosystems in the sea can recover so that the fish stocks can recover. This is an important issue. Hon. Members on both sides might guffaw about it, but it is not they who go out fishing every week: they sit around in a comfortable, warm and safe place.

Mr. Doran *rose—*

Mrs. Winterton: No, I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman because I am going to make progress with my speech.

Andrew George *rose—*

Mrs. Winterton: I am not giving way to that hon. Gentleman either. Let him make his own speech and he can give way to me.

On 1 January 1999, the Minister introduced a system of fixed quota allocations, on the basis that that was what the industry wanted—*[Interruption.]* Yes, a majority wanted it, although many indicated other views in their responses to the consultation paper. The introduction of that system has denied fishermen the opportunity to improve their businesses. They now have to pay money for the additional quota that they need to remain viable. Many fishermen have no financial means to do this and are being forced to leave the industry due to financial constraints.

Schemes using public funds for the benefit of some fishermen have been introduced. This time last week the Commission issued a press release:

> "The Commission opens investigations into UK aid schemes involving purchase and leasing of fish quota".

That is a very serious situation and refers to a purchasing company supported by the Shetland and Orkney islands councils. When that project was formulated on the recommendation of John Goodlad, chief executive of the Shetland Fish Producers Organisation and also secretary of the Shetland Fishermen's Association, who is due to step down from those posts at the end of this month, certain Shetland fishermen suggested that the Commission's authorisation should be sought before proceeding.

In the fisheries debate on 15 December 1998, the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble), whom I am delighted to see in her place this afternoon—

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): As usual.

Mrs. Winterton: Indeed. The hon. Lady is a keen attender of fisheries debates for the simple reason that she has a strong constituency interest. In the debate in 1998, she quoted from a letter the Minister wrote in the 4 December 1998 edition of *Fishing News*, which gave support to that kind of scheme. In fact, the Minister visited Shetland and when he appeared before the Agriculture Committee on 22 June 1999, he confirmed that he fully encouraged such schemes. The Liberal Democrats also encouraged that approach.

In the Aberdeen *Press and Journal* on 30 November 2001, John Goodlad is quoted as saying:

> "I am perfectly satisfied that the scheme does not breach any Community aid rules whatsoever. All the discussions we have had with the Scottish executive and the Commission confirm this to be the case".

However, Shetland councillor, Drew Ratter, was quoted as saying:

> "I am absolutely stunned. The European Commission had a very good look at this before and there was an in-depth investigation. Everyone was informed".

In the same report, Alan Coghill, chief executive of the Orkney Fish Producers Organisation is quoted as saying that he suspects that

> "a jealous Euro MP may be behind the investigation".

I understand that it was indeed a Member of the European Parliament who initially prompted that investigation. I believe that that MEP is a member of the Labour group. Indeed, I understand that it was Mr. Gordon Adam.

Mr. Carmichael: I am loth to interrupt the hon. Lady but she has now singled out no fewer than four

[Mr. Carmichael]

constituents of mine for particular comment, all of whom are well respected in the fishing industry. With every moment of her speech I can feel the Tory vote in Orkney and Shetland ebbing away. Would the Conservative party be prepared to be as fulsome in its support of the Orkney and Shetland islands councils' position on the purchase and leasing of quota on commercial grounds as the Minister has been this afternoon?

Mrs. Winterton: Of course we would be equally supportive, as long as we know—I am sure that the Minister agrees with this point—that it has not broken any rules or regulations. I will shortly describe the procedure that must be followed, and the hon. Gentleman may wish to intervene later on that point. I am sure that he would not support knowingly breaking the rules, because that is not the way forward.

The establishment of a similar enterprise, the Duchy Fish Quota Company, which is backed by Cornwall county council, has been seriously affected by the investigation. Advice about setting up the scheme had been obtained from the organisers of the Shetland scheme. In the *Western Morning News* of 3 December, the chief executive of the Cornish Fish Producers Organisation, Nathan de Rozarieux—a good Cornish name—was quoted as saying that the Commission investigation was a shock and a setback that could cause up to two years of delays.

Unfortunately, the matter is far more serious and goes much further than the Commission's investigation. Applications for such schemes must be made in advance. When an application is received and approved by the Commission, notification of approval is published in the Official Journal. If that process is not completed, the Commission will open an investigation, as it has with the Orkney and Shetland scheme, that can take up to 18 months to finish.

Annual reports have to be submitted to the Commission for such approved schemes. Have any annual reports been filed for the Orkney and Shetland scheme? It is puzzling that the scheme should have been operating for some time, and one wonders whether the Commission has turned a blind eye to its existence. If Community rules are found to have been broken in respect of a scheme operated without the Commission's approval, the member state is charged with the responsibility of taking back the money given in state aid, plus interest.

It will not escape the House that if the Commission finds against a scheme, the amount of money involved is considerable. It will have been paid over several years and will run in advance for the 18 months or so that the investigation may last before it concludes. That is a serious issue for the fishermen concerned. If the Commission finds that the rules have been broken, it will expect the Government to take full responsibility. Indeed, they have a moral duty to do so, as in the past they have publicly supported the scheme.

Save Britain's Fish and the Fishermen's Association Ltd. have warned for years that the devil was in the detail, and attracted much scorn from all sides in the process. Those who support the common fisheries policy must base their judgments not on wishful thinking, but on fact.

I wanted to speak at length about the effort restrictions that apply to western waters and the Baltic, and to ask how many kilowatt days the United Kingdom is to lose next year. The Minister knows that we are exceeding the kilowatt days allocation, but how does he believe that vessels will obtain the necessary licences to rectify the under-declared overcapacity in engines by 2004? However, I am conscious that other hon. Members want to speak, so those matters will have to wait for another debate.

In fisheries debates, we often hear the cry that too many vessels are chasing too few fish, yet, in the name of conservation, we are told that vessels must be decommissioned. That is strange, given that the quota is left intact to be reused. The Government—except for the Treasury—do not support a tie-up scheme, because that is all about getting rid of British vessels, not conservation.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Will my hon. Friend throw some light on the practice of klondiking? We in land-locked Leominster would be grateful to know more about the process, which allows a vessel to unload its quota or catch on to other vessels and thus to continue to fish 24 hours a day.

Mrs. Winterton: The fishing industry has all sorts of wheezes to deploy in the system of quota management. My hon. Friend gave one example, and I could give him others. The important matter is how we can restore fish stocks sufficiently to allow a viable and sustainable fishing industry in the future.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Does my hon. Friend accept that klondiking strips the seas of our fish stocks and so prevents recovery? In respect of reform of the CFP and other matters that will arise in the next year, should not the Government's policy be to prevent that and other practices, which are destroying our fish stocks?

Mrs. Winterton: My hon. Friend is right, and makes his point clearly.

The primary issue at stake is the development of sustainable policies to guard the marine environment and ecosystems, and thereby increase fish stocks. We know that different stocks are in flux as a result of global warming. The rigidity of the present quota system means that fishermen will catch species that are different from those specified in the 1974 to 1978 reference period. That problem will be exacerbated by the Minister fixing the quota for each vessel. As a result, catches will either be landed as black fish, or dumped.

The Minister has indicated his dislike of industrial fishing on numerous occasions. We share that dislike. I accept that he secured a restriction for the birds around Wee Bankie, but the three vessels allowed in for scientific purposes seem to have had a field day with sand eels and juvenile haddock. It is nothing short of a disgrace that the sand eel total allowable catch has been reduced by only 20 per cent., to 816,000 tonnes. I hope that he makes sure that that TAC is no more than 200,000 tonnes for the next year. The present proposals are an insult to the demersal fishermen, and we must remember that industrial trawlers are not even catching their quota. The potential for even more damage to fish stocks is therefore inherent in the system.

Another saying often heard is that fish know no boundaries. How right that is, as fish clear off to better waters when there is no food. How can fish stocks be expected to increase when the food chain is being destroyed? In the Barents sea, cod turned to cannibalism and took longer to grow, and the same is happening now with North sea haddock.

Industrial fishermen were even allowed into the areas closed for spawning cod earlier this year. To catch sand eels, they used nets through which it would be difficult to push a knitting needle. Moreover, the closed areas for cod were designated using British vessel log books and past records, but they did not match the spawning grounds and were applied only after half the cod had already spawned.

Where were the demersal vessels to go? They had no alternative other than to go to the very areas that the fishermen wanted to avoid—those with juvenile haddock stocks that needed to be conserved for the 2002 catch.

Parliament has allowed this system of integration in order to fulfil treaty obligations. It has resulted in fishermen being criminalised, and it has been the reason for decreasing fish stocks. It is no use our blaming European fishermen for making the most of every opportunity that is handed to them on a plate.

As we enter the final year of the integration process, I hope that the Minister will not continue to believe that a derogation permanently overrides a treaty. I trust that he fully understands the aces that nations such as Spain hold. The Government and the Liberal Democrat party would like the 12-mile derogation to be made permanent, but I challenge the Minister and the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for St. Ives to say how such permanency might be secured. Given that they want to make the 12-mile limit permanent, the Minister should also explain what happened to the 12 to 200 mile median-line limit established by the then Labour Government with the Fishery Limits Act 1976.

The problem for European marine stocks is political, stemming from the move for political integration to establish the superstate. The Prime Minister asserts that that will not happen, but page 34 of volume 1 of the Commission Green Paper refers to

> "ensuring that the governance remains compatible with the legal and institutional framework of the Treaty".

It is there in black and white.

Let me make very clear the difference between the political parties' policies. The Scottish nationalists cannot wait to sign up to the acquis communautaire, handing what they deem a Scottish living marine resource to the European Union, to be shared equally with all the present and future member states, including Austria and Luxembourg, which are landlocked countries.

Mr. Salmond: I do not believe that Austria poses a mortal threat to the Scottish fishing industry at present. Nor has the Scottish National party ever supported the acquis communautaire. We are strong supporters of relative stability, which I hope is being secured.

Can the hon. Lady confirm that it was a Conservative Government who, only six years ago, unnecessarily traded accelerated Spanish access to western waters in return for support from Spain on qualified majority voting on a matter that had nothing to do with fishing?

Mrs. Winterton: The hon. Gentleman says that Austria is not a threat, but my point is that countries such as Austria and Luxembourg, which have no sea, will be able to buy in an equal part of the fishing in the European pond.

Mr. Salmond: Scotland is not represented equally or often at all.

Mrs. Winterton: I will ignore that remark.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the previous Conservative Government. Has anything changed in the meantime? It is still all about horse trading, which is what the problem will be at the end of 2002.

Mr. Savidge: Seahorses.

Mrs. Winterton: Indeed.

I have known the Minister for a number of years because we both served on the Agriculture Select Committee. I often think that he must feel uncomfortable in his present position because he is a tremendous environmentalist. I hope that he will hold his views to the fore and come round to a situation in which we can save the marine environment. My goodness, at the rate it is going, there will not be one left to save very shortly.

The Liberal Democrats fully support the acquis communautaire but think that they can break the common fisheries policy down into smaller chunks. That, in theory, could be achieved now and need not wait until 2003. Ensuring that competency is given to those regions is a different matter. The Government go along with the concept of reform, which is disingenuous. How can reform be achieved to benefit British fishermen when, by definition, it means disadvantaging other countries? Reform is a smokescreen for doing little but tinker at the edges.

Andrew George: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mr. Doran: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Winterton: I am going to make progress. I have been generous in giving way.

The Conservative party believes in returning fisheries policy to national control to enable us to get to grips quickly with a very fluid conservation situation. We can achieve genuine co-operation among member states, for everyone's benefit, with reciprocal arrangements. That is the only way forward for the survival of not only the British fishing industry but of all the fishing fleets of other member states. Conservative policy has at its very heart the conservation and sustainability of fish stocks.

The present policy is a travesty under the guise of conservation and a prime example of the abuse of a valuable national resource. Such a sacrifice must not be allowed to continue. We have a duty to ensure that our national interest is protected with the restoration of competence to the place where it traditionally and rightfully belongs.

Andrew George: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her generosity in giving way. She is attempting to explain Conservative policy, after her rather vain attempt to rubbish the policies of others. Could she dwell a little longer on Tory policy as explained in the Conservative

[Andrew George]

manifesto? It says that the Conservatives will seek national or local control over our waters, to be established through zonal management, coastal management or in some other way. I am sure that that is clear to everybody. Will she elaborate on how that is to be achieved?

Mrs. Winterton: I always believe that one good quote deserves another. How does the Liberal Democrat party propose to achieve its policy? I remember the hon. Gentleman speaking in a fishing policy debate on 23 July 1997. I wonder whether he has a selective memory. He said:

> "By regional, I mean that we need to consider the relative merits of natural regions such as the North, Celtic and Baltic seas, where boundaries coincide with the general range of a particular stock and coastal state management as favoured by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations, operating up to the median line. The crucial point is that such semi-autonomous regions should be given the power and flexibility to determine the management systems best suited to their needs."—[*Official Report*, 23 July 1997; Vol. 298, c.893.]

When he speaks, perhaps he will explain how he and his party will acquire the power to carry out his policy.

Bob Spink: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Winterton: No, I intend to continue with my speech.

I want to look elsewhere in the world for a moment. Global warming moved the cod from Canadian waters, not overfishing—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for St. Ives listens, he might learn something. Because of the bloom of shrimp, scallop and crab, the landings there today are far greater than they ever were with the cod. The Canadians developed from a Norwegian idea the separator grid, which gave them a virtually clean fishery. The lessons to be learned from their experiences are that we have to move quickly with gear development for the changing global circumstances and not build vessels or processing plants that depend on one species alone.

The world's great success story is Namibia. Three years after gaining independence, the hake recovery was hailed as simply miraculous. That is an example of what national control can achieve.

I regret that the fisheries debate this year could not have been held after the Commission's report. I understand from the Minister that the basic fisheries conservation regulation is due to be introduced in January next year. It will be interesting to see, under article 43 of the treaty, whether the Commission recommends any further transitional derogations in the run-up to 1 January 2003, which is only a year away. I rather suspect that it will, and the ensuing horse trading—seahorse trading—will leave plenty of blood on the carpet.

The price of agreeing to renew the six and 12-mile limit derogation for a further period may be extremely high. It might even include Spain securing the right of a European Union-wide trading system for quota—with, of course, Gibraltar thrown in for good measure—leaving the Spanish industry in a predatory pole position to take over, for example, a further weakened Scottish fleet. After all, Spain always manages to gain financial advantages from European Union funds. It recently benefited from a further award of £122 million, so it has plenty of money with which to achieve its long-term aims.

I trust that a further debate will be secured to consider the implications of this important matter so that the House does not fail Britain's interests. We wish the Minister well in his negotiations on behalf of the United Kingdom in the coming weeks.

3.40 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): As someone who has attended and spoken in even more fishery debates than the 191 claimed by my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn), and given my even more frequent attempts to become the Parliamentary Private Secretary to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and to win his approval, I note that this annual fish fest occurs in a more difficult and uncertain atmosphere than ever before. Usually, the Minister attends the debate and then goes off to negotiate an agreement, but at present there are so many uncertainties that the situation has become extremely complicated.

Much attention has been devoted to the review of the common fisheries policy that will take place next year. That review opens up huge issues such as zonal management, which of course we all support, and relative stability. With regard to that, I draw my hon. Friend the Minister's attention to the problems of Spanish and Portuguese access. They will eventually have access to the North sea for non-quota stocks, but as there are bound to be by-catches, the fishing organisations are worried that the Spanish and Portuguese will establish a track record in quota stocks as by-catches to the quota stocks that they catch, thus giving them a foothold in that area. There are implications for the new entrants: for example, the Poles will eventually have access on the same basis as Spain and Portugal. We should consider that question.

There is also uncertainty because so many aspects have not yet been settled, largely due to the breakdown of the talks with Norway on blue whiting—a necessary form of currency for exchange with Norway. It is pointless to catch blue whiting merely for industrial purposes and to grind it into fishmeal. The fish is edible and can be used as a currency swop for cod—to obtain increased cod quota from Norway—which is vital for the big Humberside industry that we hope will be maintained. It is a shame that the talks have broken down and I hope that my hon. Friend can give us some reassurance about that. Will the 2.9 per cent. EC share of north-east Arctic cod—small though it is—be maintained? That, too, is crucial to the Humberside industry.

A further uncertainty is the conservation problem. We do not know what is happening. As yet, there has been no study of the effects of the cod and hake preservation plans. We are making decisions about TACs and quotas before we know about the reduction in the scale of the industry. Scotland generously allocated about £25 million for decommissioning while the English Government scraped together a pathetic £6 million for the English industry after emptying every piggy bank in DEFRA—and after foot and mouth, DEFRA does not have many piggy banks left. What effect will that have on the conservation problem?

What effect will the reduction in the fleet have on the multi-annual guidance programme? The industry is losing faith in that programme and it needs to be revised.

In addition, the Commission chucked a bombshell into all that uncertainty on 4 December. The industry had been looking forward to a minor increase in catches—certainly in the North sea—based on scientific advice. Although it was a small increase, it was helpful, but the Commission announced, in effect, that it was going to cut back on what had been recommended. I can see no reason for that, unless the Commission is anxious to safeguard its position by saying, "We are more virtuous. We are purer than pure, and if anything goes wrong we are not to blame because we recommended cutting back on what the scientists proposed." Why has that happened?

My hon. Friend said that he will oppose that cut. The whole industry will be grateful for that. We cannot have these unilateral excursions, whereby the Commission decides unilaterally to abandon scientific advice. We have taken great trouble to establish a proper working relationship between fishermen and the scientists. That is developing especially well in Scotland—the relationship is healthier there than in the rest of the country. Having gone to the trouble of developing that relationship, it is pointless for the Commission to torpedo the scientific recommendations. Some scientists say that that decision is nonsense. They will not say so publicly, unfortunately, but it is nonsense.

The Commission is moving to an ominous new basis for drawing up its management policy for fisheries. The basis for its judgments is now to be the optimum biological solution. That sounds good and indeed it is good—that is what we all want—but fishing is also an economic activity. We must emphasise that: it is an economic activity on which communities depend and which produces a living for fishermen all over the country. If it is to be viewed solely in terms of optimum biological solutions, it will be only one factor in a biological matrix. However, it must also be considered from the economic point of view. That is crucial. Unless the economic importance of fishing is recognised in the conservation measures, they will be circumvented.

A bankrupt or failing industry will not obey the rules—it will try to cheat. The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations put that more politely in its submission to its members by noting that there would be "circumvented measures". That means that people will cheat. There will be black landings and illegal practices. Stocks will be damaged. Fishermen will be driven to those practices by their financial situation. We must acknowledge the importance of economic factors in keeping the industry going.

Conservation must take account of the economics of fishing. Any measures that the Government or the Commission adopt must be properly financed. For example, technical measures will be introduced next year as part of the cod and hake preservation plans. There will be an increase in mesh sizes. There will be regulations on the thickness of twine—we are getting down to details like that. There will be regulations on catch composition. All that will not only be difficult to enforce, it will inevitably mean a loss of marketable fish. If fishermen have to use a larger mesh size—as they should, because it is good practice—their catches will go down. The fish will be bigger and more marketable, but less will be caught.

The Scottish industry tells us that trials in Scotland have shown that the economic loss through those measures will be twice as much as the Commission has suggested. There must be financial support from the Government or from the Commission. The industry does not care where the money comes from as long as it comes. The industry needs that incentive to help it to implement and comply with the measures and to ensure effective enforcement.

If the industry does not receive help, it will be hit by the same double whammy that has been described over the years in all those 191 fishing debates. Measures are constantly imposed on the industry from Europe: cuts in quota; regulation of days at sea; attempts at reduction and various conservation measures. No doubt they are all important. However, it does not receive the financial help from the Government—it certainly did not under the Conservatives—that comparable European industries receive.

My hon. Friend referred to the ending of the Moroccan agreement. The Spanish industry will be generously compensated for that and we shall pay towards that compensation. If there was a similar rundown in the British industry, British fishermen would receive no compensation because the British Government will not pay out the money. Because of the problems of the Luxembourg agreement and the threat to the rebate—

Mr. Morley *rose—*

Mr. Mitchell: I hope that my hon. Friend will not complicate the matter—I do not understand the Luxembourg agreement.

Mr. Morley: The loss of the Moroccan fisheries agreement is very comparable to the United Kingdom's loss of the Iceland fishery, in which case it is a complete fishery gone—there is nowhere for the boats to go. In those circumstances, there was a lot of Government compensation for the distant-water fleets. The compensation for the crews was not very fair, but my hon. Friend and my hon. Friends the Members for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) and for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) played a very important role in putting right that wrong under this Government.

Mr. Mitchell: That is certainly true, and the fishermen and the industry are grateful that that happened; it was right that it should happen. However, the point that I am making is that Spain is getting compensation from Europe now because the fishing has stopped now, and that compensation is more generous than that paid to the British industry. It is certainly more generous than that paid to the British fishermen—they got nothing when that happened in 1976. We did not get an allowance for the loss of those waters in subsequent quotas and catches.

There is a need to support and help the industry. When the industry is forced to obey European measures, it should not be hit by a refusal to pay European compensation or British Government money. The Treasury shows no sign of understanding the economic importance or the relevance of fishing.

Bob Spink: The hon. Gentleman speaks with great authority and passion and I always enjoy listening to him. Of course, the Opposition agree that we must adequately compensate our fishermen, but he is avoiding the root cause of the problem. Surely he, above all people, will accept that the cause of the problem over the past 20 years has been the common fisheries policy, which has failed. It has failed our fishing communities and the fishermen

[Bob Spink]

themselves, and it has failed to conserve fish stocks. Our industry has been decimated by Europe. Is it not about time that he came clean for his constituents and agreed that the best way forward now is not to tinker with that policy, as the Labour Government will do—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Interventions should be brief. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could come to the point.

Bob Spink: Instead, the Government should follow a Conservative policy by establishing area sector controls and national controls for this country so that we can conserve our stocks.

Mr. Mitchell: Flattery will get the hon. Gentleman a long way, but it will not get me to support Conservative party policy. I have to point out to him that the Conservative Government did nothing about this issue. In 1972, the Conservative Government sold the pass on the common fisheries policy, as the memoir written by the appropriately named Sir Con O'Neill showed at the time. He was asked to abdicate the fight over the common fisheries policy so that he could move towards getting the greater good, which was entry, and nothing has been done since.

In passing, I have to agree that life would be much easier if we could control our own destinies—I would like that, too—because we controlled our own waters. That is why other industries have been more successful than ours, and why it has faced those difficulties. The hon. Gentleman's flattery has got me to admit that much any way, but the point that I am making is more simple than that. When those measures bite and are successful, catches will begin to increase, the preservation plans will work and we shall have more cod and hake, but if we are to encourage the industry to survive, we have to help it financially through the transition.

I am delighted that the NFFO and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation have co-operated with the World Wide Fund for Nature in its cost-benefit study on the benefits of investing in fishing. I emphasise the word "investment", because my hon. Friend the Minister has said that he will not support vessels to do nothing or tie-up schemes, but this is about investment in the industry's future. That study shows—this is a preliminary indication only—that investment of £590 million over 10 years will produce a return 14 times that sum in the increase in the British industry's catches.

The value of those catches will increase to £7.638 billion as a consequence of that investment. That really is investment, and we should make an intelligent case for it. Such a case will not necessarily appeal to the Treasury—muscle is more important there—but the industry is producing an intelligent case for that investment, and I hope that my hon. Friend and the Treasury will consider it seriously.

Usually, in fisheries debates, I urge my hon. Friend to take a strong stand. I know that he will; he has committed himself to doing so and the industry trusts him. It is fed up with Europe, true, but it trusts him because it knows that he understands the industry and that he will fight the cuts, but he has to do other things as well. He is as concerned about industrial fishing as I am and he will oppose it. Industrial fishing is a disaster when we are trying to build up stocks because of the by-catches.

An item in the *Fishing News*, about which I wrote to my hon. Friend in October, states that one Danish industrial vessel was tied up for catching too much immature haddock in its by-catches. The Grimsby Fish Producers Organisation worked out that that 114-tonne industrial catch of juvenile fish, which was landed illegally in Denmark, would have amounted to 912 tonnes of mature fish if they had been allowed to grow. That is a third more than the entire Grimsby haddock quota of 600 tonnes.

Those are the figures, and they show what was ruined and the damage done to the stocks by industrial fishing. If that estimate is increased to cover 40 vessels, to make allowance for the scale of other catches, the fish that did not grow to maturity would have equalled the United Kingdom's entire 40,000-tonne haddock quota. That is terrible and frightening, and it is a direct consequence of industrial fishing, so I hope that we can ban such fishing because we cannot have effective conservation without stopping industrial fishing.

I also hope that my hon. Friend will invoke The Hague preference to protect our catches. The very small increase in the total allowable catch for North sea cod will leave the share of United Kingdom cod below the trigger point, so we can invoke The Hague preference and should do so for those areas that are dependent on fishing. Unfortunately, they are north of Grimsby, but I am making an altruistic gesture.

My hon. Friend knows the importance of research, but we should attach enormous importance to more research. Frankly, we do not know what is going on. Other hon. Members have mentioned the warming of the waters, but the Grimsby FPO says that in the 1980s the English fishing fleet was reduced by 50 per cent. It was reduced by another 75 per cent. in the 1990s, yet we still have a conservation crisis, so something more than the fishing effort is causing the problem.

The scientists inform us that the fish in the North sea stocks under survey—those that they are researching—are not now reaching the size and weight appropriate to their age. Why is that? The explanation that is most often put forward involves climatic change and global warming. The food source for the cod larvae—the phytoplankton—has decreased because the waters are warming. The fact that the waters are warming is causing the cod to migrate north, so there are more cod further north.

We are finding unusual species even in the North sea. There are increases in red mullet, bass and strangers. A swordfish was washed up on the Lincolnshire coast—the costa del caravan. I read in *Fishing News* this week that a barracuda has been caught off Cornwall—it probably has not yet joined the Liberal Democrats there—and that suggests that the waters are warming.

We need to examine the problem so that we understand what is happening, how much can be done through changes to fishing practice and how much is due to circumstances beyond our control. We cannot have a proper policy unless we understand the problem.

Although my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), with whom I usually work closely, will object, I must mention the fact that the Grimsby FPO says that there is a seal population explosion and that something must be done about that. I know that she is an animal lover but, if fish catches are down and quotas are to be reduced, why should the seal population not be culled to its previous level? A growing seal population is targeting a smaller number of fish.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes) *rose—*

Mr. Mitchell: I knew this would happen, so I give way.

Shona McIsaac: I thank my hon. Friend and neighbour for giving way, but I was probably more incensed by the reference to the costa del caravan.

My hon. Friend mentioned the seal population explosion, but what scientific evidence does he have for his claim? What evidence from scientific research shows the impact on fishing stocks?

Mr. Mitchell: I must admit that the evidence is a priori and largely in my head, but it is reinforced by complaints made by fishermen. Seals are a problem and I am asking for more research to be carried out. It stands to reason that an increasing seal population must have an effect on the number of fish.

Other problems need to be considered in the round. For example, aggregates dredging must damage fishing. I noticed that the Dutch have banned aggregates dredging entirely and that they import their aggregates from us. We dredge them up in the North sea with consequent damage to the fishing grounds.

I have also written to my hon. Friend the Minister about power stations and industrial complexes. Fish are killed in the intake pipes of the power stations on Humberside. That is a problem and we need to understand all aspects of it, so that we can devise an overall policy that supports fish stocks.

Shona McIsaac: My hon. Friend has mentioned the power stations on Humberside. As he is well aware, they are mainly located in my constituency. They take fresh water from the River Humber, which is obviously not as saline as the water out at sea. Therefore, different species are involved, so he cannot blame the power stations in my constituency for reductions in cod stocks.

Mr. Mitchell: Loth as I am to disagree with my hon. Friend on any occasion, and closely as we always co-operate, edible fish, including haddock, are found dead in the intakes to the power stations. The problem goes wider than riverine fish, and we need to have a policy on the issue. If we are to build more power stations and if it is possible to prevent fish stocks from being destroyed, we should surely act because we have a conservation crisis on our hands.

We cannot regulate in the dark, but we are being asked to accept arguments that we do not know can be supported and that are based on fairly shaky evidence. There is a genuine dispute not only between the fishermen and the scientists, but between the Commission and the scientists. My argument is for more light to be shed on the problem. Because there are so many generators in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes, I am sure that she will not argue with that. There is a measure of common ground between us on that at least. Ocean research cannot be left to the BBC. Such work is an important part of the role of DEFRA.

I am sorry that I have gone on for so long, but the discussion is based on an uncertainty that is bad for fishing. The industry has been badly battered over the past few years, and it is in a desperate financial state. Many of the vessels fishing are not viable in that they do not produce a return or support the fishermen who operate them. Some improvement will result from the decommissioning that will take out vessels in Scotland and England, but I fear that that will not be enough to return the industry to viability. We expected a slightly better deal for the North sea and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) has pointed out, we have a damaging status quo in the Irish sea.

I wish my hon. Friend the Minister all power, because he carries a major burden in trying to bring certainty to an industry when the Commission pulls one way and the scientific evidence is not available. The industry needs a national plan and the confidence that the Government will sustain it through the difficulties that it faces. It wants to be assured that the Government will resist the mercurial ups and downs of the Commission and support it by investment so that it will be seen through the problems that will undoubtedly arise. If British vessels go bust, fold up or leave the industry, we must not allow licences to be bought out by better financed industries that are supported by their Governments in a way that ours is not.

4.6 pm

Andrew George (St. Ives): I congratulate the Minister on securing this debate.

I associate myself with the sympathies that the Minister extended to the families of the nine fishermen who have died in the industry this year. As he knows, I have pursued this issue inside and outside the Chamber, because it is unacceptable that the fishing industry appears to accept far higher fatality levels than any other industry. Further measures are certainly needed. The training and training grants that he mentioned are very welcome.

The debate focuses on the Green Paper on the reform of the common fisheries policy in a climate in which, as the Minister knows only too well, difficult negotiations are due to take place on 17 and 18 December. Therefore, it is inevitable that the debate will concentrate on how we can carve out a long-term future for the industry through the renegotiation of the CFP while dealing with the short-term issues relating to the stock numbers and species that the Minister highlighted in his speech.

Despite the doom-and-gloom merchants, who are mainly on the Conservative Benches—all one of them at present—it is encouraging that we now have the best opportunity in a generation for sensible reform of the CFP. All sensible political parties are concerned about the future of the CFP, and we now have an opportunity to renegotiate it.

We welcome many elements of the Commission's Green Paper. The fact that it recognises that the CFP

> "has not delivered sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources"

acknowledges the policy's fundamental failure. Since 1986, the Liberal Democrats have published our policy on the matter and we were the first political party to argue

[Andrew George]

for devolved powers within the CFP through a reformed mechanism. The Green Paper also clearly recommends devolving serious powers to regional coastal fisheries committees. We must encourage that, and I was pleased to hear the Minister again welcome it. We must push for that in the reform of the common fisheries policy.

We welcome the recognition of the need to introduce technical measures to achieve more selective catches. The Minister welcomed multi-annual quotas, for which, as he knows, I have pushed for some time. We need to break out of the annual eleventh-hour brinkmanship that takes place when we carve up quota. The ability to plan is important. The continuation of the six and 12-mile zones and the retention of relative stability, which are recognised in the Green Paper, should be welcomed. I hope that with the Minister's support we have reason to be optimistic that we will achieve that in negotiations by the end of next year.

Having said that, we need a clearer statement of effective and stronger devolution. That needs to be spelled out in policy so that we know how it will be achieved. If we give fishermen in the regions power, we also give them responsibility. As it would be down to them if they got things wrong, it is important that they are genuine stakeholders in the regional management committees. It is essential that they work with representatives of Departments from all nation states that have an interest in that area and with fisheries scientists so that it is possible to focus on a natural fishing region and to plan for its future with clarity.

I welcome the Green Paper. It is important that we move away from the doom-and-gloom view expressed mainly by Conservative Members. The industry needs a long-term policy. History shows that fishermen and politicians do not always go together well, and it seems inevitable that there is a process of short-term reactive and piecemeal policy making for the fishing industry. That is why the Agriculture Select Committee, of which I was a member, was right to recommend in July 1999 that the Government establish a clear long-term strategy for the United Kingdom's fishing industry. That recommendation received an enthusiastic response from the Minister and the Government two and a half years ago and was welcomed in a written answer on 4 December 2001, just two days ago. However, little progress has been made.

I hope that the Minister will ensure not only that we get strong and effective renegotiation of the CFP, but that we have a clear UK strategy on where the industry is going and how it will get there. There is a general consensus in all parties on the need to have a sustainable industry and it is encouraging that environmental bodies and fishing industry representatives are coming together to achieve a common accord, which was not the case some years ago.

The hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), who has left the Chamber, referred to a recent Commission report that followed requests to all member states to provide information on the success or otherwise of their enforcement measures and on what infringements were committed and what fines imposed. She was right: the report does not make good reading. Of the 15 member states, only Denmark, the Netherlands and Austria met the March deadline to submit information. The Dutch and the Spanish supplied sections that were illegible; there were serious omissions in the reports of several states, including the Italians and the Spanish; and the French refused to send a report.

The Conservatives criticise the fact that the system is failing, but go no further. We differ from them in that they do not propose a constructive solution. We have argued for some time, as the Minister knows, that there is a choice. Either we can have central European policing, which we oppose, or we devolve the matter and give nation states greater powers to make bilateral arrangements with other fishing nations so that we can carry out spot checks at any time of another nation's inspectorate and its enforcement regime. Rather than creating another centralist policy, with more centralised bureaucracy, we have a great opportunity to create common accord between nations if we are confident that the enforcement measures are transparent to everyone.

Mr. Steen: I agree entirely about the need to avoid more centralised bureaucracy, because we would end up with another layer in the Commission that would be involved in enforcement in all member states. However, we need cross-border enforcement: for example, British fishing inspectors going to Spain and vice versa. We have been talking about that for years, but nothing ever happens.

Andrew George: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. If he was listening, he would have heard me recommend bilateral agreements between nations such as the UK and Spain. I apologise if I did not use terminology that he could understand. We would like bilateral arrangements between the UK and other nations implemented. I understand from discussions with the Minister that arrangements are in place for reciprocal visits by enforcement officers, especially with the Spanish. That is welcome. We need to hear more about that. The visits should be unannounced so that spot checks can be made, and that will reinforce the confidence that people have in the inspection systems of other nations.

The end of year negotiations on TACs and quotas are based on science. The Minister was right to say that if the science is clear and robust, it is important that all decisions, including difficult ones, are stuck to so that we do not jeopardise the health of fish stocks. I associate myself with those remarks. However, as he said, the science is at best flimsy, and in some cases non-existent, on a number of stocks. Fishermen would clearly want to recommend responsible increases in quota. If there is disagreement between fishermen and scientists, there must be a method by which the veracity of their evidence can be tested, which is not the case at the moment. Although scientists report to fishermen and there is some discussion—I accept that the relationship between them has improved in some ways—there is still disagreement, which results in a dialogue of the deaf. Fishermen who should be involved in the process end up as bystanders, having to make appeals to MPs in order to be heard, and that is a matter for concern. We need structurally to reform the process; for example, by appointing fishing industry representatives to the Advisory Committee on Fisheries Management and other bodies. The industry should be formally represented in the process of collating evidence and testing its veracity. It is essential that it is allowed to use its own evidence in negotiations.

A great deal has been said about this year's quota allocations. The Minister knows that he will have the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House if he robustly defends the science and pursues his arguments on nephrops, on the North sea cod quota and on matters where he believes that the European Commission recommendations do not reflect scientists' advice. He has our support for the agenda that he set out today.

I turn now to hake, which I mentioned in an intervention. The experience of fishermen in western waters does not match the scientific evidence. It is important that a proper recovery programme is introduced, but we must listen closely to the industry. I know that the UK industry will welcome the increased mesh sizes in area 8, in the bay of Biscay, because of deep and proper concern about the catching of juvenile fish, but that does not go far enough. Catching juvenile fish is unacceptable, and a minimum mesh size of 100 mm is not good enough. It will not protect the species, and a great deal more needs to be done. The UK industry in area 7 accepts and welcomes an increased landing size of 40 cm, and that should apply to area 8 as well.

On cod, also in area 7, once again the experience of the industry over the past year does not match the scientific advice. There is concern that the shape of monkfish, or angler fish, means that it is inevitable that large numbers will be caught as a by-catch and will need to be discarded dead, which is clearly an absurd waste. I recommend that the Minister reconsiders that issue.

I welcome the comments made by the hon. Member for Congleton, who has still not returned to her place, about the industrial fishing quota on sand eels. The UK must take a robust attitude to industrial fishing, which is the scourge of the industry as a whole and needs to be kept properly in check. I wish he well in his negotiations on 17 and 18 December.

Earlier this year, the Minister introduced welcome consultation on shellfish licensing, which has not yet been mentioned. I want to put it on record that, in a written answer to me last week, he indicated his intention to introduce measures on shellfish licensing by the end of the year. I know that almost the entire industry, and particularly the inshore sector, will welcome that. If he introduces those measures as soon as possible, he will find that he has a very supportive audience.

The Minister knows that mackerel hand liners, particularly in Cornwall and the south-west, were concerned when, only a couple of months ago, 300 tonnes of their quota were removed without any apparent negotiation. At that time, the industry was particularly buoyant, and there had been significant increases in the catch. I understand that the Minister has had further negotiations on that point.

Mr. Morley: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I have a great deal of sympathy with the mackerel hand line industry, which is a very select and sustainable fishery. That is reflected in the generous guaranteed underpinning of the industry's catch. It is true that some of the mackerel was included in international swaps, which we have to do to ensure that we have sustainable fisheries all around the country. However, as the uptake has been higher than expected, I assure him that we will ensure that that amount of mackerel is reinstated up to the maximum amount of guaranteed underpinning.

Andrew George: I am grateful to the Minister for that welcome reassurance. I hope that in meetings to discuss the future of the mackerel box, he does not allow anyone to persuade him to consider relaxing the rules on that. There is no point in opening up trawler activity in the mackerel box. As the saying goes, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

As the Minister knows, there has been a great deal of talk in this debate and others about the fact that the Worldwide Fund for Nature and the industry, in the shape of the NFFO and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, are keen to safeguard, through an investment programme, the long-term viability both of the industry and of fish stocks. I know that the Minister is sceptical about the figures provided by the WWF and the industry, which show about £500 million of investment generating over £7 billion of return in 10 years. I hope that he will carefully consider that programme and other forms of transitional aid to support the industry in tackling a difficult issue.

The hon. Member for Congleton went into some detail about the difficulties of quota companies. In an intervention, I spoke of the importance of ensuring that the European investigation into this matter is concluded as quickly as possible. She named a Labour MEP as the source of the subject's referral to the European Commission. I hope that the Conservatives have checked whether their representatives, whether in Europe or in local councils, raised the possibility of referral.

The Conservatives have made great play of criticising others but they have not been prepared to defend their record or explain their policy. I gave the hon. Lady an opportunity to do that. I know that many hon. Members are still unclear about what the Conservatives stand for. Do they want to pull out of the common fisheries policy and repatriate fishing with a return to national control? That is unclear, and all their statements simply add to that lack of clarity. However, we know what their record is, and if they could not achieve their aims during 18 years in government, we should take their claims in opposition with a significant pinch of salt.

I encourage the Minister to argue strongly with his counterparts in Europe for a satisfactory outcome according to the agenda that he has presented to the House today. In the coming months, he should also consider long-term measures to secure the future of the British fishing industry.

4.29 pm

Mr. Alan Campbell (Tynemouth): I shall keep my contribution fairly short, as I know that other hon. Members on both sides want to get into the debate. I shall focus on the main issue that concerns fishermen in my constituency.

I welcome the announcement by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary this afternoon of payment for safety training courses. The matter was raised in the debate last year and I am pleased that it has been dealt with. I am interested in his comments about the knock-on effects of cuts in quota in some species and some areas, and the disregard for the scientific advice which suggested otherwise.

[Mr. Alan Campbell]

The immediate concern of fishermen in North Shields is the proposed cuts in nephrops and the proposals that might follow cuts in North sea cod. Last year's debate was dominated by the imminent closure of the cod areas. There was a clear warning from both sides of the House that that would inevitably lead to pressure on other fisheries. In particular, prawns along the North sea coast were mentioned.

My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) had already been informed of the intention of some of his fishermen to make that transition. I do not say that to provoke civil war between Yorkshire fishermen and Northumberland fishermen; we are all in the same boat—if the House will excuse the pun. Dennis Clark, one of my fishermen, said at the time that in his view, we were trying to solve one problem but were in danger of creating another. That has been borne out by events.

North Shields, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary knows, is one of the top prawn ports, if not the top prawn port. There has been a great deal of activity this year. It has been quite a good year for fishermen in North Shields in that respect. Many Scottish boats are currently in port, but there is a question about whether the activity is sustainable. Prawn stocks appear to be relatively good. I was given anecdotal evidence to that effect by fishermen, but it seems to be the position taken by UK scientists as well. There was even speculation that there was room for an increase in quotas.

Hon. Members will understand the surprise and dismay among North Shields fishermen when there was talk of a cut in the nephrops quota in some areas, especially when that seemed to be against official advice. Such cuts are unexpected and unacceptable. I am heartened by the statement from my hon. Friend this afternoon about the strong line that he intends to take in the negotiations. I strongly support him in that.

It was inevitable that diversification from cod fisheries would put pressure on other fisheries. There is concern about how far that will go. Since the last debate, the worst scenario has been painted by the WWF report entitled "Now or Never", which suggests the possibility of not just a temporary problem for cod stocks in the North sea, but a permanent problem. I am not as blasé as the Conservative spokesman about the Canadian example. The wipe-out of cod stock should not be seen as an opportunity. If the situation in the North sea mirrored what happened in Canada—heaven forbid—why should we live through it, when we can read the book?

I was interested in the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) about the cost of action and of inaction. Whether or not we act, there will be a bill left at the end. We must address the issue of over-capacity not just in the UK fleet, but across Europe. It is a depressing prospect if only the UK and Denmark accept the need for a reduction in fleet size and in capacity. In the long term, we run the risk of running up financial and environmental costs.

These debates must be more than an annual plea for more money for the fishing industry, although we inevitably get round to the question of money. I welcome the £6 million for decommissioning this year and the £5.5 million for the fisheries regeneration initiative, but if there is a longer-term and potentially a bigger problem than the one that we face now, that figure falls short of the investment needed. I do not blame my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary in any way. Fishermen have a great deal of confidence in the way that he speaks up for the industry. If the blame lies anywhere, I suppose that it lies with the Treasury. I hope that the comments from all parts of the House lend weight to my hon. Friend's arguments when he enters into discussions with the Treasury about the amount of money available.

Successive Governments have ducked the question of investment for the longer term and of how much is enough for decommissioning. Although that is only one tool, it is a necessary and important tool, but money also needs to go into fishing areas for alternative employment. The danger for the Treasury is that if we do not face up to the cost now, that will add to the cost in the future. Governments have not been good at recognising that.

Decommissioning has a knock-on effect on the facilities and infrastructure of our fishing ports. I welcome the fisheries regeneration initiative, but it is not enough, particularly if the money came, as we understand it did, from the regional development agencies' existing budget. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby spoke about the NFFO and WWF study on the costs and benefits of fishing, but we need a proper assessment of the economic costs and benefits of fishing and of fishing communities in a regional context in the economic strategy of the RDAs, which have a key role to play. In saying that, I may be straying beyond the remit of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and into that of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and also, perhaps, into the realm of longer-term issues.

The immediate concern of North sea fishermen is what will happen to the quota and the pressure that they feel is being brought to bear. My hon. Friend the Minister has a difficult task and we wish him well.

4.37 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): I have spoken in most fisheries debates in the past 18 years. Such debates are a little like saying bon voyage to the Minister—waving him goodbye on the steps of the docks as he sails out to Brussels and wishing him well in his travels. The Minister is part of the fabric of the fishing industry—in fact, I think that he is the fishing industry. He has been the best fishing Minister, if not the only fishing Minister, that the Labour Government have found. Perhaps they cannot find another one.

It does not matter how long the debate runs, although I am grateful to all hon. Members for pushing for a full day's debate. Fishing policy has virtually nothing to do with the House of Commons. The whole thing is a charade. Everybody knows that fishing is to do with the Council of Ministers and the European Commission, and is subject to qualified majority voting. The Minister will no doubt remember that a few years ago, we had the debate in January, after he had come back from Brussels. That did not seem to make much difference.

The Commons has become a sort of focus group for the Minister before he goes off to the Fisheries Council, from where he returns every year with similar results—cuts in quotas and other bad news for the fishermen, but he is lifted shoulder high by fishermen who, I think, are brought in by his party. Shoulder high he goes along the docks, saying what a wonderful job he has done for the fishing industry. He tells us that the cuts would have been far worse if he had not argued so vigorously, and we all say that it did not matter anyway.

We enjoy the annual pantomime just before Christmas. I am not sure how the Minister is cast; I do not know whether he is the sugar plum fairy or plays another role. However, that rerun has been going on for 10 years or longer; it was going on when we were in office, and has continued now that we have swapped sides. It is like going to the cinema and watching the same film over and over again. The Minister makes his points and hon. Members on both sides of the House make theirs. As a result, we all say the same as we said the previous year and many years before.

The Minister knows my views on the fishing quota and the impact that cuts to it have on fishing communities such as Brixham in my constituency, where we have a fleet of about 100 ships. In spite of all the cuts, disasters and catastrophies, we still have a substantial and successful fleet. We have more than 100 boats, 1,000 fishermen and 3,000 to 4,000 industry-related jobs; it is a going concern and a great industry with a big turnover. Whatever we and the Minister do here does not seem to matter much because the fishermen go on fishing.

What is the problem with the common fisheries policy? We know that it has not worked. The deal struck in 1982 locked Britain into the highly dubious process of total allowable catches, which has run for 20 years. There was a mid-term review in 1992 but, by and large, the policy of total allowable catches has been rigidly adhered to. The Commission is now compelled to come up with proposals for the Council of Ministers on the reform of the common fisheries policy in 2003; 2002 will therefore be a significant year, as there is a genuine chance to reform the CFP.

We all know that the aim of the CFP was to ensure a fair standard of living for those in the industry, to stabilise markets, to ensure the availability of supplies and to ensure that those supplies reach consumers at a reasonable price. The policy stipulates that environmental protection requirements must be integrated into Community policies, with a view to promoting sustainable development. The CFP has fundamentally failed in nearly every one of its aims. On the conservation of fish stocks, for instance, the number of fish in the seas around our shores has decreased year by year, even though they have put up a spirited fight. Scientists have warned that, with new equipment such as sonar and new, more powerful boats, many species of fish are under threat of extinction. I remember going to meetings in the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at which experienced, erudite scientists explained why fish would not survive if we did not continue to make cuts. The fish have managed to survive. Ever more draconian cuts have not decimated the fishing stock or the fishing industry.

The whole thing is therefore a case of posturing—the fish posture; the fishermen posture; and we posture. I am not sure what the result is, but it is clear that there is an obscene situation in which, I am told, more fish are caught and thrown overboard than are landed. We do not know the exact number, because no one has weighed the whole catch. However, when there is a shortage of fish and a shortage of food in many parts of the world, it is appalling that we have a system in which more fish are thrown back into the sea than are landed simply because they do not fit a category in the total allowable catch. The CFP has therefore got to be changed so that, whatever fish is caught, it can be landed; we do not necessarily need a quota of that species.

I have discussed the matter with the Minister before, and we would go back to the tie-up proposals and consider the number of days at sea. There would be fewer boats, but fishermen would be allowed to keep all the fish that they caught; they would not have to throw them overboard before landing. Obviously, there are problems because there are 17,000 to 18,000 fishing vessels in Spain. There will be difficulties with European countries with a large number of boats that are subject to the same process. We have to move to a new process which, I believe, should be based on days at sea, vessel tie-up and being able to land all the fish that are caught.

The Commission's Green Paper is pretty good; it shows that the CFP is unworkable and many aspects of it are welcome. I am a member of the European Scrutiny Committee and visited Spain before it assumed the presidency of the EC a few weeks ago. I was impressed by the Spanish Minister with responsibility for fisheries, who is a professional and says all the right things. He is well briefed and said all the things that we wanted to hear; he agreed that the current policy, which allows hundreds of thousands of tons of dead fish to be thrown back into the sea rather than allowing them to be landed on shore and sold is economically unjustified and immoral. He also agreed that the reform of the CFP is necessary if we are to protect fish stocks and, at the same time, ensure that maritime industries and all the onshore industries associated with fishing remain viable. He supported the proposal that the CFP should move towards regional management. The key question is whether the Minister, his Spanish counterpart and others have got the will to replace the CFP with something better. That will be the test.

I wish to touch on some areas of concern. Monitoring and control are essential and I hope that the Minister realises that they are important. We have talked about cross-border enforcement and other things, but we do not want more bureaucracy from the Commission. As I said, the Spanish fleet has about 17,000 to 18,000 ships; I am told that Spain has about 90,000 fishermen and 500,000 people in the Spanish fishing industry, which is a big part of the country's infrastructure. The standard joke is that there are 60 fishing inspectors, all based in Madrid, but I was assured by the Minister that they are not; they move around the ports. Our dealings with Spain will therefore be critical.

Regional management is a good idea provided that the regions are given real power. In the interests of that much forgotten concept, subsidiarity, which I greatly support, it is important that regional committees have power delegated down and can do what they want for their region. My right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) recognised that limiting effort was the way forward. I may be wrong, but I believe that the Sea Fish (Conservation) Bill became law in 1992, but was not enforced. It is therefore on the statute book waiting to be used. The Minister should not feel that he has to spend time in the House introducing a new Bill; the Conservatives have done it for him already. I am quite sure that—with the consent of the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman—the Opposition would be very happy for the Minister to use that legislation in the manner

[Mr. Anthony Steen]

that he thinks is most useful. That would be a useful thing to do. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) was going to say something on that issue, but he could not attend the debate because of important constituency engagements.

I have simply gone round the course on the issues. I have travelled back from New York to make this powerful speech—I was at the Inter-Parliamentary Union and thought that they could probably do without me for a day. I did not want to miss this debate because it is always important. I also wanted to hear the Minister rehearse the same words and mouth the same platitudes that he has been saying for so many years, and he has not disappointed me at all. Thank you for calling me, Madam Deputy Speaker, ahead of all the other Conservative Members. I am looking forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

4.49 pm

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): Given the number of hon. Members who wish to speak, I shall try to keep my remarks brief. I shall try to represent the views of two organisations operating in the north-east Lincolnshire area, the Grimsby Fish Market and the Grimsby Fish Merchants Association. I thank both Martin Boyers, the chief executive of Grimsby Fish Market, for taking the time to give me his views on CFP reform, and Steve Norton, the chief executive of the association. They would like the Minister to take several messages, which I shall outline, to the Fisheries Council.

The two organisations feel that the industry itself will have to be much more involved in decision making on CFP reform. They also feel that the European Union has not taken sufficient action to protect fish stocks, and that that issue could be resolved if the industry were more involved in the decision-making process. They also feel that fleet over-capacity must be addressed because of the adverse effect on the marine environment.

The organisations also believe that in the current climate, the review must deal with stock conservation, which is the most important issue facing the CFP. They believe that the industry and other stakeholders will have to be involved in the decision-making process and that sustainable fisheries and environmental protection are aspects of that. The objective is an economically viable and self-sufficient fisheries sector.

The organisations feel that cuts in fleet size will have to be made sensitively and should not penalise those who depend for their living on the fishing industry. Not only should financial aid be sufficient to ensure that those leaving the industry are well compensated for loss of livelihood, it should be made available to address various educational issues.

Although compensation for those who lost their livelihood in the cod wars had been agreed, no payments were made until, I think, just before Christmas last year. In the past year, however, thousands of those men have been compensated. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for all that he did to support the campaign, which has helped the men to get justice. Although there are still a few problems to iron out, all of us who were involved in the campaign thank him for his help. The campaign has also highlighted the sensitivity of the compensation issue. We have been campaigning for compensation for those who were affected by the cod wars, but we do not want future generations of hon. Members to have to campaign to address compensation issues arising in today's industry. That is a particular fear.

Earlier this year, my hon. Friend announced assistance for fishing communities, which was much welcomed by hon. Members who represent fishing communities. However, as has been pointed out in some excellent research by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), there are concerns about how that money is allocated. If there is another such initiative, I hope that we will ensure that assistance goes to the fishing communities that are most affected by quota cuts.

The previous Government did not serve the fishing communities well on a related compensation issue, providing almost no assistance in the attempt to obtain compensation for those communities after the cod wars. Moreover, British taxpayers are still paying for the action that the Thatcher Government took against Spanish fishermen. That situation angered fishermen across the United Kingdom, and people should remember that it demonstrated that Conservative Members are no friends of the fishing industry.

The speech by the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) did not reveal what the Opposition would do to assist Britain's fishing communities. The Tories did nothing to address quota hopping, which resulted in the payment of damages of, I think, more than £50 million—it was certainly millions of pounds. Indeed, I believe that they also illegally removed the UK fishing vessel register. What they did to the fishing community was scandalous. I welcome what my hon. Friend the Minister has done about quota hoppers. The problem now seems to be declining because of the action that the Government have taken.

On compensation and decommissioning money, we must consider all the small businesses such as fish producers and smokeries in Grimsby docks. Such businesses are also affected by the reduction of quotas and by decommissioning—issues that can have an severe knock-on effect in the community and on small businesses. That must be considered more. When we discuss fisheries, we talk far too often only about the men and boats, rather than about all the associated industries on which our communities depend for employment. I should also like fishing communities' local authorities to be regarded as stakeholders in these matters. They should be more involved in decision making and discussion. The other matter that the organisations in my area would like my hon. Friend to take to the Fisheries Council is industrial fishing. Anybody who looks at the evidence will see that the Danish industrial fisheries are doing particular damage and are probably undermining the cod and hake recovery programmes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) mentioned concern expressed by the Grimsby Fish Producers Organisation about climate and the fact that red mullet and swordfish have recently been found off the Lincolnshire coast. He said that that obviously related to global warming and climate change. There could be something in that suggestion. We must be very careful about climate change, especially with regard to the hydrodynamics of the ocean. If the ice caps melt and fresh water is released, salinity and water movements will be affected. The effect would be to switch off the gulf stream and the north Atlantic drift, to make waters here much colder—

Mr. Morley: And to drown Cleethorpes.

Shona McIsaac: Indeed, most of my constituency would probably disappear under the sea.

We must be very careful when talking about climate change. Grimsby's fish producers are not happy with the scientific research. They feel that it is flawed and that the vessels are returning to the same grids year after year, while the changing hydrodynamics, currents and temperature of the ocean mean that the fish are moving to different areas. They believe that we might be getting false data, so they would like the scientific research to be reconsidered.

I believe that changes in quota allocation and the reduction in quotas will probably not have a severe effect on Grimsby. I am sad to say that many fishermen are taking the opportunity to decommission their vessels. If all those who have applied to decommission do so, the changes will not have much of an effect on the fleet because it simply will not exist.

I should like quickly to mention two final points to my hon. Friend the Minister. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby mentioned by-catch, in relation to which I want to raise one specific issue: harbour porpoises. I think that 7,000 harbour porpoises are probably killed by the Danish fleet every year and 1,000 by our fishing vessels. I hope that the Minister will express concern about the matter when he attends the Fisheries Council, as there are EU regulations that relate to it. Perhaps measures such as the use of acoustic devices could be introduced to try to reduce unwanted by-catch.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to disregard totally the comments of my neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby about culling, shooting and decimating the seal population of our islands. The biggest consumers of young fish are other fish. The seals are visible, and therefore some people, like him, try to blame them.

5 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I say to the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) that I shall present some evidence on the migration of fish. She thought for a moment that I was going to talk about seals. I am sure that she will find the evidence interesting; I have already discussed it with the Minister, and I shall read out an extract. It is the first detailed evidence to support the view that cod stocks in particular have substantially moved and that that might undermine some of the methods of current scientific research.

First, I want to outline some of the politics of the industry. When I listened to the comments of the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) about the Minister's longevity, I could not help thinking about the transience of Tory fishing spokesmen. They come and go and leave their speeches behind them. I have heard it all before. She speaks with some vigour, but as she developed her speech, I could not help reflecting that there was something to be said for the laid-back approach of her predecessor, the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss).

Conservative Members do not want to talk about the history of the common fisheries policy and their involvement in it. Given the vast expanse of green Benches with no Conservative Members to fill them, it would be unfair to put the boot in too hard. [HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] It will not stop me. Let us remember that the Conservative Government sold fishing down the river on entry into the then Common Market. In the words of the famous Scottish Office memo of the time, in the overall importance of the negotiations, fishermen were "expendable". For 18 years, not only did the Tory Government refuse to concede generally agreed sources of aid, which the EU would have accepted, for the fishing industry, but they traded its interests at every opportunity.

The hon. Member for Congleton said that horse trading—perhaps seahorse or horse mackerel trading—was part and parcel of the CFP. There was never any doubt in 18 years of government who was traded first. Time and again, the interests of the fishing industry in Scotland and elsewhere was subordinated to other policy objectives in the wider European structures.

If we consider other fishing nations, the lesson is not whether they are in or outwith the CFP, but the priority that they allocate to fishing, whatever structure they operate. Norway, outwith the EU, allocates a huge priority to its fishing industry. Year after year, it secures a good deal for its fishermen in the Europe-Norway negotiations. In the EU, Spain and Denmark accord a huge priority to fishing. Year after year, in aid or, in the case of Denmark, protection of the abomination of industrial fishing, they secure a good deal for their fishermen because of the priority that they attach to the industry.

The priority that the Conservative party accords to the fishing industry is shown by the vast expanse of green emptiness behind what remains of the Conservative Front Bench. With the honourable exception of the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen), who has attended almost every fisheries debate—although perhaps not as many as the Minister—not one Conservative Member, let alone the party, expresses an avid interest in the industry.

Let me consider the Government briefly. The Minister knows that I admire him greatly, but my comments constitute a warning. He confirmed in a debate in Westminster Hall earlier this year that his previous boss had complained in a letter, which was leaked to *The Herald*, that he had been "holding the line" against allocating decommissioning grants across the fishing industry. He then wrote—*[Interruption.]* I am sure that the those on the Tory Front Bench would be interested to hear this. If they listened to it, they might be able to make better speeches on the industry.

The previous Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food wrote:

> "We now face a development in Scotland, where the executive has responded to mass demonstrations by fishermen by offering a decommissioning scheme worth up to £25m for next year. The English industry is arguing strongly that this puts them at an obvious disadvantage and that I should offer a similar package. This is a most unfortunate situation."

I am glad that the mobilisation of the fishing industry in Scotland secured some sort of financial package, even if it was not the one that I would have chosen for the industry. I am equally glad that that motivated the Minister—or his former boss—to secure something for the fishing industry. Would it not be better, though, if we had Ministers who were prepared and able to secure a

[Mr. Alex Salmond]

package for the industry without being embarrassed by the success of the campaign in Scotland, or who were prepared to listen to the industry as a priority?

Mr. Doran: This is the third or fourth time that I have heard that letter read out in a debate, either here or in Westminster Hall. It obviously still has quite a bit of life left in it. The hon. Gentleman is being disingenuous, so far as the fishermen's demonstration is concerned, because my recollection is that the money had already been offered, and was on the table, before the demonstration started. It was not offered as a consequence of the demonstration.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman is confusing a series of demonstrations at fishing ports—which he chooses to remember because he likes to embarrass fishermen—with the demonstration that involved 180 fishing boats being photographed sailing under the Forth bridge. That was the largest mobilisation of fishing effort that we have seen in recent times, and it occurred before the announcement of the package—

Mr. Doran *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Salmond: Yes, it did. I was in the Scottish Parliament and at the fishing demonstration—

Mr. Doran *rose*—

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman sit down for a second? The fishing demonstration on the River Forth occurred the week before the announcement of the package in the Scottish Parliament. The Government were then defeated on that package because the Parliament at that stage wanted a tie-up scheme. He should not complain to me but to the former Minister, who said clearly in the leaked letter that it was the mobilisation and the campaign—to which the Executive responded in Scotland—that resulted in the package being offered. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should pursue his argument with his colleagues rather than me.

The lesson for the Minister is that there was a Fisheries Minister in Scotland who resisted the justified demand for a tie-up scheme, and she is no more. The Minister's former boss resisted the demand for a decommissioning scheme, and he is no more. If this long-serving Minister wishes to stay in office, let him listen with an open mind to these justified arguments from the fishing industry north and south of the border. I hope that he will.

I have many difficulties with the case advanced by the Conservatives. My main difficulty is that they do not address where we are at present, or how to get the best deal that we possibly can in the current political context. If the Conservatives were proposing to leave the European Union, of course they could adopt a new fisheries policy, although it would then have to be negotiated with other people, new arrangements would have to be made, and all the rest of it. But that is not their policy, so their argument has no meaning whatsoever.

Those of us who do not like the CFP—including the fishermen's organisations, whatever their standpoint—who see its faults and limitations and who have made speech after speech and argument after argument against it, have managed to engage with some aspects of it. We can now see a glimmer of light, at least in certain areas, such as in the growing acceptance of the concept of zonal management. We are not there yet: not everybody has agreed to it. There is still resistance across the European Union, but there is majority support for it, so far as we can judge. As the Minister knows, it was at least mentioned favourably—let us say no more than that—in the fisheries policy Green Paper. My late colleague, Dr. Alan McCartney, should be mentioned in despatches as a pioneer of that approach to fisheries management, in which fisheries organisations north and south of the border engaged. They can now see a possibility of the policy coming to fruition.

The engagement of scientists and fishermen in exploratory and research voyages is very much in its infancy, but the Scottish Fishermen's Federation told us yesterday that it hopes that it will make the scientific research more meaningful. The Scottish industry in particular has pioneered certain technical measures. I know that they are not the Minister's specific responsibility, but I hope that he will do his level best to ensure that they receive their proper reward in terms of the allocation of quota. The industry has been told, "Use technical measures to conserve fish," so those measures cannot be ignored when questions of quota are decided.

I must refer to what I promised the House is interesting research and evaluation that I hope will help the Minister in arguing about cod migration in the coming negotiations. Unless there is at least an increase in the cod quota, the recovery in other North sea stocks and nephrops stocks or quotas in particular will be badly affected. Any benefit that fishermen should take from a recovery in stocks or a well sustained industry such as the shellfish industry will be ruined by what may be done to the cod allocation and quota.

The Scottish Fishermen's Organisation has carried out a study of boats fishing for northern cod in particular, and I shall give the Minister the full report for his evaluation, but I want to read the House a few paragraphs. It states:

> "The reduction in the cod total allowable catch for the North Sea in the current year was amongst the most savage reductions ever imposed in any fishery. The 2001 TAC is some 45 per cent. lower than the 2000 TAC. And this reduction was on top of significant reduction in the previous year when most of the Scottish groups undertaking sectoral quota management responsibilities took their full allocations of . . . cod.
>
> There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that the spatial distribution of cod in the North Sea is in the process of changing and in particular the distribution of cod is moving in a northerly direction. This is highlighted by the fact that the Scottish groups have taken a far greater proportion of their cod allocations in the North Sea than those groups based further south. And an examination of individual vessel landings who concentrate on cod suggest that they have not seen much of a reduction in their cod catches in the current year.
>
> The reality of the current year has been that despite the cod closure areas, the reduced fishing year resulting from the fishermen's tie up, the reduced vessel allocations necessitated by reduced total allowable catches, vessels have actually maintained their cod catches in the northern sector of the North Sea.
>
> What this does suggest is required is a reappraisal of the way in which the sampling of North Sea cod stock is carried out. Taking samples from the same area over a long period of time is in accord with scientific discipline. But when the anecdotal evidence suggests that changes have taken place in the spatial distribution of a stock then the strict disciplines of comparability have to be revised. If the

Western mackerel stock was still being assessed on the basis of catches in the Minches which was the main catching area 20 years ago, the scientific assessment would be that the stock had . . . vanished. The reality is that the stock has seldom been larger but is in a different location. It is essential that the cod stock in the North Sea be treated as one that may have been over fished but has responded to environmental and other factors and may very well be in . . . better condition than a narrow interpretation of the known facts suggests. The fact is that all the facts are not known because yesterday's science has not taken account of all the changes that are taking place within the marine ecosystem within the North Sea."

To back up that detailed analysis, the fishing results from 22 vessels specialising in catching cod in northern waters produced significant evidence: those vessels are suffering less of a reduction in catch than would otherwise be expected.

I know that the Minister will take that evidence on board and, if the worst comes to the worst and he is unable to negotiate a satisfactory cod quota in the first round at the European Council, he might go for a mid-year review based on a special scientific assessment of those areas in spring, which is the next available period.

I hope that he takes that evidence on board, because, following the decommissioning victory, if that is what it was, a huge number of Scottish boats applied for decommissioning. That in its turn shows how depressed the industry is. Young men in my constituency are being asked to go to sea for £10,000 a year: there is thus a shortage of experienced seamen and crews, with all the consequent dangers.

The processing sector cannot survive without a steady supply of fish. We have evidence that many stocks are on the way to recovery: in many areas, the fish are there. It would be a tragedy if we could not manage the difficulty that we are experiencing, certainly with cod stocks, in a way that allowed full access to fishing opportunities, and enabled as many as possible of our constituents to retain their livelihoods.

The fishing policy is not just about the conservation of fish, although that is vital. It is not just about the conservation of one species—cod—however important that may be. It is about the conservation of fishing communities. I trust that the Fisheries Minister—a long-lasting Fisheries Minister—will bear that in mind as he takes our case to Europe.

5.15 pm

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): I apologise to both my hon. Friend the Minister and the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) for being unable to stay for the winding-up speeches. I wish the Minister well in his efforts at the Fisheries Council. He is well respected in fishing communities for his knowledge and understanding of the industry, and if there is anyone who can take our message away and argue the case forcefully it is him. However, none of us underestimates the difficulties that that may involve, especially in the context of the savage quota cuts that are having a particularly dramatic effect in the Irish sea and on Fleetwood's fishermen. I shall concentrate on the impact on Fleetwood.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) pointed out, we are talking not only about catching effort, but about fishing communities and about all the jobs in the onshore industry. We are talking about the auction hall, the processors, the retailers and the wholesalers. Many more jobs onshore depend on the catching effort. The CFP was introduced to safeguard fishing communities, but it has not done very well in that regard. We must ensure that it does rather better in future.

Franz Fischler, the European Fisheries Commissioner, visited Fleetwood recently. I think that it was the first time that a European Commissioner had done so. I thank my friend Terry Wynn, MEP for facilitating the visit, which was much appreciated by the local fishing community and all representatives of the local fishing industry. In the past, they had gone to Brussels to put their case—this was the first occasion on which Brussels had come to them. Commissioner Fischler not only listened to what they had to say, but engaged in a constructive debate with them, and his Cabinet member Maya Kirshner remained the next day to take part in even more detailed discussions.

I am pleased that Commissioner Fischler recognises the substantial shortcomings of the CFP. In an article in the 21 September edition of *Fishing News*, he said:

"We have to end the cycle of short term measures which are detrimental to both fish resources and the fisheries sector."

That reflects what happens annually here. We have a relatively short debate, and then the Fisheries Minister goes to Europe. Everything is done in a rush. We need a much better system of organising quotas and organising the industry.

Commissioner Fischler went on:

"There is no doubt in my mind that the fishing industry must be more involved in fisheries decision making."

That is why local fishermen welcomed his visit, but there has been disappointment in Fleetwood at recent announcements by the Commission, both about the substantial cuts in quota—the 55 per cent. cut in the haddock quota is huge—and about the operation of the Irish sea cod recovery programme for next year. I hope that at this late stage the Government will press the Commission and the Council of Ministers further on some aspects of the conservation plan for next year.

My hon. Friend the Minister is well aware of many of the issues that I shall raise, because I have raised them with him over the past two years in detailed correspondence. I am pleased to say that he has, on occasion, been able to respond positively. However, we are now addressing those issues against the backdrop of substantial cuts and an industry that is looking for some sort of help for the future.

With regard to the cod recovery programme, I wish to raise the issue of the closed area in the Irish sea. The eastern Irish sea—Liverpool bay and Morecambe bay—was included in the 2000 closure programme but not in this year's. However, the eastern Irish sea is recognised as a major cod spawning ground. Fleetwood fishermen requested of Commissioner Fischler that it be brought back into any future programme closures. They also asked that it should include any closure that had a significant by-catch of cod. The derogation to beam trawlers working in the eastern Irish sea is unacceptable to Fleetwood fishermen.

My constituents are disappointed that neither of those requests was met in next year's plan for the Irish sea. That is especially bewildering because the explanatory memorandum to the proposed new Council regulations acknowledges that cod stocks have reduced to such a level that they cannot readily replenish themselves by

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reproduction. If stocks are so low, why will not the Commission listen to Fleetwood men who say from personal experience that spawning cod are being caught in the eastern Irish sea in large numbers by Belgian and Dutch beam trawlers? By mid-September, in area 7a Belgian beam trawlers alone had caught 235 tonnes of cod, or 11 per cent. of the total allowable catch. The total Belgian and Dutch cod quota for area 7a, including swaps, is now 310 tonnes, which accounts for 15 per cent. of the TAC. The information that the Fleetwood Fish Forum has from the surveillance carried out by the enforcement agency is that the main effort of those vessels in January, February, March and April 2001 in area 7a was carried out in statistical rectangles, including those for the eastern Irish sea that were included in the first cod recovery programme.

Because of their cod catches, Dutch and Belgian beam trawlers are included in the recovery programme in the North sea. Their combined quotas account for 15 per cent. of the TAC for that area. At the cod and hake meeting in Brussels on 19 October, they were included in the measures to protect hake. They asked for a derogation to use 80 mm nets in The Hague boxes to the south-west of the UK, but were refused. During the proposed closed season in the western Irish sea—11 February to 30 April—the beamers come into the eastern Irish sea and catch fish heavy with roe, swimming along the bottom of the sea. That is not conservation.

Fleetwood men are not anti-Dutch and Belgian beamers per se, but they want fair treatment. They want the Dutch and Belgian vessels to be incorporated in any cod recovery programme in the Irish sea, as they are in the North sea and to the south-west of England. The Fleetwood men think that beamers should be brought into the programme as well as recognising that small local boats with low horsepower must be allowed to continue to fish in the so-called Blackpool box. My hon. Friend the Minister will recall the problem in 2000 when those vessels were not allowed to fish and had nowhere else to go. That caused problems. Their effort is very small and they do not affect the cod recovery programme or the viability of the fisheries.

My hon. Friend the Minister and I have corresponded on mesh sizes. Fleetwood fishermen tell me that mesh sizes should be linked to horse power. They see beam trawlers exploiting regulations on mesh sizes and mixed fisheries and catching a wide variety of fish. That undermines the effort to conserve stocks in the Irish sea.

Information from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea shows that cod, whiting and sole in area 7a are being fished beyond biological limits. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will re-examine the issues of mesh sizes and the quotas that are allocated in mixed fisheries. I hope that he will also look into the way in which vessels such as beam trawlers, which specialise in catching sole, can catch substantial amounts of cod as well, even though they are using a much smaller mesh size. Moreover, I am told that the mesh size for sole catches many fish that are not yet mature and have not yet reproduced. Clearly, that is another serious conservation issue.

I understand too that the Commission is looking at the possibility of introducing a uniform mesh size of 120 mm for cod fisheries around the whole of the UK. This is a very technical matter, and my fishermen sometimes show me the size of the mesh and the twine that they use in their nets. They tell me that the thicker twine that they use in the 100 mm mesh works in exactly the same way as thinner twine in a 120 mm mesh. I understand that that is accepted, and I hope that my hon. Friend will look into that when the Commission considers introducing a uniform mesh size.

I come briefly to the matter of governance. Many hon. Members have drawn attention to the recommendations from the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation on regional fisheries management. They are widely supported, with the proviso that the particular needs of sub-regions around the country must also be taken into account.

All parties involved accept that decision making has been too remote and bureaucratic. The Commission's Green Paper acknowledges that fishermen have not been sufficiently involved in developing acceptable technical measures. We need the advice and expertise of local fishermen, scientists and administrators if we are to formulate a policy that will deliver a sustainable fishery, and which will also be acceptable to those who work in the industry.

Several hon. Members have commented on decommissioning, an issue that excites very different opinions. Previous schemes led to a large number of vessels being taken out, and meant that no new investment was made. Seven years ago, 40 local boats were registered with the Fleetwood Fish Producers Organisation, but today there are only 20. We could end up with no local vessels fishing our local waters in the Irish sea. That would be dreadful, so I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will recognise the impact that decommissioning can have on fishing communities. At the same time, however, some fishermen regard decommissioning as an opportunity to leave the industry with some dignity.

Finally, I shall sum up by thanking Tom Watson and the members of the Fleetwood Fish Forum for their hard work in supporting the local fishing industry. I am also grateful to them for the many hours that they spend briefing me and keeping me updated on issues of local concern. Their plea to my hon. Friend and his colleagues in the Council of Ministers is that they work to protect the British fishing industry and to support the needs of our local fishing communities, so that when—and if—stocks recover, Fleetwood fishermen will still be around to benefit.

5.29 pm

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): I apologise to the Minister for having to leave the Chamber during his speech. This was no discourtesy to the House or the Minister but, as a member of the Committee dealing with the Proceeds of Crime Bill, I found myself in mid-sentence when the Committee was adjourned at 11.25 this morning, and was left with no option but to return. I welcomed much in the Minister's speech, and shall make every effort to familiarise myself with it in its entirety in the *Official Report*.

I welcome this debate, as many other Members have done. It has struck me, as a fairly new Member, how difficult it is to get the opportunity to discuss fishing matters. The Minister is no doubt aware that at the last Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Question Time there were no fishing questions. On the previous occasion, the one question on fishing—about total allowable catches and their effect on Essex, that great fishing community—was given less than two minutes. Therefore, I am glad to take part in this debate.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of fishing to my constituency, especially to Shetland. Some 33 per cent. of the Shetland economy—£180 million—is derived from fishing and some 20 per cent. of the active Shetland population is employed directly in fishing. The Minister knows that because he attended a seminar in Shetland as recently as May this year. His attendance was greatly welcomed and I hope that he will return there soon to keep up to speed with what the fishermen in my constituency are saying.

I do not know whether the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) has ever been to Shetland. I suspect that after her contribution to the debate, if she were minded to make the journey she might be given a rather hotter welcome than would previously have been the case. We have long felt that the 18 years of a Tory Government damaged the fishing industry in Shetland and elsewhere in Scotland because of their indifference towards us. I was intrigued to see from her contribution that their policy has moved on from indifference to downright hostility.

I was particularly concerned that the hon. Lady—who, unfortunately, has not had the courtesy to stay for the rest of the debate—felt it necessary to quote from the minutes of the Shetland Fishermen's Association in trying to support her contention that the Scottish pelagic fleet was given the benefit of a different enforcement regime. She referred to one of my constituents, Josie Simpson, and quoted the part of the minutes that said:

> "Josie Simpson reported his disappointment at a recent pelagic enforcement and monitoring committee meeting where it was made clear the Fisheries Department intend to leave it up to the industry to clean up overquota landings."

That would be a fairly flimsy justification, at best, for the hon. Lady's remarkable assertion. However, I have obtained the whole minute, and from what follows it occurs to me that the hon. Lady may have come very close to misleading the House with regard to the position of the Shetland Fishermen's Association and my constituent. The minute continues:

> "A discussion took place and it was agreed that the Association should continue with our existing policy of calling for black fish to be eliminated across the whole of the EU. Disappointment was expressed that the Fisheries Department did not appear to show the will to eliminate overquota landings while actively trying to eliminate mis-reporting of fishing grounds. It was agreed the focus of their enforcement was wrong.
>
> It was reported that new satellite monitoring rules recently introduced require a manual report to be sent to the Fisheries Department every 2 hours rather than 24 hours if the equipment breaks down."

That does not sound like an enforcement regime that is in any way lax or indifferent. I hope that the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) will address that matter and put things straight when he sums up. The hon. Lady has just returned to the Chamber, but I shall not take interventions at present.

The Minister made reference in his speech to the elements of the common fisheries policy that he considers work well. I commend him for that and hope that he will give his blessing to the continuation of another element of the current policy—the position with regard to the Shetland box. That is crucial to the fishing industry in the northern isles. It has worked exceptionally well and might indeed serve as a prototype for zonal management under a reformed common fisheries policy. The licensing scheme limits the number of vessels of more than 26 m in length, and it is extremely important as it also allows unrestricted access for smaller boats.

The scheme is an important element in sustainability. It encourages small boats and it is crucial that inshore fishermen in Orkney and Shetland have such unrestricted access. They must be able to continue landing in Shetland and Orkney, as their contribution to the local fish processing industry is also of immense importance.

Several hon. Members referred to decommissioning and tie-up. The Scottish decommissioning package of £25 million is most generous. I ask the Minister, however, not to shut the door on tie-up and not to close his mind to it. I commend to him the report issued by the World Wide Fund for Nature, "Now or Never", which makes a strong case that short to medium-term financial assistance of that sort is a sensible long-term precaution and a conservation measure. I urge the Minister to use every available opportunity to ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ensure that funding will be available for a tie-up scheme in the future.

I thank the Minister for his support—unlike the support of the hon. Member for Congleton, his was unqualified—for the case being put by the Orkney islands and Shetland islands councils for the supremely important leaseback schemes for quota that they are operating in the northern isles. I have no doubt that they are doing so properly. I urge the Minister vigorously to pursue at every opportunity the case for maintaining such schemes. They are of crucial importance to one of the most fragile industries in one of our most remote and peripheral communities.

Sustainability for the Shetland fishing industry is not some high principle or a great ideal to which we must aspire. No community depends on fishing as we do. For us, it is essential to our continued survival and economic prosperity. I urge the Minister to remember that when he goes to Brussels.

5.39 pm

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): I congratulate the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael). As I come from the community of Scarborough and Whitby, I can appreciate that he has a complete grasp of the strong wishes of his community in respect of the fisheries debate. I welcome him to this debate, and hope that he will make speeches in many such debates.

We experienced a sense of deja vu during the contribution of the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen). I am sorry that he is no longer in his place. In fact, it was not so much deja vu; his approach to this annual debate was more like "Groundhog Day". Obviously, I am sure that all hon. Members were pleased to hear that he had flown back specially from New York to make his contribution, but I had a feeling that I had heard his speech many times before.

Unlike many of the other hon. Members who have spoken, I feel that the agenda is moving forward. I commend to the Minister the contributions made by my hon. Friends the Members for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), for Blackpool,

[Lawrie Quinn]

North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) and for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell), and I commend them for the fact that the agenda is moving on.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman does a disservice to the one Tory Member who has been here for most of the debate. I have listened to many speeches made by the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen), and the one that he made today was the most practical, most up to date and most open-minded that I have ever heard him make. I think that he is changing his mind.

Lawrie Quinn: I bow to the hon. Gentleman's wisdom on the issue, but from my perspective, having replaced a similarly minded gentleman in the Scarborough and Whitby constituency in 1997, it certainly sounded like "Groundhog Day". For those who are not aware of that movie, the point is that when the principal character wakes up in the morning he has forgotten what he learned the day before. He finally gets there, but it takes a long time. Surely if the Conservative Benches are to be filled in future annual fisheries debates, they have a long way to go and many more groundhog days before them.

I regret that, once again, the editorial line taken in today's *Yorkshire Post*—the principal newspaper in Yorkshire and the Humber region—involves a sense of "Groundhog Day". I hope that the Minister will have an opportunity to read that article if he has not already done so. The headline is "Fishermen fear scrap heap in quota cuts". I recall seeing that headline as a preface to the debates that we had last year, the year before and the one before that. In any case, I suggest that the media need to play their part in the wider national debate on the economic, environmental and socio-economic issues that are important to the fishing communities. They need to get down to the quayside more often.

I commend my hon. Friend the Minister for visiting my constituency on numerous occasions in recent years. He has met my constituents, who rely on the industry for their incomes. He has listened to them and engaged with them, and he goes from strength to strength in their minds, especially given his record of representing the industry, which is very important to my constituency and many coastal communities around the country.

On most of the visits that my hon. Friend has made to my constituency he will have met Mr. Arnold Locker—a well-known fisherman in Whitby, the principal fishing port in my constituency. I am glad to say that he is now the NFFO's chairman-elect. I very much look forward to receiving the national briefings that he may send to those of us in the all-party fisheries group next year. I hope that Arnold will take the time to come to London to help to brief us for next year's annual fisheries debate, and I hope to see him then.

Like many fishermen, Arnold Locker is very good at communicating verbally. Having previously heard from Arnold an awful lot, I was very pleased that he has now put pen to paper. He has written a very interesting article in the current edition of *NFFO news*, which is an important newspaper for the industry. In many respects, Arnold's "View from the wheelhouse", as it is called, reflects the current opinion, which may be dangerous to my hon. Friend, that the great esteem in which he is held in Scarborough and Whitby and other fishing communities may be affected and that the choppy seas that he may face in the negotiations may be even rougher than any of us had previously thought.

Arnold Locker's article is entitled "Why the cod plan must be scrapped" and it conveys the message that I have heard on the quayside. Fishermen in Whitby are suspicious of the Commission because, as the Minister said, its recovery plan for the North sea chooses to ignore key parts of the science.

Arnold writes:

> "It is ludicrous that this cod recovery plan is still going ahead at a rate of knots despite the fact that we don't know why there is no cod in our part of the North Sea. It seems unlikely that overfishing is the reason, given the fact that the fleet in Yorkshire and Humberside has been reduced by about 80 per cent. in recent years. The real reason is probably due to global warming, which is well illustrated by the good catches of red mullet our boats are now getting. This is further backed-up by catch statistics . . . which reveal that cod catches are much higher in the northern North Sea compared with areas off the English coast."

Such areas include Yorkshire. He adds:

> "Nobody seems to care. It also seems crazy that our Yorkshire boats, ranging from 200 to 480hp and with a small bollard pull, have to work to the same mesh size regulations as much bigger 2,000hp stern trawlers. Conservation policy, or the lack of it, means that the whole industry is on a roller-coaster at the moment. We need to get some sense into everything and the first step should be a far-reaching investigation into conservation policy. And until that is done, the pointless cod recovery plan should be shelved".

Arnold Locker is not only putting pen to paper but talking to many people in my constituency and up and down the Yorkshire and Humber coast. The fact that someone like him is doing that means that the immense credibility of the long-term sustainable approach to fishing policy that scientists have been able to generate in the fishing community is being questioned. We must be able to demonstrate to the industry that the science is being applied, so, as many Members have said, I hope that the Minister will stress in the Council meeting on 16 and 17 December that the science cannot be ignored.

If the science is ignored, short-term damage will be done to the delicate relationship between the quayside, the scientists and this place. Furthermore, longer-term damage might be done to a conservation programme that fishermen and key stakeholders can buy into. The problem is not just the short-term one of quotas, but the long-term credibility of the Minister and this place when we talk about the national interest.

People on the quayside have asked me to raise several other specific questions in the debate. If the Minister does not have time to respond in his closing remarks, I hope that he will be able to write to me.

Does my hon. Friend accept that effort control in the form proposed by the Commission for the recovery plan will be both brutal in effect and uncertain in its benefits? Does he accept that the short-term losses associated with the North sea mesh size increase to 120 mm will be crippling for the industry? Does he accept that there is manifest agreement for public investment in recovery measures that will allow the fishing industry to rebuild its stocks to optimum levels? I stress to my hon. Friend that many Whitby fishermen have benefited more from the recovery package in Scotland than from the English scheme. Those fishermen are sceptical about what the public purse is managing to achieve.

Access to the North sea—my hon. Friend has heard us get on this old hobby horse many times before—is pertinent to the debate in which he will engage in Brussels in the next week or so. What steps will the Government take to ensure that Spanish access to the North sea from 2003 will not result in a by-catch of quota species and an overall increase in the fishing effort?

Other hon. Members mentioned industrial fishing. Every fisherman finds it abhorrent that Denmark and other north European countries can still use industrial fishing for non-human consumption purposes. Will he ensure that he is seen to press for that to change?

On a local issue, a few salmon netsmen still fish out of the River Esk. My hon. Friend is aware that there is great concern about how long it is taking to conclude the negotiations on a compensation package to buy out the netsmen's licences. Obviously a tendering process is going on and I would appreciate it if he referred to the conclusion of that delicate negotiation.

I wish my hon. Friend well on behalf of the fishing communities of Scarborough and Whitby. I hope that he comes back with a headline settlement that is far better than the bleak prospect that we currently face, and that the next time he visits my constituency he is held in the same regard.

5.51 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am pleased to participate in the annual debate on fisheries. It has been of a high quality, and I hope that the Minister appreciates the assistance that we are trying to give him in his difficult job as he takes his arguments into Europe on 16 and 17 December. In fact, I think that we should have an annual dinner each year in which mugs are cast. The Minister could be the honorary patron of the organisation and I might even buy some of the drinks.

The debate has been valuable. The Minister has done well to secure a full day. I have much more confidence that the industry is in his hands rather than those of some of his predecessors who have sat on the Treasury Bench during my 18 years in this place. That is good. We hope that he will build on his reputation and use his experience to great effect on 16 and 17 December.

Although I concur with much that has been said by hon. Members on both sides of the House, I fear that the situation in my constituency is as bad as it has ever been. We cannot avoid that, and it is not the Minister's fault. I have noticed for the first time that any sense of hope is beginning to disappear, especially among young skippers. That is very bad. In larger coastal communities and bigger sections of the industry, such as in Peterhead and the places represented by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), there is a higher critical mass. A village-based industry or a small coastal community reach a level at which skills, and the investment, go.

There are two things that are different this year and that worry me. The volatility of scientific advice makes it harder for people to plan investment, marketing and processing. We have had long battles. The Minister has led the argument, with some success, that science is the thing to follow. Cod recovery plans and so on are the only way forward in the longer term. However, there are deeply worrying wild fluctuations in scientific advice and the statistics on which we base policy decisions. As a lay person, one would think that they cannot be right every year. On top of that we have to deal with the Commission's new complementary measures, which do not have anything directly to do with science and produce more difficult TAC situations with which we have to cope.

In addition to those difficulties, we face an uncertain year come 2002. Everybody understands that the common fisheries policy needs reform. I know that the Minister understands that, and that he is aware of crucial issues such as zonal management and relative stability in the six and 12-mile limits, but they represent yet more uncertainty, and that does not help. We must all work harder still to address those issues.

I am very worried about the level of discards in 2001, which other hon. Members have mentioned. It seems to me, from my experience and from what I am told, that there is a big biomass of undersized fish, and catching them is leading to discards on a scale that we have not seen for a long time. That may get worse next year. I do not know what can be done. In my constituency, 250 boxes of haddock that were just above minimum size were left unsold, so it is clear that even if one lands this stuff, there is no market for it. We need actively to address the issue of discards, and if the Minister can get better scientific advice and support on that, so much the better.

I agree that transitional protection, to which the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and many others referred, needs urgent consideration. I think that I can win an argument in my coastal communities that with the industry in a state of flux, if sensible scientific advice is consistently followed for five years, there will be better times ahead. However, fishermen will not be able to survive for that time, so some support is necessary. In Scotland, £25 million for decommissioning has gone a long way, and that programme has allowed people to exit the industry with dignity. Fishermen, particularly those with smaller boats, will find it hard to deal with the technical conservation measures that will come in early next year. The Government need to work harder and harder to provide the support that the fishing industry needs to survive until, we hope, the cod recovery programme and other measures come on-stream and come right.

I subscribe to the view about ambient temperature changes that the hon. Members for Banff and Buchan and for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) usefully put on the record. We need to understand those important issues, but it is difficult for us, as policy makers who are laymen, to do so. I hope that we will not ignore the advice that we are being given.

As I said, decommissioning is important, and industrial fishing must be dealt with, but I want to leave the Minister to consider two other issues. The first is the effect of the proposed cut in nephrops in my area, which will be very difficult to sell to fishermen. It is almost impossible to convince the sector in my constituency that such cuts are necessary. There has been a huge diversion of effort, which we all expected as a result of the cod recovery programme, so it is impossible for me to return to my constituency and defend nephrops cuts on the scale suggested by the commissioner. We produced evidence on that, and I was surprised by it because I thought that in the north-east sector there would have been a bigger cod by-catch. If the Minister takes any message from me

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

to the negotiations on 16 and 17 December, it is that he should fight his hardest to try to inject more common sense into them.

Secondly, as someone who spends quite a lot of his time in this place considering social security issues, I know that there are big changes ahead in the social security programme. The Government are sensibly moving towards working tax credits, but the way in which the fishing industry works, with days at sea determined by the weather, makes it difficult for people on jobseeker's allowance to try to get any sustainable help coherently delivered by the benefits system. It would be sensible if the Minister could spend half an hour with his colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions. He could then explore whether the introduction of tax credits, later this year and beyond, will provide better support and ease access to the benefits system, particularly for crewmen.

Of all the resources, fish are probably the main one on our minds in this debate, but if we do not have the skilled labour to go to sea, we are all wasting our time. It is becoming increasingly obvious to me that young people are not prepared to contemplate any career in fishing, and it is becoming harder and harder for share fishermen north of the border to find crews to go to sea.

Let us hope that the Minister can keep in mind all the points that have been raised. If, after the resolution of these difficult matters on 16 or 17 December, he can secure a meeting of the European Standing Committee under the scrutiny process, that would be appreciated by all.

6 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): It is a pleasure to be called to speak in a fisheries debate, especially as it is the first time that I have been able to speak in one for more than two years, having served as a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. That experience gave me some insight into the role of the Department in dealing with fisheries.

I am sure that we could not have a more committed Fisheries Minister than my hon. Friend. As has been said, he is clearly the most knowledgeable Fisheries Minister we have had. He has become irreplaceable, even if after four years of fishing and floods, some of us may feel that he deserves promotion, or perhaps relief. It was said earlier that he was the best Fisheries Minister in a Labour Government; I think that he is the best in any Government. I know that he has a hard task in government carrying the flag for fishing, which is why I begin my contribution by saying why I believe fishing is important in national terms.

First and obviously, fishing is a source of healthy and nutritious food—non-fattening food, as I have discovered in recent months, by focusing my diet more on fish. It is also an extremely popular food, though not always in the least fattening form. Fish and chips is our national dish. If hon. Members have not tasted them at their best, I invite them to sample the fish and chip shops of Lowestoft. It is inconceivable that we in the UK will not want to eat fish.

We are an island nation, so it is unthinkable that we will not want to catch a substantial proportion of our fish ourselves. We expect to be a top fishing nation. We know that we are now catching much less than we did and that there are fewer fish to catch. Governments cannot conjure up more fish, but our industry is becoming weaker, relative to that of other countries that fish our waters. I shall return to that.

All round our island are fishing ports and fishing communities. Fishing is especially important to places such as Lowestoft, where I live. It is not easy to find other work in such peripheral locations. Fishing in those communities is in people's hearts, as well as their minds. We know that there are only a fraction of the jobs that there were and that fishing is no longer the major part of those local economies as it once was. However, it is still a substantial part of the economy in Lowestoft, and it is an emotive issue.

Everybody in a fishing community knows a fishing family and sadly, everybody knows a fishing family who has suffered a bereavement at sea. Fishing is rather like mining. When we see it in those terms, fishing has political importance, like mining. We should recognise that.

Other hon. Members referred to the recent WWF report, "Now or Never", which is one of the most significant reports that we have had for a long time. It is significant because it resulted from a partnership between the WWF, an environmental organisation, and the fishermen's organisations. This is the first time that that has happened, as far as I know. It is the first of two new partnerships that I shall mention.

I do not have time to dwell on the report, but it paints a grim picture. It notes that our fishing industry is disintegrating before our eyes. It charts the decline, and points out that the financial assistance to the UK fishing industry is among the lowest in the European Union: 850 euros per fisherman in the UK, compared with 3,532 in Belgium, 3,524 in Germany, 1,222 in the Netherlands and so on. As I said, the Government cannot conjure up more fish, but those figures suggest that we could do more. All countries face the same problem of stock depletion, but the Dutch and Spanish industries seem to be in a stronger position than ours.

My principal contention is that this country needs a comprehensive plan for fishing, which will be achieved only by the Government and the industry working together in a formal taskforce. There should be a plan not just for conserving fish, vital as that is, but for the industry as well. The plan for the fish is obviously the common fisheries policy, which we are trying to reform; it certainly needs to be much better. We come to the House annually to discuss the usual measures—tax, multi-annual guidance programmes or MAGPs, recovery programmes, technical measures and so on—but what about the fishing industry? As other Members have said, if we succeed in conserving our fish and achieving a recovery of stocks, what shape will our industry be in? We must ensure that there is still a worthwhile industry to catch the fish.

I want to put to my hon. Friend the Minister the views of my local fishing industry on measures for the year ahead. In Lowestoft, the fleet of North sea plaice fishermen agrees with the scientists' recommendation of a total allowable catch of 77,000 tonnes for North sea plaice. The fishermen make that suggestion, despite knowing that there has been a better year class for plaice this year; they have asked me to urge my hon. Friend not to agree a higher quota in the Council of Ministers. They accept that the Dutch may try to push it up to

86,000 tonnes, but they do not want that because they want to conserve the fish. There is therefore a second remarkable partnership; fishermen and scientists agree on what the level of fishing should be. That came out yesterday in the meeting between the all-party group on fisheries and the NFFO, which is at one with the scientists. In those circumstances, the Commission should not disregard the science; I urge my hon. Friend to ensure that on 17 December, the politicians do not disregard it either.

My plaice fishermen do not want closed areas, whether for North sea cod or other fish; they regard such areas as unfair for plaice fishermen, who have a tiny by-catch of cod. Last year, they were prevented from going to catch plaice by the cod closure programme. They appreciated the extra little box that my hon. Friend negotiated, but last winter was extremely tough, especially with high fuel prices. Like them, I feel that they could be allowed into closed areas under satellite monitoring, with their catches validated on landing. If there has to be a closure period this year or in future, I do not see why they cannot be allowed to do that. We would know exactly which boats are fishing; my fishermen do not catch much cod and must be allowed to carry on catching plaice when those fish are there to catch. They do not want proposals for tie-ups or days at sea, which would be impossible to manage because of their difficult circumstances.

Mr. Carmichael: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that closure plans alone, without a measure of funded tie-up, simply lead to displacement of the overfishing problem?

Mr. Blizzard: I certainly agree. My fishermen say that if there are tie-ups and closure periods without compensation, the industry will simply be unable to manage and will be brought to its knees. If that happens, we fear for the future.

The Lowestoft plaice fishermen voluntarily use nets with a larger mesh, which is a key point for CFP reform. Why do we continue to allow smaller mesh sizes? How can fish recover if young fish are still being caught? It is madness not to address that crucial point. I want to emphasise that we must not penalise the plaice fishermen, whatever we agree we need to do for cod. I also have long-line fishermen in my constituency. Long-lining is an environmentally friendly and sustainable fishing method, although my fishermen cannot find any cod at the moment. They fear that stocks have already collapsed in the southern part of the North sea. They, too, are now at one with scientists. Last week, they came to see me and said that the "scientists were horrifically right" all along. Now they are looking for radical action to enable the cod that they fish to recover.

We hope that a reformed common fisheries policy will deliver more fish. However, what about the industry? Some people in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs say that they are concerned only with the fish, not the industry. If so, which Department sponsors the fishing industry? For my money, DEFRA is the only possibility.

We need to do more. We know that £11 million of the £22.5 million which my hon. Friend the Minister announced in April was from the previous grant regime. On a small point, while I am dealing with that, I should say that there are grants to encourage long lining, which is a more environmentally sustainable fishing method. However, long-liners are asking whether they will have access to a further grant, to try something else, if they cannot find any fish by the use of long lines. I make that request to the Minister.

There is £6 million for decommissioning. However, my trawler industry has told me that, in practice, it is difficult to decommission because environmental controls have resulted in ever fewer scrap facilities to chop up boats. Trawlermen feel that they may not be able to decommission to the required standard within the proposed time scale. They are therefore looking for sufficient flexibility to allow them, more simply, to put their boats beyond economic repair so that they cannot take to the water, but also to receive interim decommissioning money so that they can finish off the boats later. Smaller fishermen are also asking for decommissioning to apply to vessels under 10 m where there are too many such vessels.

I shall not dwell on the next element of the £22.5 million package as I had an Adjournment debate on that in Westminster Hall. However, the £5.5 million fishing communities regeneration initiative was a travesty at every level. It was shared out between the regions, and certainly within the eastern region, in the wrong manner, and the money was often spent on the wrong things. Lowestoft lands almost 10 per cent. of England's catch, but it was offered a mere £65,000, out of £5.5 million.

We have, however, had a bit of a breakthrough: we were offered another £60,000. That is being spent on some jolly good measures, and I wish that I had enough time to tell hon. Members about them. Nevertheless, I urge Ministers to dig into that regeneration money and try to ensure that it is spent on things that relate to the fishing industry, not on some of the things that it is being spent on that do not relate to the industry at all.

The failure of the fishing communities regeneration initiative shows the need for a proper plan for the fishing industry. However, how can we work out such a plan when the industry is not nationalised but is a collection of private businesses? The Government have already developed such a model in the oil and gas industry. Three years ago, the oil and gas industry taskforce was established, comprising the leaders of that industry and officials from three Departments including the Treasury, and it was chaired by the Minister with responsibility for energy. It set itself a deadline and developed a plan for how that industry could get more resources out of the North sea, rather than closing down the operation more quickly than was necessary. The taskforce met the deadline and is now implementing the plan through another body called Pilot.

I believe that we could do in fishing what we have done in the oil and gas industry. If we do not, our fishing industry will simply wither away. Pieces of it would fall off haphazardly, which would be no good for fishermen, for the communities in which they live or for the country. I doubt that we would ever recover from it.

The WWF and NFFO report shows how investment in a transitional package can reap a rich return. If my hon. Friend the Minister can achieve such a plan and such a partnership, we shall have a future; we could look ahead with confidence. We have seen partnerships between scientists and fishermen and between fishermen and environmental organisations, but let us now see a

[Mr. Blizzard]

partnership with the Government. If my hon. Friend can achieve that, I am sure that I would not be the only one saying that he is the best fisheries Minister we have had.

6.14 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I certainly endorse what the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) said about fisheries regeneration funding and the need to get the best deal possible for his constituency. We will support him on that, because there are obviously important implications for King's Lynn as well.

The hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) spoke about industrial fishing. I concur with what he said 100 per cent. I note that the Minister has visited his constituency; I hope that he will visit mine and talk to my fishermen. Indeed, I hope that he will come to Conservative-held constituencies. I do not know whether he is prepared to do so, but he has an open invitation to come to west Norfolk to speak to our local fishermen.

I do not know why we are having this important debate on an Adjournment motion. We should be debating a substantive motion that would enable us to have a vote at the end. I am sure that the Government have nothing to fear when it comes to putting their case to a vote, but we obviously cannot have one this evening. None the less, I welcome the fact that we are having a full day's debate on this important subject.

As most hon. Members whom I have heard have pointed out—I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I was not present for the whole debate; I had to move some amendments in a Standing Committee—the background to the debate is the reform of the common fisheries policy. In the course of the next year, the Commission will have to table a proposal for reform of the CFP. I am pleased to see that it is beginning to accept the arguments for a radical decentralisation of the CFP. I note especially that Commissioner Fischler now appears to be convinced that the new regional committees should hold real powers and responsibilities, rather than act merely in an advisory capacity.

That is good news, but I still feel that the policy is fundamentally flawed. Hon. Members have spoken much about the cod and hake fishery, which is in crisis. We have heard about a proposed programme of savage cuts in quotas for the Irish sea, the western approaches and the channel. I think that there is also probably a genuine threat to the six-mile limit in terms of open access. The abandonment of that limit would have a devastating effect on the Wash shellfish fishery. The hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby mentioned the very important point about Spain and Portugal having access to the North sea from 1 January 2003. He rightly pointed out that their quota share arrangements will limit their catch to non-quota species. However, there will, of course, be a significant by-catch of quota species, which is a serious concern.

I believe that the time has come for us not merely to reform the CFP, but scrap it completely and replace it with a series of bilateral arrangements between member states. If we continue to proceed as we are now, it will not work. We will be tinkering with a system that is fundamentally flawed. We must now move forward with a much more radical policy. That view has been expressed to me by most of the fishermen in King's Lynn and west Norfolk.

In the short time that remains, I should like to say a few words about the Wash inshore fishery, which is crucial to our local community. The main species of catch are shrimps, cockles, whelks, mussels and crabs. Forty boats and about 100 crew are involved in the King's Lynn fishing fleet. I think that the Minister knows that, as he visited the fleet during the previous Parliament. He will know that for every job at sea, there will probably be four jobs on land. On that basis, about 500 jobs in total are dependent on the fishery, which is crucial to the local economy.

As the hon. Member for Waveney pointed out very eloquently, we are not talking only about pure economics. The fishery is of huge symbolic importance. Some fishing families go back many generations. The Wash fishery and fishing folklore are deeply entrenched in the local psyche. He summed that up well.

There are various threats to the fishery. Resources in the Wash are being depleted, especially the shrimp fishery. The Minister knows that, under current regulations, white fish boats that meet their quotas are allowed to diversify into the shrimp fishery on their existing licence. There appears to be widespread support for a licensing system for inshore fishermen. I should be grateful if the Minister would comment on that.

Another important point relates to the structure of inshore fisheries. The legislation is too old. The Sea Fisheries Regulation Act 1966 and the Sea Fisheries (Conservation) Act 1967 need updating. The Minister knows that the 1966 Act is a rehashing of a 100-year-old Act. The legislation is therefore out of date, and the funding of sea fisheries committees badly needs reconsidering. Since 1966, extra responsibilities have been placed on the fisheries committees, especially environmental responsibilities, with no extra resources to accompany them. It is time for a new Bill to amalgamate legislation on sea fisheries boards so that they can address those extra responsibilities.

Other serious issues affect the Wash fishery, especially dredging, cable laying and the potential development of offshore energy in the form of wind farms. All have serious ecological side effects for marine ecosystems. They unsettle the sea bed and the silt-over of breeding grounds has a profound effect on shellfish habitats.

There has been much controversy about dredging. Although everyone feels strongly that dredging to replenish sea defences, for example the Skegness to Mablethorpe section of coastal defences, is acceptable, it is not acceptable to dredge sand and gravel for export. Roughly 30 per cent. of all offshore dredging is of minerals and sand for export. That is unacceptable. We are considering a delicate marine ecosystem. If dredging helps to support local communities and to sort out sea defences, that is one matter. But the commercial export of minerals is another.

As the Minister knows, the Crown estates have been through the pre-qualification process. The wind farms need permission from the Department of Trade and Industry, and I presume that there will be a public inquiry and that the Secretary of State will have the final say. However, on the pre-qualification site allocation, King's Lynn wind farm will have 60 turbines and the Cromer site will have 30. I accept that the benefits in renewable energy will be substantial. We must look increasingly to renewable energy. However, there are serious drawbacks for the Wash fishery.

We must consider the construction phase for 60 large turbines. It will mean substantial disruption to fisheries. The completed turbines will be surrounded by exclusion zones. I have not worked out the exact square mileage for 60 turbines, but we are considering a substantial area of fishery in the Wash. The location of the turbines will therefore be crucial. If they are located in the wrong position, we could do irreparable harm to the shrimp fishery, the whelk, cockle and mussel fishery off King's Lynn and the crab fishery off Cromer. That damage would have a profound effect on an important community in my constituency. I ask the Minister to look carefully at that.

I said a moment ago that this resource is vital to the local economy. It is essential, particularly, at a time when the wider economy is starting seriously to suffer from the downturns in manufacturing, and in the telecoms and tech sectors. Jobs are being lost across the board in those sectors in west Norfolk, and elsewhere in Norfolk and Suffolk. We are also suffering from an appalling downturn in agriculture. It is crucial that this local fishing community is given maximum priority. It is part of our local heritage, and also forms an important part of our national heritage, which is why it is essential that it should be protected and maintained. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

6.25 pm

Vera Baird (Redcar): I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to my hon. Friend the Minister and to the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), because I cannot stay for the end of the debate.

I, too, want to scale down, and I invite the Minister to take the view from my constituency, Redcar, which has one of the smallest fishing fleets. We have nine cobles, which are less-than-10-metre boats that are launched afresh each day from the beach. They fish primarily for shellfish, but also for cod, Dover sole and nephrops.

For my briefing, I owe much to Mr. David Horsley, an executive member of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations from my locality. I am also indebted to him for a well learned bit of wisdom. When I said to him, during what he must have suspected was one of my early fishing conversations, that I knew that nephrops were important to him, he said, "Why, pet, if you're going to talk to us, you're going to have to learn to call 'em prawns, like we do."

The fleet fishes using gill netting, and long lines, and some of the small boats trawl. The less-than-10-metre boat fleet gets an annual quota from DEFRA of the TAC for each relevant fish. It has already received notice that this year's quota has run out. From 14 January to 30 April 2002, it will be banned from landing any Dover sole. There is a proposed further cut of 25 per cent. in the TAC for Dover sole and, unless there is a variation in the DEFRA quota to the less-than-10-metre boat fleet, that will have a great impact on it.

This argument has to be put into the economic context in which the fleet works. It has an approximate annual catch value of between £20,000 and £40,000. That is an annual input before any costs such as diesel, maintenance, shared hard-standing—because the boats are often out of the sea—and security from urban risks. Let us compare and contrast that with larger boats, which can catch up to £50,000 worth of fish from four or more days at sea. The larger boats obviously have higher costs, but the relative economic positions are clear from those figures.

Relatively and absolutely, small-boat fishermen in Redcar live hand to mouth. In that situation, they could easily be unbalanced and tipped into inviability, and they therefore merit particular consideration. A sustainable fisheries policy means taking measures to sustain fish stocks. It also means taking measures to sustain the fishing industry, so that its contribution to the local and national economy can continue.

A further problem that my constituents see on the horizon is the increase in mesh sizes in January from 100 mm to 120 mm for trawling. Large modern trawlers can drag their huge nets faster than an unladen coble can steam at full power. The mesh, heavy enough to remain rigid at a gauge of 110 mm, cannot be towed by a small boat at a speed sufficient to keep it rigid. The weight of the mesh does not allow the boat to get sufficient weigh on, so the mesh is not rigid but opens and closes, allowing the catch to slip through. Thus, for a small boat, the effect of an increase in mesh sizes goes beyond that for a large boat and it has a particular and perhaps unforeseen, but certainly disproportionate, effect on small-boat men.

In January, mesh sizes for gill nets will be upped from 4.75 mm to 5.25 mm. That will have a much more straightforward impact on those fishermen, because, inshore, they take smaller fish. There will also be a significant and deep impact on their takings. They are concerned, too, about the revival of the Minister's intention to impose shellfish licences on static gear at a cost that, at their subsistence earnings level, is meaningful.

A primary concern is that those fishermen fish for prawns, as I am learning to call them, at the west edge—a location in the North sea 15 miles offshore and hence not protected by the 12-mile limit. Access will soon be available to the French and the Spanish, who will not pay the costs of a British licence and will therefore be given a worrying economic advantage.

I must mention the importance of the fishermen in Redcar, which is primarily not a fishing port, but a small seaside resort backed by a poor, post-industrial area suffering from economic decline and social deprivation. The Redcar fishermen sell their fish direct from the coble, having been tractored up to the back of the sands on the esplanade. That is an attractive feature of Redcar's appeal as a resort.

People travel from further south and east in Cleveland and from Teesside, south Durham and north Yorkshire to buy freshly caught fish and, of course, to enjoy the picturesque spectacle. They stroll along the esplanade and are attracted to the shops, cafes, garages, amusement arcades and museums. They also pay to park and drink in the pubs. The point is clear: the fishing industry is, first, an integral part of the culture of a sea town and, secondly, engenders business for the town far beyond the value of the fishermen's earnings in a location in which every pound of local income is important to local people.

I must say again that there are general and specific problems for such a small fleet of small-boat inshore fishermen and I invite my hon. Friend the Minister,

[Vera Baird]

on behalf of everyone in the community I represent, to give all possible assistance to Redcar's highly valued fishermen.

6.32 pm

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): Like the hon. Member for Redcar (Vera Baird), I represent a small fishing port, which is in the heart of my constituency. Unfortunately, I am old enough to remember when Arbroath was a bustling fishing port, but it has been in decline for a number of years to the extent that few boats fish out of it. Of those, three have applied to be decommissioned under the Scottish scheme, leaving very few still working. However, Arbroath still has a vibrant fish processing industry, and when we discuss the future of the fishing industry we should not forget that it sustains a great deal of onshore employment. Any Member who represents a fishing area also represents many fish processors.

My constituency is famous for the Arbroath smoky, the raw material of which is the haddock, so I am interested to note that the scientific evidence going before the Commission contains a recommendation for a considerable increase in haddock quota. That is welcome, but given the way in which the Commission has used other scientific evidence before it, I am apprehensive about whether it will ever come to pass. It should also be noted that, even if the haddock quota increases, levels would return to those fished in the mid-1990s, which were far below historic levels, so there is hardly cause for great celebration.

Over the past few years, there has been a problem with the continual supply of fish to the fish processing industry because of quota difficulties. That has affected my constituency, as some processors have been unable to obtain supplies and a main Arbroath smoky producer stopped making them because it could not obtain a consistent haddock supply. As a result, Arbroath smokies are now produced by small outfits.

We should bear it in mind that quotas are important not just to offshore fishing, but to onshore industry. A steady supply throughout the year is, perhaps, even more important to processors than to fishermen. Much of the fish coming into Arbroath comes from the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), and from Aberdeen. It is transported by road, but that involves considerable cost.

I hope that when he discusses this in Brussels, the Minister will remember that for every job at sea there are numerous jobs on land—many in rural communities—that rely on those jobs at sea for a sustainable future.

6.35 pm

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): We have been fortunate enough to hear, I think, 14 excellent speeches from Back Benchers, some of which had to be short. There was a common theme: the speakers represented fishing communities, and spoke on their behalf. A number emphasised the fact that we were discussing not just an industry but a community. One referred to mining. I come from a farming rather than a fishing community, but I too appreciate the point.

Members have put to the Minister the view from the fishing ports, and we all hope that he will convey that view at the important meeting that will take place on 17 December.

Strong views were expressed, not least by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), about the general nature of the common fisheries policy. Undoubtedly there must be reform at the very least, if not radical change. I do not want to concentrate on that because she made the necessary points. In the short time available, I want to ask the Minister two or three specific questions, because it is important for him to flag up Members' concerns at the meeting.

The first of those concerns, which the Minister himself admitted was causing anxiety, is the proposal for cuts in quotas. He rightly emphasised not just that we should question it for the scientific reasons adduced by a number of Members, but that it was unacceptable to fishing communities whom we, the politicians, must persuade of the efficacy of a policy proposed by the European Union as well as our Government. It is possible to put a lot of force behind Government policy and EU policy, but if the fishing communities reject proposals out of hand we are in dangerous waters. I know that his time is limited, but I hope that he will specify at least some of the arguments that he may advance, apart from his questioning of the science.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton expressed strong views about the CFP's appalling impact on the environment. It not only affronts tens of thousands of EU citizens but is totally counterproductive. I suspect that, with the exception of one or two bad fishermen, the fishing community rejects it as well. I should like to know what the Minister will say about that.

Finally, there is the whole business of compensation for fishermen, particularly in relation to the decommissioning of fishing vessels. The Minister and I were on a Committee debating a statutory instrument dealing with that. Our Scottish colleagues touched briefly on compensation in Scotland today, but perhaps the Minister will say whether all the compensation relating to English vessels has been taken up, and whether there is a queue for future compensation. That will be an issue that will come back and hit us again.

I wish the Minister well on 17 December and I hope that he will be able to address the problems raised by hon. Members. I look forward to further debates in the House next year on the issue and I am sure that we will have a robust discussion of the common fisheries policy. He will have had notice of some aspects of the argument from our side.

6.40 pm

Mr. Morley: I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House for their kind remarks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The Minister should ask for the leave of the House to speak a second time.

Mr. Morley: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to respond to the debate. I am not used to both opening and winding up these days.

One thing that does not change about the debates is their seriousness. Of all the debates in which I participate, this is one of the few where we have a genuine, thoughtful discussion about serious issues, such as fisheries management and conservation, the importance of the fishing industry in a regional context and all the other points that we have heard in the course of the debate. Not least of those was that made by the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) about onshore interests, which was also raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) and other hon. Members.

I have so many points written down that we could have another whole debate on them, but I shall do my best to address them. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) has a long history of involvement in the fishing industry and great knowledge of it. He, and several other hon. Members, asked about what would happen with regard to access in 2003. We should not forget that the quota is the key issue and that that is why the issue of relative stability is so important. There is very little in the North sea that is not a quota stock. It would not be economic for any fishing vessel that does not have a real commercial quota to take all the trouble of steaming all the way to the North sea to fish. By-catch is monitored and would not count in that fishery towards establishing a track record, so there is no advantage in a by-catch. I cannot see any commercial inducement for anyone to enter the North sea when that changes.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of the 2.9 per cent. cod allocation from north Norway, which is part of the European Economic Area agreement. That is a legal agreement and forms part of the relative stability for the range of quotas that we have. I hope that that reassures him. He also raised the important issue of rising sea temperatures, which we take seriously. We are carrying out research on such matters as the decline in plankton, but it is important not to try to look for scapegoats.

We cannot escape the fact that the biggest pressure on fish stocks comes from fishing. That is not to say that we do not take into account, for example, the impact of seals, although that impact is complex, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes stated. We have little evidence that seals have much impact on commercial fish stocks, but the research is being done. The same is true of power stations. I have been looking at some figures on power station intakes—that is the kind of person I am—and considering the fish by-catch that is sucked into the intakes. The figures are fairly low, but measures can be taken—such as bubble streams—to minimise the problem. I expect power stations to implement those measures because I take the problem seriously.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran) questioned whether the demonstrations on fishing were before the aid package was announced in Scotland, and I have checked the facts in the Library. The flotilla sailed on 6 March and the aid package was announced on 8 March. I know that the Minister wanted me to put that on the record. Will the debate or the information that I have supplied help in his examination of the migration of species, especially cod? Will that information be useful in establishing whether that migration can be substantiated or whether it is anecdotal? It is a widespread belief among fishing communities.

Mr. Morley: The migration of species is a widespread belief—and I had made a note to myself to reply to the hon. Gentleman on the matter, which I know that he was very keen to get on the record. All I can say is that, from my close and friendly contacts with the Scottish Executive, I am aware that the package was being discussed for some time. I suspect that it was being discussed even before the flotilla, of which the hon. Gentleman was part, sailed down the Forth.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby also referred to aggregate dredging, as did a number of hon. Members. These days, any new application for a licence must go through a thorough environmental impact assessment. That will take account of the impact on the local fishing industry and whether the area is a spawning area or important for shellfish. If the study finds that the impact would be detrimental, the application is turned down. Applications have been turned down for that reason, and I emphasise that we take into account the impact of activities on the fishing industry.

Finally, my hon. Friend will be pleased to know that we have commissioned a new research vessel for the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science. It is under construction at present—and in a British shipyard, I am glad to say.

The hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) always takes a sensible and pragmatic approach to reform of the CAP, which is a matter of what is achievable. He also emphasised his support for multi-annual quota, which I share. I support, too, the concept of banking and borrowing, which has been used quite successfully in the south-west.

The hon. Gentleman also emphasised the need for the industry and science to work together. I agree, and believe that the industry's involvement is important. It has an important contribution to make, which I take very seriously, as do the scientists in my Department. We have worked hard in the past few years to involve the industry more in discussions and decisions. Recently, we invited industry representatives to sail with CEFAS on our research ships and to work alongside our scientists. I am sure that that experience was mutually beneficial: the industry representatives watched the scientists work and saw the techniques that they used, and I understand that the scientists found very helpful the representatives' advice about matters such as net repairs and setting nets.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell) emphasised the importance of the prawn fishery to his port in North Shields. I know that port and the industry well, and I repeat that I think that the Commission's suggestion about the scale of the cut in the nephrops quota is not justified by the science. It would have a devastating effect on the prawn industry, and I assure him that I take very seriously the points that he made. They will certainly guide me in the negotiations to come.

The hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) is a fixture in these debates, as he has been a Member of Parliament for a long time. Although it is fair to say that the process of these debates is largely similar year to year, different issues and priorities arise every time. I am used to seeing hon. Members posture in debates, but the hon. Gentleman's description of posturing fish—although interesting—was new to me.

However, I emphasise to the hon. Gentleman that things have changed in the Council of Ministers. Less of the horse trading—or sea horse trading—mentioned by the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) goes on. It will not be easy to get the Commission to shift position

[Mr. Morley]

on some of the matters that have been raised, as it is acting according to what it believes to be the basis of sustainability.

There is a genuine motivation behind what the Commission is doing, and I would not want to criticise that. I simply believe that it is not interpreting the science correctly on a number of points and not thinking through the implications of moving beyond the science in a range of stocks, particularly in a mixed fishery. We want to emphasise those issues to the Commission so that it will think about them and, I hope, make changes.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Why does the hon. Gentleman believe that the Commission can deliver now when it has failed to do so over the past 19 years?

Mr. Morley: It is hard to put the blame completely on the Commission. It has to take its share of the blame and, indeed, it was open and honest in the Green Paper about the failures of the common fisheries policy. The people who should take the blame are Fisheries Ministers from a range of countries who have refused, over the years, to follow the science. They have been reluctant to go against the undoubted impact on their industries and have talked up the quota over and above the scientific advice. That has to stop. That attitude has changed within the Council of Ministers because it is not sustainable and we are still paying a price for it now with regard to the desperate state of many stocks. Even stocks that are not in their recovery position are on the borderline of sustainability in relation to their biomass. Every year, what is being taken away for the commercial catch should be increasing the biomass.

We must address these tough issues. Over the years, people have ducked them because they are so difficult. If we are not careful, we will have no fishing industry in this country and will be in a situation similar to Canada. Whatever has been said—and there are some unknowns in the Canadian situation, which I would not dispute—the principal reason that the cod stocks were wiped out was overfishing.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) made some pertinent points about the history of the common fisheries policy and the involvement of the previous Government, which we all noted. He raised the issue, which has been put to me by a number of fishermen, about whether cod have migrated further north because of changing sea temperatures. We do not rule out any kind of environmental change. Our scientists have a whole range of sampling points, including the northern North sea, and they will take these figures into account.

I take the views of the fishing industry seriously. They are the ones out at sea and they have a valid contribution to make. Indeed, much of the science is based on catch records and the fishing patterns of the industry. I will ensure that the figures that the hon. Gentleman presented are considered very carefully by our scientists.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) raised a number of issues about the industry in the Irish sea. I understand the worries about the scale of the proposed cuts in haddock. I also understand the concerns about twine thickness, although I can reassure her and her industry that we are not looking to apply standards that mean that her industry would have to have a different twine thickness. They can continue to use their present twine thickness, which is environmentally friendly.

All the evidence that we have and the surveys that we have carried out, including surveys in the eastern part of the Irish sea with British and Belgian beam trawlers, show that the main spawning cod concentrations are in the western side of the Irish sea. That will be closed in the coming spawning season, and it will be closed to beam trawlers as well—so they will be kept away from the cod concentrations. However, we have little evidence that the concentration is on the eastern side.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) spoke about the Shetland box, which is of great regional importance. I was glad that the Commission, in its Green Paper, accepted the continuation of the Shetland box and, indeed, the Irish box. I recognise the regional importance of the fishing industry to Orkney and Shetland. As he said, I have visited the islands on a number of occasions and had a chance to talk to his industry. I always appreciate the opportunity to go there and chat to the very far-sighted and progressive industry.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's points about a co-operative venture to buy up quota and lease it on commercial terms, which has also been considered in Cornwall and other areas. As long as it is a commercial operation and does not discriminate against other regions, I am sure that it can meet state aid rules and I look forward with interest to the outcome of the current investigation. I am sure that the Commission will be sympathetic to the way that it has been operated in the past.

My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) represents two important east coast fishing ports. Cod is, of course, an important catch there. He raised several points, including the impact of horsepower and I wholly accept the comments of his constituent, Mr. Arnold Locker. I shall be seeing a great deal of Mr. Locker in his NFFO role in forthcoming months. No doubt he will make his case clear to me.

Effort control has not yet been agreed. It has not been decided whether it will be a feature of the cod recovery plan in the North sea. I realise that people are worried about that. We shall need to talk to the industry about the issue and keep it involved. I also know of my hon. Friend's concerns about 120 mm nets in a mixed fishery. Mesh size is important and we should think about it carefully, but it will be difficult to move to 120 mm in one go. That is why I have argued for a phased approach.

I understand my hon. Friend's point about industrial fishing. I am a long-standing opponent of industrial fishing and my views have not changed. Human consumption should always take precedence in fisheries management. I expect to see a reduction in the TAC for sand eels in the negotiations. I support the 20 per cent. reduction. There may be attempts to raise it again, but I assure the House that I shall support the Commission on that particular reduction, because we need to introduce it.

We are working with the Danes on by-catch. I accept the dangers of excessive by-catch as reported in *Fishing News*. I notice that the Danes suspended the licence of the vessel concerned. That is a draconian power that we do not have in this country, and I was pleased to see the Danes using it.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) also spoke about scientific advice and withdrawal. It is important that the industry concentrates on quality, not quantity. We want to encourage that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) stressed that the fishing industry has a cultural and social importance. The industry is important to him locally. He raised the issue of the plaice quota, and I was pleased to hear of the responsible attitude of the industry in his area. I shall certainly take that seriously.

The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) spoke about CFP reform. It is important that we try to address that realistically. At present, all inshore boats must have a licence—we are very keen on that. I understand the pressure for review of the legislation on sea fish committees. I am sympathetic, but it is a question of finding parliamentary time. That discussion will continue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) made an excellent speech on the needs of the inshore sector. She spoke about the differences in the horsepower of large vessels and expressed the concerns of fishermen in her area about shellfish licences, although I think that such licences are in their interest. The majority of the inshore sector support them.

The hon. Member for Angus expressed concern about Arbroath smokies. I should not want them to be threatened in any way. He made an important point about the impact on the onshore industry if supplies were limited.

The hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) made several points, some of which I shall have to deal with on another occasion. There has been enormous interest in the decommissioning scheme; the money will certainly be fully utilised. In fact, it is likely that the scheme will be oversubscribed—as, I suspect, will the Scottish industry scheme.

I point out to the hon. Member for Congleton—as I did to her predecessors—that it is all very well to talk about national control, but what does it mean? I have never been clear about the meaning of the Conservative concept of national control, and nor has the industry. The industry believes that sensible reform—in which it is engaged—is the way forward. That is why it supports our position and that of other parties.

We are seeking that reform pragmatically and sensibly. Unless it is undertaken in that way, we should be completely isolated—like the hon. Lady's party during the last Parliament. There would be no support and we would make no progress. I believe that we can address some of the serious weaknesses of the CFP. We can make it better. We can take into account the needs of the industry and bring about that reform.

It being Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Downview Prison

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Angela Smith.]*

7 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I am very pleased to be able to secure this debate on Her Majesty's prison Downview. The debate is extremely timely this week because it coincides with the retirement of Downview's governor, Mr. Bob Chapman, and it provides an opportunity for me to put on record my appreciation of his service to Downview, its staff and its inmates during the past few difficult weeks and his lifetime's commitment to public service.

The debate follows a meeting that I had yesterday with the Minister and the Director General of the Prison Service. I have to say, and I suspect that the Minister will agree, that it was perhaps not the most satisfactory meeting that a Member of Parliament will have ever had with the Minister. I hope that the perhaps at times disagreeable tone of our discussions will not be replicated here, and I wish to conduct this debate in that spirit.

The issue arises because of Downview's change in role from a male to a female prison and the way in which that decision was made and handled by the Prison Service. I want to focus first on the wider issues for the Prison Service that relate to the way in which the decision was handled and then to deal with the specific issues that relate to Downview's future as a prison for female inmates.

No one disputes the fact that the Government and the Prison Service face a problem in the steady and relentless increase in the number of women sent to prison. The exchange that I had yesterday with the Minister on the number of women prisoners was rather sterile, and I hope that we do not return to that issue in detail; suffice it to say that on the basis of the figures that I have received from the Minister in parliamentary answers, especially on 7 November, there appears to be a relentless increase of about 8 or 9 per cent. in the size of the women prison population, year on year.

I am slightly concerned that the decision-making process in the Prison Service currently appears to be based on a projected increase of 4.5 per cent. I want to place on record what I said privately to the Minister yesterday: there is a problem for the Minister and the Prison Service, and I hope that they will re-examine it. If they do not do so, the sort of decision making that has led to so many problems at Downview will continue. The problem has also occurred at two other prisons whose role has changed from male to female very recently—at Send and, most recently, at Buckley hall in the north-west.

I was pleased to have the opportunity to speak directly to the Minister and the director general and to put my concerns directly to them, but I am afraid that my conclusion from that meeting is that serious concerns remain about the way in which the decision-making process works in the Prison Service. Downview illustrates the problem, and it had to deal with its consequences.

In May this year, the Prison Service was contemplating changing prison roles, and the area manager informed the governor of Downview that it was not one of the prisons being considered. Obviously, it came as a surprise when it was announced by written answer on 17 July that Downview would indeed be re-roled. I understand that the governor had only a week's notice of that decision.

[Mr. Crispin Blunt]

On the basis of all the information that I have been able obtain, there is no evidence that the director general considered the proper information in coming to that decision, which was formally endorsed by the Minister. There should have been a proper cost-benefit analysis of exactly how much changing the prison's role would cost the Prison Service and therefore the public. I believe that that decision was taken by the higher management, the director general and the Minister in ignorance of the facts on the ground.

Yesterday, I asked the Minister for the advice, on whatever basis she would like to provide it, that she and the director general received in taking that decision, which was published on 17 July. I hope that the Minister will be able to provide some comfort when she replies, because I want to be reassured about the quality of management in the Prison Service. Given all the challenges that the director general and Ministers face in managing the service, I am happy to give Ministers the benefit of the doubt.

This is a unhappy story. The decision was announced in a written answer on 17 July and, on 25 July, the governor got the staff together to tell them that the prison had to start emptying itself of male prisoners at the beginning of August. That process was to be completed by the end of August. I am informed that pressure was placed on the Prison Service to empty the prison immediately and that some people wanted to send a fleet of buses to move the male prisoners out straight away. Within one month, the prison started to fill up with female prisoners.

On 3 October, the board of visitors was so concerned that it wrote to the Home Secretary. It also wrote to me to draw my attention to the problem; I regret that it had to do so because the Prison Service did not realise in whose constituency the prison sits. My engagement with the prison has been entirely pro-active since I made a visit to it in 1998. I also went there on a later occasion when I visited it in conjunction with a visit to the prison across the road at High Down. I suspect that I did not receive any information from the Home Office or the Prison Service about Downview because they had failed to plot it in the correct constituency. I hope that that mistake has been put right, and I have accepted the apology that the Minister made on behalf of the Prison Service.

To a degree, my concern arises out of my visit to the prison in 1998. Category C and category D prisoners were placed alongside each other and the Rehabilitation of Addicted Prisoners Trust—RAPT—programme, which was founded in Downview, was working effectively. Prisoners elsewhere in the prison estate were queuing up to get to Downview to get on to the addiction programmes, to become clean of drugs and to be able to return to society free from the problem that probably resulted in their going to prison in the first place.

I have been concerned by the changes that have taken place to the prison since 1998 and since 2000 when category C and category D prisoners were no longer placed alongside each other. The institution was working well and I had every reason to believe that it was a flagship for the Prison Service. The then governor, Colin Lambert, frequently appeared at events—not least, here in the House—to promote the RAPT programme and the excellent education and rehabilitation work that took place in the prison. I had no reason to believe that it did not represent a decoration for the Prison Service.

Tragically, things began to change when the Prison Service began to remove category D prisoners from the prison and to turn it into solely a category C prison. The desire of people to get on and through the programmes has regrettably changed in the past year as a younger cohort of prisoners go into the prison.

The chief inspector of prisons noted that, in the wake of those decisions, the Prison Service had not seemed to have identified properly a clear role for the prison. It is a great shame that the Prison Service did not, at a senior level, understand just how effective an institution it had in Downview. That partially explains why I am so exercised by the decision to take it out of the male estate and away from the role that it had so successfully pursued.

The real concern, however, is about the cack-handed way in which the Prison Service managed the change. To give people in a prison private notice of only one week about its change in role is unacceptable. That is not just my view; it is the view of the board of visitors. In its report on Downview to the Home Secretary, it said:

> "We consider this to be gross mismanagement on the part of the Prison Service, displaying total lack of concern, and indeed contempt, for human issues. Whilst we fully accept the need to adapt to a changing population, such changes can not have occurred almost overnight. Assuming there is any planning at all at Head Office, it would seem reasonable to conclude that it gives itself the luxury of time and then expects the people at operational level to act almost instantaneously."

It goes on to say:

> "All this is now, with no warning, being followed by a complete change of direction at breakneck speed. We consider this to be an extreme example of poor strategic management on the part of the Prison Service."

I wholly agree with that conclusion.

From what I have seen—I hope that this impression is corrected—the decision-making process inside the Prison Service is centralised and autocratic, and responds almost directly to crisis management. At the moment, I do not have confidence in the management of the Prison Service. I know that the director general has just been reappointed. I hope that the Minister, and the director general in the years to come, will reassure me that my lack of confidence in the Prison Service management, especially with regard to the two prisons in my constituency, is misplaced.

The victims of the Prison Service's decisions are the staff and the inmates. I note that the director general has given a reassurance that all the male inmates who were so rapidly displaced from Downview have completed their programmes of education and rehabilitation at other institutions. I have tabled a written parliamentary question on that. As the director general has given me an answer, I look forward to the Department confirming that that is the case.

I want to express my gratitude to the Minister for the compliment that she paid the governor and the staff on the way in which they coped with the decision that the Prison Service imposed on them. In her letter to me of 13 November, she said:

> "I am extremely grateful to the Governor and his staff for the efficient and professional way in which the changes are being implemented."

I am sure that the governor is grateful for her kind words.

For my own part, I very much regret the retirement of Bob Chapman in the middle of the process this week. The timing is most unfortunate. I understand that the staff equally regret that, and that they gave him a generous and moving send-off. I commend them for the support that they gave him in the past difficult months. I am sure that they will continue to give that support to the new governor in the months ahead.

Let me turn to the future challenge for Downview. One of the satisfactory outcomes of my meeting with the Minister and the director general yesterday was the director general's promise that in three years' time Downview will be a state-of-the-art prison for female inmates. I hope that the Minister will confirm that.

I want the Minister to address specific issues that affect Downview. There is real concern about the suicide risk among women prisoners. They are at greater risk of suicide than male prisoners. Apparently some 40 per cent. of female inmates are identified as being at risk of suicide or self-harm. That is a particular interest of Jean Casale, the mother of the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale), who is in the Chamber. I commend her for the work that she has done.

I also commend the work of the rest of the board of visitors, led by Simon Morrison and Terry Cushing who accompanied me when I visited the prison on 26 October. They do an unpaid and unsung job, which is of critical importance to our community and, in particular, the prisoners.

On the future of Downview, will the Minister confirm that the prison will be a local prison, taking remand and recently sentenced women prisoners, which is what it was designed to be when the director general took his decision, on the basis of its location? The director general will be all too aware, as is the Minister, of the requirement to get the prison into proper shape so that it can carry out that role. The first thing that I want is for the Minister to confirm that that will be its role. Will she also confirm that C wing, which has two thirds of the prison's capacity, will be emptied so that it can be properly rebuilt and turned into state-of-the-art accommodation for women prisoners, as the director general promised?

In my judgment, the comparison between High Down, across the road from Downview, makes it clear that if Downview is to become a local prison, it will need a new reception centre. I do not believe that the existing facilities are adaptable, and I would be grateful for the Minister's confirmation that she will examine that issue. The medical centre and prisoners' health requirements have been of grave concern to the board of visitors, and I hope that the Minister is able to reassure me that there will be proper, separate health provision for women inmates, who, on average, need more health care than male prisoners.

When will the Prison Service reach the stage at which it no longer requires detached duty officers to serve at Downview, as they have done for the past few months, at some considerable expense to the service? May I draw to the Minister's attention the condition of the buildings that house the education facilities? They are temporary buildings with a roof that leaks on to IT equipment, which is obviously not satisfactory. Frankly, they need rebuilding if this is to become a state-of-the-art facility.

I am grateful to have had the attention of the director general and the Minister focused on the prison, and I hope that that will continue until the work to turn it into a state-of-the-art institution is complete, which, with the scale of rebuilding that is required, will take two or three years. I wholly regret the way in which the decision was reached, and I hope that lessons have been learned.

7.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes): I welcome the opportunity to put on record some of the facts surrounding the issues raised by the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) in this debate and, more publicly, on previous occasions. As he said, I have had several brief discussions with him and provided information in answer to a number of parliamentary questions. Yesterday, the director general and I met him to discuss some of his main concerns. Although I shall try to answer some of his additional questions, I have nothing to add to the facts, but as I said, I welcome the opportunity to put them on record.

I repeat to the hon. Gentleman publicly what I said to him yesterday and previously. Notwithstanding his remarks, to which I shall turn in a moment, I welcome his great interest in the prisons in his constituency. That is not something that every Member of Parliament demonstrates, and I do not criticise him for expressing his concerns; indeed, as I said, I welcome that interest. However, his interest does not entitle him to make wider allegations about management and decision making in the Prison Service. He may reach a conclusion from the limited perspective of his concern about a prison, but the director general and I have to take into account the condition of women prisoners throughout the prison estate and the Prison Service more generally. The hon. Gentleman needs to understand the decision in that context.

The hon. Gentleman knows that it is essential to change prison accommodation from male to female to provide sufficient spaces for the increasing number of women who, as he acknowledged, are being committed to custody by the courts. Downview was selected on the basis of a range of criteria, including not only its geographical location relative to where in the country the demand for places was arising, but the availability of female staff and the ability to relocate the existing male population. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that the Prison Service did not know of the quality of Downview as a prison for men. Clearly, the Prison Service was aware of that, as was I, but the factors that had to be taken into account to meet this need were many and varied, and decisions were not taken in the absence of knowledge about Downview.

Unfortunately, the demand for prison places for women, which represents about 11 per cent. of all places between May 2000 and May 2001, increased sharply again in the middle of this year, with the result that Downview had to take in women prisoners faster than the Prison Service would have liked or, indeed, was planning for. That meant that, once the decision had been taken, there was no alternative to moving women prisoners in before all the desirable works had been completed. Those included some redecoration, changes to bathing and sanitation arrangements, the extension of in-cell electricity, and staff recruitment. I am glad to say that the changes to in-cell sanitation and much of the refurbishment have been completed. A suitable mix of male and female staff, including those with experience of working with women, has been achieved, as the hon. Gentleman says, by transferring staff from elsewhere on a temporary basis.

[Beverley Hughes]

The hon. Gentleman concludes from his experience at Downview that the haste resulted from mismanagement by the Prison Service, which should have foreseen the need and managed it better. As I said to him yesterday, although I accept that part of the process of change was not as we would have wanted, the reasons for it were outside the control of the Prison Service and were not due to mismanagement.

In the three months between July and September, in the context of a general upward trend, the number of women in prison rose by 7 per cent. That represents an annualised increase of 30 per cent. That sharp increase, on top of an existing upward trend, was totally unexpected. The Prison Service had no indication that that would happen. The hon. Gentleman expressed surprise yesterday, but that can be the pace at which cumulative sentencing decisions make themselves known to us. The Prison Service is required to accept those prisoners committed to custody by the courts. We must make the best arrangements that we can, sometimes in difficult circumstances, to increase the availability of places—in this case, women's places—as a matter of urgency.

The alternative of increasing overcrowding elsewhere in the prison estate was not acceptable because of the lack of privacy and the risk to the safety of women prisoners that it would present. As it was, women from the south-east of England were being sent to the far north of England, away from their families. That is another factor that we had to take into account. It would have been equally unacceptable to resort to the use of police cells for women prisoners, because of conditions, the lack of a regime of activities, the diversion of police resources, and so on. The alternatives were examined and found to be unacceptable across a range of objectives, including decency and contact with family.

The seasonal slowdown that we usually experience in December is just beginning. The population at Downview has allowed us to stop taking new prisoners for the past two weeks—the first time that the rate of increase has allowed us any respite. In response to one of the hon. Gentleman's questions, I can confirm that we expect to be able to empty C wing quickly to allow the recruitment of permanent staff and the completion of works, subject to the population trend for December continuing as we expect.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I understand that there were serious problems with the transition from a male to a female prison at Downview, and I am grateful for the action that my hon. Friend took after I, too, raised the matter in a written question. Through my mother, Mrs. Jean Casale, who is also my constituent and a member of the board of visitors, and Simon Morrison, the chair of the board of visitors, I have kept in regular contact about the situation at the prison. I am grateful for the steps that my hon. Friend has immediately taken. I understand that the situation is improving, to the extent that some women prisoners were offered the chance to go to another prison, but declined and said that they wanted to stay. There are important lessons for us to learn for the future from the experience of Downview. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) for raising the matter.

Beverley Hughes: I thank my hon. Friend. He, too, has raised the issue with me informally, and I know that he has taken a close interest in it. I am grateful for his interest and his remarks.

With regard to the consequences for some of the male prisoners relocated from Downview, the transfer would clearly result in some disruption to their sentence planning. Of course, we regret that, but I can tell the hon. Member for Reigate and my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) that, as far as possible, all prisoners were given the opportunity to express a preference for relocation. We had additional recategorisation boards and about 50 men were recategorised to category D. No prisoners had their security category increased as a result; as a temporary measure, a substantial group were moved to Wormwood Scrubs, where they were accommodated in a separate wing.

I know that the hon. Member for Reigate is anxious that prisoners moved from Downview should not be prevented from completing any rehabilitation or education programmes that they were following. As he said, he has tabled a question on the matter, which is of immense concern to me too. He will understand that it will take some time to collate the information and I am not in a position to give him a detailed response today. However, we are putting the material together and I shall reply to him in due course.

The hon. Gentleman made two points about what he felt was the mismanagement of the process by the Prison Service. He talked about the use of projections and the decision-making process. As I said yesterday, projections are not an exact science, but are produced as rigorously as possible by the Home Office. They are produced by independent statisticians, not Prison Service statisticians, who produce three variants—high, low and central—for us.

The population trend in relation to projections is closely monitored and contingency plans are always in place and are periodically reviewed. It is not a matter of us not having plans in place and being surprised by changes in trends. Contingency plans are in place. Indeed, yesterday we detailed for the hon. Gentleman extensive plans for extra women's places, new prisons, new ready-to-use units and so on. In addition, we have had to re-role Downview and a number of other prisons. I explained to the hon. Gentleman that decision making is a robust and systematic process. The decision to re-role a prison is not taken lightly. The criteria for decision making and the way in which the process is executed are not unique to Downview, but are systematically applied to any similar situation. Downview, therefore, is no exception.

I wish to join the hon. Gentleman in his congratulations to the staff, who have coped magnificently with the process of change. I accept that many members of staff are unsettled by the process, but I know that they have responded to demands and put the interests of prisoners first. However, I do not accept that the way that staff were treated was an abuse of authority or was overly centralised. Prison officers are subject to transfers as a condition of their employment; that is essential to make sure that we have the necessary flexibility to cater for the demands on the Prison Service. I make no apologies for that.

The hon. Gentleman raised the important concern of health care. He is right that women's health care issues are different from men's. Indeed, the incidence, not of suicide, but certainly self-harm, is different. Since the prison re-roled, 35 prisoners have been identified as at risk, although there have been only 10 recorded incidents of self-harm. The staff have had to grapple with the issue of the difference between men and women. The population of women at Downview is similar to other populations of women prisoners; there is no over-representation of self-harm incidents as a result of the move. We are watching closely the impact on individual women.

We plan that Downview should be an excellent women's prison. If the hon. Gentleman visits other women's prisons like Styal, he will see what we are aiming for. I have told him that C wing will be emptied. He mentioned education and reception facilities. I am aware of deficiencies in those buildings, and we are looking closely at those issues. On detached duty and recruitment, we will need staff on detached duty until we are able to complete the recruitment process. However, we are pressing on with that and I am confident that, in a few months, we will be in a position to have permanent staff at Downview.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 10 December 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr. Speaker *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

Double Taxation Relief

The Vice-Chamberlain Of The Household reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address, as follows:

I have received your Addresses praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Lithuania) Order 2001 and the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan) Order 2001 be made in the form of the drafts laid before your House.

I will comply with your request.

DEATH OF A MEMBER

Mr. Speaker: I regret to have to report to the House the death of Sir Raymond Powell, Member for Ogmore. I am sure that hon. Members in all parts of the House will join me in mourning the loss of a colleague and in extending our sympathy to the hon. Member's family and friends.

Oral Answers to Questions

WORK AND PENSIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Information and Communications Technology

1. **Brian White** (Milton Keynes, North-East): What plans he has to enable the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service to use common IT communications. [19141]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): Mr. Speaker, may I identify Government Front-Bench Members with your remarks about our colleague, Sir Ray Powell? As a former Chief Whip, may I add that Sir Ray will be very much missed on our side?

We are bringing the Employment Service together with those parts of the Benefits Agency that support people of working age, to create Jobcentre Plus. The first 49 Jobcentre Plus pathfinders went live on 22 October. I am pleased to announce that the Brent Jobcentre Plus pathfinder, a group of four offices, opened this morning. That brings the total to 53. We plan progressively to extend that integration nation wide, beginning next year.

We are investing to upgrade and replace the Department's outdated computer systems. We want to ensure that everyone, including people who use Jobcentre Plus, receives a modern service. The new and improved information technology that we are developing will allow us to capture the necessary information from people face to face or over the phone, instead of getting them to fill in multiple benefit claims forms. We will replace the main income support and jobseeker's allowance benefit processing systems and modernise the payments system, to improve the efficiency of the service that we provide.

Brian White: The new deal worked because it had good IT support. One of the lessons of the state earnings-related pension scheme debacle was the failure to communicate with Department of Social Security offices. The permanent secretary said that we needed to bring it up to date. Given that major progress has been made, will the Minister confirm that it remains a key priority for the Government?

Mr. Brown: Yes, I can confirm that. We want to ensure that all the new desktop infrastructure that we are rolling out into the Benefits Agency offices can run the major Employment Service systems. We are targeting the end of next year for having everything in place.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): Mr. Speaker, I associate Conservative Members with your remarks about the former Member for Ogmore. He was a character who brought a distinctive flavour to the House and we shall miss him.

We agree with the Minister that it is important that the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service communicate with each other. The ONE project was supposed to be about that. Last week, the Department placed in the Library a copy of its evaluation of ONE. Does the Minister acknowledge its results? The conclusions state:

"The evidence does not suggest that ONE has changed the probability of leaving benefit"

either for jobseekers or

"for sick or disabled claimants."

Ministers say that they believe in evidence-based policy. Now that the Minister has the evidence, will he change the policy?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his words about our former colleague, the Member for Ogmore, not least because Sir Ray Powell had dealings with his Opposition counterpart through the Whips Office. I agree that he will be sorely missed.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the Government would change their policy. The answer is no. It is not fair of him to dip into the evaluation of the ONE pilot and partially quote from it. He missed out many of the evaluation's positive points about working across Departments and with stakeholders. Our actions are partly based on the evaluation, but events have moved on and we intend Jobcentre Plus and the IT that supports it to be focused on moving people from welfare to work.

It was implicit in the hon. Gentleman's question that some of the equipment with which we have to work is 20 years old. I agree that it is long overdue for overhaul and modernisation. It would be reasonable to pause and consider why the equipment was not upgraded and modernised in 18 years of Conservative Administrations.

Winter Fuel Allowance (Wales)

2. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): How many pensioners in Wales will receive the winter fuel allowance this winter. [19142]

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): Last winter in Wales, just over 600,000 people aged 60 and over received a winter fuel payment. A similar number will receive the payment this winter, and about 18,000 people will benefit in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Mr. Edwards: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend and to the Government for their decision to increase the winter fuel allowance for the rest of this Parliament. Does he agree that this will be particularly welcome in Wales, where an awful lot of pensioners are really quite poor, and where more than 50 per cent. of women pensioners do not receive the full state pension because of disadvantages in the labour market when they were younger, or because of some of the disadvantages in the social security system? Does he agree that targeted measures such as the winter fuel allowance, the minimum income guarantee for pensioners and the pension credit will work in the interests of Wales' pensioners?

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend's description of the history of a low-paying Wales is absolutely right. Before the universal benefit of the national minimum wage, Wales was the low-pay capital of Europe. From 2003, the pension credit will replace the current benefit, and two thirds of its recipients will be women. The state second pension, which commences in April next year, will right a wrong perpetrated many years ago when 2 million carers and 14 million low-paid workers—the majority of them women—were excluded. The Government are committed to righting the wrongs of previous Administrations and to ensuring that women get a retirement settlement.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): How many pensioners are still waiting for last year's payment or, indeed, payment from previous years?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's question must be related to Wales.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to emphasise that the winter fuel allowance is available not only to pensioners but to males and females over the age of 60? Will he also assure the House that sufficient attention will be given to publicising that fact throughout the country, so that all people over 60 are aware of their eligibility?

Mr. McCartney: We are publicising that fact. *[Interruption.]* I notice that Conservative Members are denying that Wales is a country. As a Celt, I certainly do not do so.

There will be a £200 winter fuel allowance for each eligible household, worth £4 a week. The Chancellor made it clear in his statement that the payment will remain at £200 for the remainder of this Parliament. About 11.5 million pensioner households will benefit from the measure, this winter and beyond. That will be a significant factor in reducing fuel poverty among the elderly.

Universal Bank

3. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): If he will make a statement on the progress of the universal bank. [19143]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): Steady progress is being made on the implementation of universal banking services, which are on schedule for introduction in April 2003.

Dr. Cable: May I ask the Minister, in relation to the April 2003 launch, whether the Post Office card account will be ready at that time? Will he also tell the House how many of those card accounts he is planning to introduce?

Mr. Darling: The card account is an integral part of the universal banking services. The number of such accounts is the subject of negotiations between the Post Office and its various partners, and it would not be right to air the content of those discussions on the Floor of the House, for obvious reasons.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, when the universal bank was announced, it was intended to provide revenues to fill the black hole of £400 million in the finances of sub-post offices caused by the Government's decision to force people to have their benefit payments made into their bank accounts? Will he also confirm that, far from contributing revenues to make good that lost income, the universal bank will cost £180 million over its first five years? Will he, therefore, assure the House that neither he nor the universal bank will try to obtain revenues from the poorest of the poor by charging the bank's users, who will, by and large, be benefit recipients who previously had no bank account? Is it not monstrous that he should even think of getting money from such a source?

Mr. Darling: I admire the right hon. Gentleman's gall. I thought that he might have wanted to refer to the benefit payment card, which I see has yet again been the subject of damning criticism by a Select Committee, and for which he was responsible. He says that people are being forced to move to automated credit transfer, but as a former Secretary of State for Social Security, he must be aware that about 40 per cent. of benefit and pension recipients already receive their money by ACT. In relation to child benefit, something like 57 per cent. of new applicants ask that the money be paid directly into a bank account. Because of that, we needed to put in place measures that would protect the position of the Post Office. The universal bank is designed to do just that.

The right hon. Gentleman presided over a situation in which benefit card costs rocketed out of control and he came up with a product that was virtually obsolete before it was delivered; but I believe that the universal banking service provides the Post Office with the best opportunity to manage the change that is already taking place.

Disability Discrimination Act

4. **Mr. Tom Clarke** (Coatbridge and Chryston): If he will abolish the small firms' exemption from the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [19144]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): We are committed to ending the exemption of small employers from the employment provisions of the DDA in October 2004.

Mr. Clarke: I welcome my hon. Friend's excellent announcement. Has she evidence on whether small businesses agree with me that ending the exemption is a challenge and an opportunity for people with disabilities, or does she share the view of the Government who took the DDA through the House, who said that employing people with disabilities in small businesses represents an unacceptable burden?

Maria Eagle: My right hon. Friend has a long and fine record in the House of supporting people with disabilities and promoting legislation to assist them. There is no evidence that small firms with under 15 employees consider the DDA a burden; and during recent research by the Disability Rights Commission on employers with fewer than 15 employees, two thirds said that they welcome and are in favour of the DDA. Hardly any expressed a negative opinion, so this is a measure whose time has come. We are determined that it will be properly implemented by October 2004.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Can the Minister advise the House of the cost of abolishing the exemption? If not, will she commit to publishing a full regulatory impact assessment before making any change?

Maria Eagle: The hon. Gentleman is relatively new to the House. Had he been aware that the announcement was made in our response to the disability rights taskforce document "Towards Inclusion", he could have looked up the draft regulatory impact assessment in the back.

Mr. Prisk; The cost?

Maria Eagle: The cost is £3.92 per business, on average. The hon. Gentleman ought to realise that reasonable adjustments to enable disabled people to access employment require thought more than cash.

New Deal (Eltham)

5. **Clive Efford** (Eltham): What assessment he has made of the impact of the new deal for young people in Eltham. [19145]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): Since 1997, youth unemployment in Eltham has fallen by more than 40 per cent. and long-term youth unemployment has fallen by two thirds. The new deal for young people has played an important part in that success. In Eltham, the programme has helped over 600 young people move from welfare to work.

Clive Efford: I welcome my right hon. Friend's answer, particularly the figures on reduced youth unemployment in my community. The benefits that that has brought can be felt far and wide. May I highlight a problem with the new deal? Owing to its success, my local Employment Service says that there are not enough clients to fill the vacancies reported by potential employers. Will he encourage more unemployed people to take up the opportunity to go on the new deal before the statutory six months?

Mr. Brown: We keep under review all the new deal schemes, which have different nuances in the rules relating to the target groups that they try to deal with, but even where the local labour market is tight—I can confirm that that is the case in my hon. Friend's constituency—there are still people who are disadvantaged and out of work, some for considerable periods. That is why we have introduced special new deals focused on the specific needs of those who find the labour market most intractable. I hope that, as the new deals roll out, some of those people are able to take advantage of the tight labour market he describes.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): Is not one problem, which applies in many areas of London and certainly in my constituency, that there is insufficient London weighting in a range of Government schemes? What has the Minister to say about London weighting for public sector jobs and the new deal as a whole?

Mr. Brown: There is a range of issues relating to the special circumstances that pertain to the labour market across London. I am not convinced that London weighting is the sole solution to every shortfall in the labour market. Alongside communities that are prosperous and where the labour market is tight are pockets of real deprivation and long-term, intractable unemployment, where people are left out of the strong labour market in London. A close look at the jobs that are available shows that they are jobs that the long-term unemployed could do, with a bit of training, help and support. That is why the new generation of new deals are specifically focused on people for whom the labour market is the most intractable.

Incapacity Benefit (Wythenshawe and Sale, East)

6. **Paul Goggins** (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): How many people of working age in Wythenshawe and Sale, East are not in work and are claiming incapacity benefit. [19146]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): Around 7,000 people in Wythenshawe and Sale, East are claiming incapacity benefit. Some of those people will participate in work trials, work placements and voluntary work. We are committed to giving people the help and support that they need to work, where they wish to do so. From next April, we are changing the incapacity benefit rules to help more people to try out work without fear of its affecting their benefit entitlement.

The House will also want to know that the Government have decided that random assignment will not be used as an evaluation tool for the new deal for disabled people.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Ah!

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that, since this is a new announcement. I am pleased that it was an "Ah" of welcome, rather than an "Ah" of dismay. I shall set out our reasons more fully in response to questions tabled by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), but I wanted to take the first opportunity to tell the House.

Paul Goggins: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer and for his announcement. He will know that the figure he gave for my constituency is double the constituency average. I welcome the initiatives that he mentioned, and the work of the Wythenshawe action team, which helps to find jobs for people who, in the past, were left on the scrap heap. Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the main problems facing incapacity benefit claimants in my constituency is that they have no qualifications? What steps is he taking to help them to improve their skills, and thereby enhance their capacity to work?

Mr. Brown: We have a range of training programmes for those who want to work. It is a feature not just of people on incapacity benefit but of the long-term unemployed more generally that 40 per cent. of those out of work for long periods have difficulty with basic skills such as literacy and numeracy. The Government have programmes in place to address those issues.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Will the Minister confirm that the fastest growing group of people in Wythenshawe and Sale, East who claim incapacity benefit are those who pass the incapacity test but who fail the contributions test—what the Department calls credits-only cases? Does he accept that those people are genuinely disabled, unable to work but receive no money from the Government through this scheme? If Wythenshawe and Sale, East is typical of the country as a whole, does that worry him and does he plan to do anything about it?

Mr. Brown: I cannot confirm that the hon. Gentleman's point about the individual constituency is correct, but as he knows it is a contributory benefit, so if the contributions have not been made the benefit is not available.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Does my right hon. Friend agree that many of the males on incapacity benefit in Wythenshawe and Sale, East are like those on incapacity benefit in South Yorkshire, Scotland and South Wales? They are in receipt of compensation for chronic bronchitis and emphysema, and for vibration white finger. He will also be aware of their grievance that the examination procedures used in the common law system that awards disability benefit are different from those used by the Department. Will he consider referring the matter to the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council, so that it can advise him whether it would be worth the Department's accepting the examination procedures that are used by the common law system?

Mr. Brown: I cannot give my hon. Friend the assurance that he is seeking, because the purposes underpinning the two systems are different. He is correct about the communities that traditionally looked for their employment base to heavy industry or primary industry, such as coal mining, shipbuilding and steel. Those communities, especially the people who left work in their late 40s, 50s or 60s, often bear the scars of the industrial diseases that, to our great shame, went with those industries. I am thinking of pneumoconiosis, industrial deafness and tenosynovitis. My hon. Friend is right to describe such illnesses as terrible injuries, and to say that compensation should be paid.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins) on his question. It is clear that there is great interest on both sides of the House in the situation in Wythenshawe and Sale, East. Will the Minister tell us whether that situation differs from the national trend? If it does not, that means that more people are claiming incapacity benefit now—that the figure has been rising, and is now at its highest for three years. It also means that the number of people who are economically inactive because of long-term sickness is greater than it was when the Government came to office.

If the situation in the hon. Gentleman's constituency is typical of that throughout the country, more people are claiming income support because they are disabled than when the Government came to office—200,000 more nation wide.

Surely that evidence shows that the Government are failing to reform welfare. Instead, they have more disabled people on means-tested benefits. While we welcome the Minister's decision not to pursue his ill conceived idea of random assignment, what we need is evidence, carefully assembled and presented to the House. All too often, such evidence shows that the rhetoric about welfare reform is not supported by the reality.

Mr. Brown: I do not accept that—but I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for the Government's decision not to proceed with random assignment, while gently taking issue with him and pointing out that it was not my "ill conceived idea", if that is how he wishes to describe it. [*Laughter.*] I should have thought that gentle humour was permitted in this place, Mr. Speaker.

I cannot confirm that the position in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins) is typical of national trends. The stock of incapacity benefit claimants there is probably higher than that in the country as a whole, and thus atypical. I can confirm, however, that the number of new claimants is declining, if demographic factors are taken into account.

The issue is the stock of people claiming this benefit, having moved on from the previous similar benefit. Why are there so many of them? The answer is clear: as the hon. Gentleman knows, during the 1980s the policy of the then Conservative Government was to shift people off the employment register and on to the benefit that has been succeeded by incapacity benefit. The Government must confront not just the question of flows, but the issue of stock. The reason the problem is as intractable as the hon. Gentleman says is that for 18 years his party failed to do anything about it.

Lone Parents (North-East)

7. **Mr. Kevan Jones** (North Durham): If he will make a statement on the impact of the new deal for lone parents in the north-east. [19148]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): By the end of September, there had been nearly 17,000 participants in the new deal for lone parents in the north-east. Of those, nearly 2,000 had taken up education or training opportunities, and more than 8,000 had moved into work. Nationally, 118,000 lone parents have moved into work.

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend's answer will be very welcome in the north-east, but is he aware of the concern felt by organisations such as the Derwentside citizens advice bureau in Stanley, in my constituency? The CAB has complained that the scheme is not well advertised, and that therefore people are failing to take it up locally. Will my hon. Friend assure me that it will be better advertised locally, so that more people in North Durham can have access to what is a very worthwhile scheme?

Malcolm Wicks: The best way for lone parents to find out about the scheme is to be invited for an interview with a new deal personal adviser. We have a rolling programme to ensure that that happens, and that all new claimants are invited in when their youngest child goes to school. We also have a programme enabling lone parents who have been on income support for some years to be invited in when their children are older. It is best to take part in a face-to-face interview to find out what is happening.

It is good news that since the 1997 general election the proportion of lone parents on income support has gone down by 10 per cent in my hon. Friend's constituency. That is not welfare reform rhetoric. It is good reality.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): How many of the 2,000 lone parents in the north-east currently undertaking education and training will go on to obtain a job? How many would have found work anyway? What added value is the new deal bringing to lone parents in the north-east?

Malcolm Wicks: I am surprised that this is a controversial matter in the House. I have already said that, in addition to the 2,000 who have gone into education or training, 8,000—49 per cent.—of those who had interviews have gone into work, so work is there. Some lone parents have fewer educational qualifications and skills than the population as a whole. That is why it is right and proper that sometimes we talk about welfare through education into work. I would have thought that that was welcomed.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Is not the problem with the new deal in the north-east not just that it is not well advertised and is not giving added value, but that there is an insufficient supply of good jobs for people to go into, particularly long-term jobs? As the Minister admits, only a minority are going into those jobs; the manufacturing sector in the north-east is shedding jobs at an alarming rate. Apparently, the new deal in the north-east is serving up jobs at McDonald's, something that Labour Members complained about when they were in opposition. Should not Labour Members, including the Minister, be worried that, notwithstanding the statistic that he has quoted, the claimant count is going up in the north-east? The Government's policies are a bad deal for the north-east. Would it not be better if Ministers in the Department persuaded their colleagues in the rest of the Government to stop piling burdens on business in the north-east and to allow businesses to get on with the job of creating employment?

Malcolm Wicks: Not so much fast food as fast and sloppy rhetoric. Why cannot the hon. Gentleman rejoice in the fact that 8,000 lone mothers in the north-east are now in work as a result of the new deal? That is good news. Even in the most hard-pressed regions there are still job vacancies. That is why the skills and training agenda is so important. We are determined to enable everyone on income support, including lone parents, to have the best advice about training and job opportunities. That is what the new deal is about and it is what Jobcentre Plus is about.

Jobs Transition Service

8. **Mr. Parmjit Dhanda** (Gloucester): If he will make a statement about the work of the jobs transition service. [19149]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): As I announced on 28 November, we are strengthening and expanding the help we can offer people facing redundancy. The rapid response service is on track to be fully launched in April 2002 and will receive an additional £6 million over the next two years.

Mr. Dhanda: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on measures such as the new deal and the jobs transition service, which in my constituency of Gloucester have reduced unemployment to 2 per cent., the lowest for a generation. Does he have any plans to visit Gloucester? If he has, I will take him to Action for a Fairer Gloucester, a local initiative that is working with the local authority and the Employment Service to help to reduce unemployment among the most vulnerable people in society, including people with disabilities and from ethnic minority backgrounds? Does he agree that by supporting initiatives such as Action for a Fairer Gloucester, we can not only reduce unemployment but tackle poverty and social exclusion?

Mr. Darling: On the latter point, my hon. Friend is right to make the link between work and the fight against poverty. One of the reasons why child poverty trebled during the term of the last Conservative Government was that unemployment was very high. My hon. Friend makes the point that unemployment is at its lowest for some time in Gloucester, and I think that long-term youth unemployment in Gloucester is down by almost 70 per cent.

I do not know when I shall next visit Gloucester, but when I do I shall be only too pleased to look at the programmes to which my hon. Friend refers.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The Secretary of State's announcement on the rapid reaction force was welcome, but given that it is predicated on the basis of major closures and redundancies, can he tell me what criteria will be used for the allocations? As he and I know, closures in smaller communities such as market towns can have a devastating effect on the local work force and economy. Such closures do not make the national headlines and are not seen as employment emergencies, but they need the sort of support that the agency will provide.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The purpose of the rapid response service is to enable us to send people from Jobcentre Plus or the Employment Service to those companies that announce large redundancies, simply because when a lot of people are involved it makes sense to send in advisers in advance to discuss training options for them. That programme has been successful so far. The hon. Gentleman is right that it is also important to help anyone who loses their job for whatever reason, and that is why we are improving the service we offer through Jobcentre Plus. We are making arrangements to convert the entire Employment Service and Benefits Agency estate so that Jobcentre Plus is available across the whole country. That will enable us to provide interviews and assistance which, together with the tax and benefit reforms we have introduced, will help anyone, no matter where, who is faced with losing their job.

Partially Sighted People

9. **Linda Gilroy** (Plymouth, Sutton): What steps he is taking to assist people who are partially sighted to overcome barriers to employment. [19150]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): We have in place a range of measures to help disabled people, including those who are partially sighted, to take up work. These include the access to work programme, the job introduction scheme, work preparation and workstep. In addition, the new deal is providing disabled people with more opportunities to move from benefits into work, while changes to the incapacity benefit rules are designed to provide work-focused help for sick and disabled people who wish to try to get back to work.

Linda Gilroy: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. She is aware of the achievement of my constituent Mr. Andrew Shipp, who is the first visually impaired person to be admitted to associate membership of the British Institute of Professional Photography. His film "Courageous Plymouth" has been shown several times at the imperial war museum just across the Thames and he is determined to set up his own production company. Can my hon. Friend assure my constituent and the House that she and her Department will continue to bring down the barriers for people who face such challenges in obtaining employment?

Maria Eagle: I congratulate Mr. Shipp on his fine achievement. I was browsing through the back catalogue of the Plymouth *Evening Herald* online news recently—as one does—and noticed that we have not yet missed all opportunities to see Mr. Shipp's film. It will be shown again on 15 December, so anybody with 15 minutes to spare can nip over and have a look. I can assure my hon. Friend that we are determined to ensure that people such as Mr. Shipp and other disabled people, who for too long have been excluded from the labour market and have had to face impossible barriers to fulfilling their potential, have proper opportunities. Programmes such as access to work are designed with exactly the sort of obstacles that Mr. Shipp has come across and has shown great signs of overcoming in mind. We will continue to consider ways in which we can help disabled people and others who face barriers to employment to overcome them.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Does the Minister agree that the issue of partial-sightedness not only affects entry to employment but attracts the danger of early retirement as sight begins to fail, and is therefore a significant social ill? In that connection—and I hope we would all agree with that assertion—will she take particular measures to ensure that the access to work programme is better publicised, better marketed and, if necessary, more appropriately resourced than it has been so far? Will she also publicise the work of the disability employment advisers and take another careful look at the workstep programme? There is no intrinsic problem in moving people into open employment, but many disabled people who have been in supported employment do not wish to feel that they will be forced out into the open labour market when that might not be appropriate for them.

Maria Eagle: There is no question of those for whom the workstep programme—which replaced supported employment—is inappropriate being forced to progress into open employment. We aspire to ensure that those disabled people who are on the programme and can make progress into open employment have a chance to do so. One of the problems with the supported employment programme was that people did not progress, and there were fewer opportunities for those who could benefit from using the programme as a stepping stone. On the access to work programme and the other specialist disability programmes, we advertise the services that are available to disabled people and we do our best to ensure that people who may benefit from them are aware of what is required, necessary and available. Our disability employment advisers in the Employment Service do a very good job in ensuring that disabled people have access to these programmes to assist them into work. We intend to make sure that they continue to do so.

Mr. David Miliband (South Shields): Does my hon. Friend agree that voluntary agencies have a particular role to play in helping those who are hard to place into work? Organisations such as the Shaw Trust in my constituency are making special efforts to help disabled people into work. Does the Department have any plans to extend the role of voluntary organisations in complementing the universal reach of the Employment Service?

Maria Eagle: My hon. Friend is right to mention the Shaw Trust, and there are other examples around the country of voluntary organisations that have particular expertise in this area. He may know that the new deal for disabled people—which went live in July across the country, out of its pilot phase—makes use of such organisations as job brokers to enable disabled people throughout the country to have a proper chance to be assisted into employment by agencies including the Employment Service, private sector organisations and voluntary organisations. This ensures that we can offer disabled people throughout the country a job-brokering service. Thus far, indications are that that is working very well.

Unemployment (Young People)

10. **Mr. John Baron** (Billericay): If he will make a statement as to the effectiveness of the new deal in reducing unemployment among young people. [19151]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): Up to September 2001, the new deal had helped over 333,000 people into work. Since 1997, youth unemployment has fallen by over 40 per cent., and long-term youth unemployment has been cut by almost three-quarters. Independent research has estimated that, without the new deal, long-term youth unemployment would have been about twice as high.

Mr. Baron: Is the Secretary of State aware that the National Institute for Economic and Social Research has estimated that up to 70 per cent. of those who it is claimed the new deal has helped would have found work anyway? This means that over the last Parliament, there has been a cost of about £15,000 per job. Does the Secretary of State accept that this initiative is too expensive and that taxpayers' money could be spent more effectively on relieving poverty in this country? Will he reform this wasteful policy?

Mr. Darling: No, I will not. What the hon. Gentleman says might have some credibility if he could point to anything that his party did during 18 years in power that provided a systematic attack on poverty or did anything to provide the number of measures that we have put in place to get people into work. During the Conservatives' time in office, unemployment was over 3 million for far too long. On the new deal, I should have thought that the fact that long-term youth unemployment in the hon. Gentleman's constituency was down by 80 per cent. might cause him to reflect before speaking to the House this afternoon. The new deal and other measures are doing a great deal to get people into work. Until the hon. Gentleman's party comes up with an alternative policy that would begin to deal with some of the problems, I suggest that a period of reflection would do him some good.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that long-term youth unemployment in Hamilton has been reduced by 69 per cent. since 1997 because of the introduction of the new deal initiative? What steps are being taken to ensure that more employers and businesses participate in this scheme? Are statistics available, showing the benefits to young people in terms of education and training?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend represents a constituency that was devastated by the steel closures in the 1980s. It is just one of many that has benefited through the new deal and other measures which are helping people to get back into work. Perhaps I should have made this point in response to the hon. Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron), but the cost of the new deal is about £4,000 a head. When we compare that with the cost of keeping someone unemployed, it is money very well spent.

My hon. Friend also asked what we are doing to encourage more employers to become involved. Each new Jobcentre Plus office will have someone whose sole job it is to contact local employers, to make sure that we do far more than we have done in the past to match individuals with specific jobs. I hope that my hon. Friend will welcome that measure, because I think that it will be of great help, particularly in areas where, although we have reduced unemployment, a number of other people would still like to get into work.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): Is the Secretary of State aware that in my constituency, out of the 522 people who left the new deal during the past 12 months, only 201 went on into unsubsidised employment? Is that not an indication that, whatever the merits of the new deal, it is not very effective at moving young people into full-time work? Will the right hon. Gentleman kindly bear that in mind before delivering sanctimonious lectures to Conservative Members?

Mr. Darling: But those 200 people would have been unemployed had it not been for the new deal. No one in the House would say that it is easy to get people into work, especially those who have been unemployed for a long time. However, independent research has shown that the new deal and other measures have done a great deal to get people into work who, but for the new deal, would have been unemployed, on the dole and costing billions of pounds in benefit. I believe that the measures that we have taken, which are built on a strong economy—including tax and benefit reforms and changes to the conditionality of receipt of unemployment benefit—have all combined to ensure that it is now more likely that we get people into work. If the hon. Gentleman is considering the alternative, which the Conservative party is flirting with—the Australian style of getting rid of all that help—he might want to reflect on the fact that the unemployment rate in this country is the lowest of that of any of our major competitors.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): Youth unemployment in my constituency was reduced by some 80 per cent. because of the new deal, but we still have pockets in rural areas. Is my right hon. Friend proposing to introduce any extra support to help with transportation problems in the most rural areas, where people have problems in getting to placements?

Mr. Darling: Again, I believe that we can do more here. I am aware of cases in which the Employment Service has teamed up with employers some distance away from its catchment area and they have, through a variety of means, provided transport to get people from where they live to work. For example, people regularly travel from north London to Stansted airport, and measures have been put in place to make it easier for them to do so. My hon. Friend is right to highlight the fact that people who are unemployed and live away from main centres of employment face additional difficulties. That is one reason why we are introducing measures such as the step up programme to see what else we can do to ensure that people who have been disadvantaged in the past are given the same opportunities as everybody else.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): The Secretary of State refers to research, but if he really cares about research, he will have looked at the report produced today by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, "Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion". It says about youth unemployment:

> "the unemployment rate amongst those aged 18 to 24 is still more than twice that for older workers and this gap has widened somewhat in recent years."

That is the evidence about the Secretary of State's new deal. Despite his new deal, the gap between youth unemployment and unemployment for other groups has increased. The Government never take account of the evidence, when it starts coming in, about how their policies are not delivering what is promised.

Is the Secretary of State still committed to reducing the gap in unemployment rates between young workers and the rest? If he is, why is the direction of change—the gap—getting wider? It is another example of the gap between rhetoric and reality.

Mr. Darling: The reality is that the new deal has involved a huge reduction in youth unemployment that would not have taken place but for the new deal and other measures. The hon. Gentleman is always quoting selectively from reports. Clearly, he has had trouble sleeping in the past few days, to judge by the number of volumes of research that he has brought into the Chamber. Of course, he neglects to mention the fact that many of those reports have not yet picked up the full effects of the policies that we have introduced in the past two to three years, but the difference between us is that, during the past four years, we have begun to put in place measures that are producing a systematic reduction in long-term unemployment, not just for young people, but for older people as well. On top of that, we are introducing further measures to help those people who have been unemployed for extremely long periods, despite all the measures that have been put in place.

I return to the same point: what are Conservative Members suggesting as the alternative? They do not have an alternative, other than the wholesale break-up and privatisation of the Employment Service, of the kind that we have seen in Australia, as well as in other countries. I believe that the measures that we are putting in place are making a huge difference to the number of unemployed people in this country and, year by year, there will be a steady improvement in the situation because of the reforms that we have introduced.

Winter Fuel Allowance

12. **Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): If he will make a statement on the progress made in paying backdated winter fuel payments to newly entitled men. [19153]

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): Following the extension of the winter fuel payment scheme to most people aged 60 and over, there have been around 1.2 million claims for the first three years of the scheme. There are no time limits for claiming those backdated payments, and we continue to receive and pay claims. About 16,000 people will benefit from the winter fuel payment in the Newbury constituency this winter.

Mr. Rendel: I am grateful to the Minister for the information about the Newbury constituency, but why has not the Department tracked down, perhaps using its very expensive new computer systems, those who are eligible but have not yet claimed, so that they could be sent an individual letter to their own homes telling them that the money is now due?

Mr. McCartney: We have already paid more than 1 million claims for past winters, and we continue to advertise at all levels in the community in that regard. I cannot force someone to make a claim, but it is absolutely certain that if people make claims and are entitled to the money, they will be paid as quickly as possible. In addition, our home energy efficiency scheme has provided grants of up to £2,000 to heat the homes of up to 250,000 over-60s in the first two years, and 1 million low-income homes have also benefited from the tax changes under our affordable warmth programme. So, at every level, the Government are encouraging the people who are entitled to claim to do so.

Employment (Deprived Areas)

16. **Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): What plans he has to help people back into work in areas of acute social deprivation. [19157]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): Our welfare-to-work initiatives are helping people into work in all parts of the country. The new deals have already helped well over 500,000 people into jobs. We have also introduced action teams for jobs and employment zones, which, between them, have helped more than 32,000 people into work in the most deprived areas. Through Jobcentre Plus, we will work closely with local partnerships and other agencies to ensure our services focus appropriately on areas of acute social deprivation. On 28 November, we also announced the introduction of step up, and one of the pilot schemes for that programme will be run in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Mr. Cunningham: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. He said that one of the step up pilot schemes would be run in Coventry. Can he assure me that not only young people but people over 50 will benefit from that scheme? He is probably aware of the many debates in the House about ageism, and I hope that he will give me an assurance on the over-50s.

Mr. Brown: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. The scheme is aimed at the long-term unemployed, at people who have found the labour market intractable and even at people who have previously been on one of the Government's schemes. We want to prevent churning, which is why the new scheme will provide intensive work with those who have found the labour market intractable, with a view to getting them into permanent employment.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Is the Minister aware not only that his policies are not working, but that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), the shadow Secretary of State, said, it is revealed in the report published today that more families are classified as very poor now than in the last full year of the Conservative Government? In the light of that, will he urge the Secretary of State to apologise to Conservative Social Security Ministers in previous Parliaments, such as my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), for his outrageous attack on our successful policies?

Mr. Brown: That is the first time I have heard the hon. Gentleman use the word "apologise", although I accept that he has been out of this place for some time. The Conservative party has a lot to apologise for. It could start by apologising to the 3 million unemployed and to those who were told in the 1980s that there was no place for them in the economy of this country and who had to be shifted on to incapacity benefit to get them off the unemployment register. If we extended beyond them the list of those who are due an apology from the Conservative party, it would be a long list.

No one on the Government Benches owes an apology—certainly not to the poor and the dispossessed, whom we are setting out proactively to help. They include the long-term unemployed, whom we are determined to help back into the labour market and keep there.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): My right hon. Friend will know that the reports on the disturbances in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford earlier this year will identify unemployment in areas of social deprivation as one of the problems. Recognising that unemployment is a problem in areas of deprivation and poverty, will the Government look again at possible ways of tackling the problem, particularly where there is perceived unfairness of job opportunities between the different groups?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend makes some good points, and I can give him the assurance that he seeks. I hope that the step up pilot in his constituency will go some way to addressing the problems, particularly as they relate to the long-term unemployed and to his constituents who have already been through Government programmes. However, we need to keep a close eye on how the pilots work and to pay attention to the reports, which will be published tomorrow, so that we see what more we can do. As my hon. Friend suggested, some pretty intractable issues lie behind the difficulties that his constituents have faced.

Stakeholder Pensions

17. **Mr. Mark Hoban** (Fareham): What assessment his Department has made of the estimated cost to businesses of implementing stakeholder pensions. [19158]

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): A regulatory impact assessment was published last year setting out the likely costs to business of the stakeholder pension schemes regulatory framework. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Hoban: Is it not disgraceful that a Minister does not know how much businesses have spent on implementing a policy that the *Financial Times* described as unsustainable and as unlikely to survive? What would the right hon. Gentleman do to resolve the crisis of this flagship policy with its appallingly low take-up rate among the target group of moderate to low income earners?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman is certainly a weary Willy. It is quite clear that both Front-Bench and Back-Bench Conservatives are totally opposed to providing pension provision to that group of workers who currently do not have such provision.

Far from being a failure, from a standing start and in a matter of months, just over 500,000 stakeholder pensions have been sold, and 285,000 employers have been designated. When I last stood at the Dispatch Box at Question Time, I said that it was likely that only two thirds of employees would have designated schemes by 8 October, but three quarters of them have done that. We are working with employers to maximise the numbers involved.

The overall level of pension provision this year shows that the value of new pension sales rose by 9 per cent. and regular premium business rose by 50 per cent. The Government are supporting the pension market and supporting the large proportion of workers who, if it had been left to the Tory party, would not have had a pension at all.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the recent report produced by the National Association of Pension Funds which shows that new entrants to pensions are increasingly offered money purchase schemes rather than final salary schemes? Moreover, it shows that employers' contributions to money purchase schemes are only just over half the contributions to final salary schemes. The implication is that people now in their 20s or 30s will have substantially less pension when they retire than their counterparts who retire now. Is that not inconsistent with Government pension policy?

Mr. McCartney: The policy that my hon. Friend mentions has been going on for 30 years, but it is interesting to note the sustained growth in the amounts contributed to state pensions. The figure has risen from £37 billion in 1994 to £69 billion last year. As I said in my reply to the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban), there has been a sustained increase in pension sales and in the investment going into pensions. The issue is to make sure that we have pension products that provide for all aspects of people's pensions, and that is why the second state pension has been introduced. Some 14 million low-paid workers benefit by an average of £32 a week and 2 million people with disabilities are also helped. Women carers are benefiting for the first time. A large proportion of workers who were outside the stakeholder pension are now inside the pension marketplace. The Government have a sustained programme in place, and it is important that my hon. Friend supports the Bill to introduce a second state pension because that will help many pensioners who would have lost out under the Tories.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I understand that the House of Commons Commission is due to meet today. In view of the extraordinary circumstances regarding the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, could you ask your colleagues on the Commission to circulate the minutes of those meetings to hon. Members as quickly as possible? I have yet to see one outside reference in favour of the decision not to renew the contract of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. It is a serious and disturbing situation and, I have to say, it is the House of Commons that seems to be in the dock, not Mrs. Filkin.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Members will be aware of the sensitivity of this matter, both for the House and the Chairman of the House of Commons Commission, so I shall not trespass on that. However, would it be possible for a member of the Government or a representative of the Commission to say what action they propose to take on the allegations in the *Sunday Mirror* yesterday that for 48 hours Ministers and others briefed against the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards? It is up to the House to protect someone who is here on behalf of hon. Members and the public, and it is important that we discover what has been going on, who has been doing it and who is going to stop it. I do not want to attack the Prime Minister, but if Ministers are doing that, someone should be able to stop them.

On a personal note, when I get told by journalists that people in authority outside the House are saying that I leaked a letter, which I did not do, on Tuesday, I take that not as a particular attack on me, but as a further attack on the Commissioner. I hope that those attacks will stop as well.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) knows that the Commission meets in private. However, I reiterate what I said last week: I have asked the Commissioner to put her allegations to me in writing, so that I have an opportunity to investigate. I am awaiting word from Mrs. Filkin on that matter.

David Winnick: Can I ask about the minutes?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman asked about minutes and then went on to make a statement. That was unworthy of him. Making a statement has nothing to do with a point of order. I can tell him that the Commission meets in private and minutes will not be issued. He knows that.

Peter Bottomley: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful to you for reminding the House about the contents of last week's statement. Since then, a fresh series of whisperings have taken place which continue the campaign that the Leader of the House has known about since August, when it was referred to in the *Financial Times*. Did either he or the Commission act on that public notice of such whisperings? Do they intend to take direct action about the allegations in the *Sunday Mirror* or against Ministers on what has been going on since your statement last week as Chairman of the House of Commons Commission?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that the Speaker does not respond to press reports. If he did, he would be here all day.

Orders of the Day

Tax Credits Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

3.33 pm

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Government have made clear their commitment to increasing and improving the support available to families, to making work pay and to tackling poverty. That means providing financial help for all families with children, recognising the costs and responsibilities that come with parenthood, targeting help on those who need it most to help to achieve our long-term goal of halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it within a generation, and reforming the tax and benefits system to make sure that work pays.

During the last Parliament, we moved to tackle those problems on a number of fronts, and we worked within the constraints of the system that we inherited, trying to ensure that we maximised benefits to those in greatest need. We introduced the working families tax credit, which currently benefits nearly 1.3 million families, and the children's tax credit, which is a tax cut of up to £520 a year for around 5 million families. The introduction of new tax credits, as our next step, will allow us to make further progress in achieving our aims.

We will rationalise and streamline our systems of support to deliver more effective help to families with children and to working households. The Bill replaces numerous strands of support with two new targeted tax credits: the child tax credit to tackle child poverty and provide targeted support to parents, and the working tax credit to improve work incentives, tackle in-work poverty and remove barriers to work. We are not changing our objectives—they are the right objectives—but we are changing the way in which we deliver them. Our aim is to provide a seamless stream of support to parents, who will be able to apply at one point, the Inland Revenue.

Our reforms so far have been successful, but they do not go far enough. Existing forms of support can be divisive: support for children depends on whether the parents are in work; some people drop through the gaps in support; measures such as the children's tax credit can reach only taxpayers; and support for workers with disabilities focuses on their disability rather than on their working. Existing forms of support are inflexible. The working families tax credit and the disabled person's tax credit, beneficial as they have been, are fixed awards that cannot usually respond to changing circumstances. Existing forms of support overlap and can be an awkward fit with the tax system, increasing the hassle of applying for them and creating confusion for claimants.

We are now introducing a single inclusive credit to support families with children: one framework for income-related support for children that will reduce stigma, smooth the transition into work and broaden the scope of support. We are also introducing an inclusive credit for those in work, with the emphasis on work, so that workers with disabilities and households facing in-work poverty are within the single framework.

The new tax credits will be able to adjust to reflect changes as they happen—for example, when a child is born or when parents start or stop using paid child care. They will be able to respond to changes in family income, so that support is better targeted, providing extra support when it is needed and helping people to stay in work. They will be a better fit with the tax system, improving transparency and fairness and making it easier for people, when they apply for their tax credits, to use the information that they already get for tax. Tax credits will be based on annual income before income tax and national insurance are deducted.

This is a substantial change, and the Government have engaged in detailed and wide-ranging consultation with organisations outside the House that have the expertise to help us to develop and improve the system. The consultation document, published in July, received more than 170 written responses. A series of consultation meetings were held around the United Kingdom to discuss the issues, and many other formal and informal meetings with a range of groups also took place. The consultation has been widely welcomed. For instance, NCH Action for Children said:

> "We would like to thank the Revenue and Treasury for the very genuine efforts you have made to inform and engage organisations like the NCH in this consultation process—not only on paper but also through your programme of events."

The Disability Alliance said:

> "We would like to place on record our appreciation of the extent and openness of the consultation."

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): If the consultation was so wonderful, why did the Institute for Fiscal Studies say of the consultation document:

> "Although it invited views on key issues, it provided no quantitative evidence on which one might base a sensible response"?

What is the Paymaster General's answer to that?

Dawn Primarolo: The Bill provides a framework for bringing together a range of benefits and support for families. The thresholds and tapers to which the Institute for Fiscal Studies referred will be made clear in the Budget statement by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. Today, the House is considering the framework for delivering those benefits and whether those payments are clearer, more effective and more helpful for those who will receive them.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): May I develop that point? Two people in a couple who are both on average earnings would get the full children's tax credit, but under joint assessment they might get nothing, the full amount or something in between. I sense that the Paymaster General's response to them is, "Wait and see". Can she give them any more reassurance today or will they have to wait until next year to find out whether they get all the £500 or nothing?

Dawn Primarolo: I can reassure individuals and families that the Government are committed to continue reforms that will benefit them. Unlike the previous Government, we, continue to take serious steps to tackle poverty, particularly children's poverty. As the hon. Gentleman knows, and as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I have repeatedly said, thresholds and tapers will be announced in the 2002 Budget. The hon. Gentleman is an acknowledged expert on those matters. I hope that even he would agree that the framework that

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we are putting in place will be more transparent, easier to understand and more effective in delivering support to families. That is what we are deciding today.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): My hon. Friend knows that people who successfully claim those tax credits are extremely grateful. But is she also aware that take-up is significantly lower in London because of housing costs and the way in which the housing benefit system works? Will she look at circumstances in London to ensure that work can be made to pay for single mothers and poor families, via the tax credit system, just as it does in the rest of the country?

Dawn Primarolo: I thank my hon. Friend for her comments. I assure her that we will look closely at take-up by the most vulnerable people in our communities and the crucial interaction between the threshold, tapers and other benefits, such as housing benefit and council tax benefit.

The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, in its submission for today's debate, said that measures that have already been introduced have made a significant impact on the lives of many people, including CAB clients. It said that the working families tax credit has proved extremely popular and that it is readily apparent that large numbers of lone parents, for example, have started working and are receiving it. The arrangements in the Bill seek to build on that success in the course of delivering our objectives.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): This being carers' rights day, may I ask whether, in response to the consultation, carers' representatives have been in touch to find out whether the employment tax credit that benefits disabled workers could also benefit carers?

Dawn Primarolo: Yes, the Carers National Association has participated in the consultation process. Discussion continues between the Inland Revenue and associations representing carers to take forward their objectives, particularly to establish an agreed definition of carers and how that may become part of tax credit payments in the future. I know that the association has been fair and direct in its comments, but achieving such a definition will be difficult. It is important that the definition is correct and allows carers to benefit. The Government have made a commitment to take that forward.

There will be continuing dialogue with interested groups as the Bill goes through the House and supporting legislation is drawn up. Many points raised in the consultation responses will be picked up again during those discussions, the definition of carers being but one.

In the light of the views expressed in the consultation process, we have decided that child maintenance payments will not be treated as income for the purposes of the new tax credit. The disregard of child maintenance has been a successful feature of the working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit, helping lone parents move into work. We are continuing that approach in the new tax credits—a decision that has been widely welcomed.

Building on reforms in the system must take account of the progress that has already been made. The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux has been constructive in its engagement in the process. It stated:

> "We recognise the substantial progress that has been made in the past four years with the introduction of a range of policies aimed at increasing the incomes of people both in and out of work."

By the mid-1990s, the United Kingdom had the highest rate of relative poverty in the European Union and the highest proportion of children living in workless households. Personal tax and benefit changes introduced since 1997 have ensured that there are now 1.2 million fewer children in relative poverty than there would otherwise have been. From April 2002, increases in the rate of child benefit, which is vital to families but was frozen by the previous Administration, will be worth £15.75 for the first child, and £10.55 for subsequent children. That represents a 26 per cent. rise in real terms for the first child. Compare that with the actions of the previous Government, who froze child benefit and made sure that it contributed less to households. The children's allowance will be raised in income support and other income-related benefits, and there will be real-terms increases of 80 per cent. for children under 11.

We introduced the working families tax credit and the disabled person's tax credit, which provide more support to families than their predecessors—family credit and disability working allowance—ever did. The working families tax credit helps almost 1.3 million families, who receive an average of £35 a week more than under family credit. The disabled person's tax credit goes to more than 29,000 people—almost 60 per cent. more than the disability working allowance at its peak. In 2001, we introduced the children's tax credit, which is worth up to £10 a week for about 5 million families. From next April, it will be worth an additional £10 a week to families who have a new-born child in that year. However, we have also made sure that work pays.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): The Paymaster General said that 1.3 million families were benefiting from the working families tax credit. It is important, of course, to assess the take-up of tax credits against the number of people who are eligible to receive them. How many people are eligible for the working families tax credit and how does its take-up compare with that of other benefits?

Dawn Primarolo: I have indicated the growth in working families tax credit and the number of extra families who are receiving it over and above its predecessor, family credit. The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the impact of the working families tax credit and whether it gets to the families who need it most and addresses the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). That is precisely why the Government have ensured that we have independent assessment and research on those points. It ill behoves Opposition Members, who presided over record growth in child poverty and unemployment, to try to undermine the take-up of those benefits.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I want to press the hon. Lady on the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), who asked about take-up of the working families tax credit. How many people are eligible for it and how many claim it?

Dawn Primarolo: Some 800,000 people were claiming family credit and 1.3 million now receive the working families tax credit—a higher number. Opposition Members need to focus on two points: first, the benefit to those 1.3 million families, and, secondly, whether all those who are entitled to receive the credit are receiving it and any barriers to doing so. Precisely the comments that Opposition Members have made about complexity and the problems of applying for this support are addressed in the Bill, to which they should turn their attention.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dawn Primarolo: No; I want to make some progress.

Mr. Prisk *rose—*

Dawn Primarolo: Which part of the word "No" is the hon. Gentleman struggling with? I should like to make a little progress, after which I shall give way. I have been very generous in doing so. Indeed, so few Conservative Members are present in the Chamber, I think that I have given way to just about every one of them.

The commitments to supporting families are mirrored by our efforts to ensure that work pays. We have improved work incentives and reduced in-work poverty through targeted tax cuts that allow families to keep more of what they earn. We introduced the working families tax credit, the disabled person's tax credit and the children's tax credit—targeted cuts for families that provide, alongside the national minimum wage, guaranteed levels of income for working families. We included the child care tax credit in the working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit, removing the barriers to work and helping parents to enter and remain in the workplace. We introduced the 10p starting rate for income tax, which has halved the marginal rates of tax for almost 2 million people on low earnings. We also introduced the national minimum wage to ensure that people receive a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. The national minimum wage tackles the worst excesses of low pay and ensures greater fairness in the workplace. The Low Pay Commission has estimated that between 1.2 million and 1.4 million workers aged 22 or above have benefited from the increase of the national minimum wage to £4.10.

I turn now to the structure of the new tax credits and what they replace. Building on the foundations of universal child benefit, the child tax credit will draw together in a single payable tax credit the child elements of the working families tax credit, the disabled person's tax credit, income support and the income-based jobseeker's allowance, as well as the children's tax credit.

It establishes for the first time a single system of income-related support for families with children, whether they are in or out of work. It bridges the gap between welfare and work and removes the stigma from support for children.

The credit will include a family element available to all families with children that will be higher for families with a child under the age of one. We will also include additional elements to reflect the number of children or young people in the family. That tailors support according to the size of the family. Higher credits will be payable for children or young people with a disability.

The working tax credit replaces the adult elements of the working families tax credit and disabled persons tax credit, as well as the employment credit in the new deal 50-plus. It extends the principle of in-work support, paid through the wage packet to those without children. If based on current support systems, it would benefit an estimated extra 400,000 people without children on low incomes. That benefit will also cover workers with a disability. Disability groups have favoured that approach rather than retaining a separate tax credit such as the disabled person's tax credit.

With the minimum wage, those credits will tackle poverty and improve work incentives by making work pay. The working tax credit will consist of a basic element for all those who are eligible. Additional elements will target support according to household circumstances. For example, there will be an additional element for couples, lone parents and workers who have a disability.

The working tax credit will also include an element for the costs of child care. Unlike the other elements in the credit, it will be paid directly to the main carer alongside child tax credit. It will not be paid through the wage packet. That reflects views expressed in the consultation. The Government remain committed to helping parents to overcome barriers to work. We will therefore build on the success of the child care tax credit in the working families tax credit and the disabled person's tax credit by including a child care component in the working tax credit.

The child care tax credit already helps approximately 145,000 families with their child care costs. That is three times the number who benefited from the child care disregard in family credit. Lone parent employment is at its highest for 20 years. We have listened to the comments of parents and child care providers about the existing arrangements, and we will make improvements to the new system. We plan to pay the child care element only while child care costs are being incurred. That will meet the anxieties of providers about keeping places open for parents who do not use them. It provides flexibility for parents who can get extra help when they need it.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): My hon. Friend knows that there is no greater champion than me of the Government's actions on child care. However, during the Bill's passage, I ask the Department to try to tackle the problems that face families whose child care is provided in their homes. For example, child care must be provided in the home for a nurse on shift work or a parent with a disabled child. More than 50 per cent. of child care is in the informal sector.

Dawn Primarolo: I assure my hon. Friend that child care in the home is partly covered by the Bill. However, I know that she is a champion of child care principles, and I emphasise that when we pay for child care, we must ensure that it is safe and of high quality so that the child is protected. She also knows that the Department for Education and Skills regulates child care providers. It will

[Dawn Primarolo]

be necessary, especially in the case of disabled children for whom it is more appropriate to provide care in the home, to ensure that there are no barriers to prevent the payment of the tax credit. This issue will also apply, as my hon. Friend rightly suggested, to shift workers, who usually find it more appropriate to provide child care in their own home, depending on their shift.

The payment of the working tax credit through the wage packet will be key in demonstrating the link to work. We also recognise the practical need to provide help with child care costs quickly to the main carer. We shall, therefore, pay the child care element of the working tax credit directly to the main carer alongside the child tax credit.

The Bill also deals with the transfer of child benefit payments to the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Webb: I appreciate that the Minister will not give us specific figures, but may I ask her a question on the principle of the streamlining of support for people both in and out of work? She will be aware that the children of someone in work get slightly more support—through the combination of child benefit and working families tax credit—than the children of someone who is out of work receive through personal allowances on income support. The difference is not large, but it exists. Will she confirm her intention to level up, rather than level down, that difference?

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman seeks to draw me into a discussion on rates and tapers in a slightly different way and, as much as I like and respect his work, I cannot be tempted down that route at the Dispatch Box today. He makes an important point, however, that goes to the heart of the tax credit reforms, which will ensure that support given to families specifically for children should not be differentiated according to whether the parents are in or out of work. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will follow closely when the Chancellor makes his announcements on the rates and tapers in the 2002 Budget, and if the hon. Gentleman serves on the Committee for the Bill, he will no doubt want to pursue the matter further when we discuss the clauses that provide for the regulations on child care.

The Bill provides for the transfer of child benefit to the Inland Revenue, as announced by the Prime Minister in June this year. Child benefit is a key part of the Government's strategy for eradicating child poverty, and it will remain an identifiable stream of income that is universally available. The child tax credit introduced by the Bill will build on the foundations of child benefit. It makes sense to streamline the administration of financial support for parents by transferring child benefit to the Inland Revenue.

Alongside the introduction of the child tax credit, that will enable the Government to deliver a joined-up service to parents, who will need to deal with only one Department to get the support to which they are entitled for their children. The majority of the 7 million families who receive child benefit will also receive help through the child tax credit, so it makes sense for both to be run by a single Department. That will help to reduce the hassle and red tape for those families.

Mr. Prisk: While welcoming the simplification of the various credits that the Minister has mentioned, may I ask her whether she believes that the Bill in any way negates the need for the Carter report, which she and her senior colleague published recently?

Dawn Primarolo: The simple answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is no, if he is referring to the Carter report that deals with the burdens on small and medium enterprises. The Government are currently seeking responses to the suggestions in the report.

As the hon. Gentleman is no doubt aware, small and medium enterprises have made the criticism—unjustly, in my view—that the working families tax credit and the disabled person's tax credit put an unreasonable burden on such companies. While reforming the system, we examined the development of tax credits in the context of reducing the burdens on small and medium enterprises. If he reads the regulatory impact assessment, he will see that the costs are reduced by about £11 million per year, but by bringing tax credits more in line with the tax system we have reduced the number of necessary contacts with the employer. For example, the assessment is annual, so there is no need to stop and start during the year, which happens with the six-monthly working families tax credit allocations, and much of the paperwork necessary because of the six-monthly renewal has disappeared.

I am sure that a few companies still cannot appreciate the benefits of having a stable work force and being able to provide child care, but they will realise that the burdens on them are considerably reduced. Although I do not necessarily agree with all the criticisms made originally, it would be churlish not to seek during the reform further to reduce the pressures and burdens on small and medium enterprises.

If the hon. Gentleman is lucky enough to sit on the Committee, which I hope he is, I shall be more than happy to engage in greater detail on the changes that we have made. Indeed, the Institute of Directors, which is not necessarily noted for its great enthusiasm for the tax credit agenda, has congratulated the Government on the measures and changes that we have introduced

Mr. Kidney: On burdens, the other side of the coin is the ability of Inland Revenue staff to carry out their new duties in addition to their existing ones. Is my hon. Friend happy that they will be able to discharge their duties well? As an indicator of the answer, may I say that I have been extremely impressed with the high-quality service provided by the Inland Revenue in my constituency during delivery of the working families tax credit system?

Dawn Primarolo: I was a little worried as my hon. Friend began in case he was about to point out an error—errors do happen in such a vast system—but I am happy that he has confirmed his experience of how the Inland Revenue conducts its relationships with employers, ensuring that they are properly informed of their obligations and working with those who claim their entitlement through the tax credits. It has worked extremely efficiently.

There are always problems in a vast system, and I cannot put my hand on my heart and say that there will be no errors in future, but the Inland Revenue has shown in the development of the working families tax credit and the disabled person's tax credit and in the Bill that it has the capacity to deliver sensitively, quickly and in a way that people who claim the tax credits understand.

The other important point, which my hon. Friend's intervention leads me to, is the tax credits responding to changed family circumstances. We inherited much of the structure for the working families tax credit and the disabled person's tax credit from their predecessors, family credit and the disability working allowance, which included fixed awards. That means that families may have to wait up to six months for their award to be adjusted to their changing circumstances.

We have already made changes to the working families tax credit and the disabled person's tax credit to ensure that families can receive extra help immediately a new child is born, but the introduction of the new tax credits allows us to go much further in developing a responsive, targeted system.

Under the new system, tax credit awards will respond as a family's circumstances change, delivering the right support to families at the right time. For example, whenever the composition of a household changes or a family's child care costs change significantly, tax credit awards will be able to respond to that change straight away. No longer will there be any need for a family to wait six months.

In responses to the consultation, everyone recognised that there was a need to respond to changes in income, both up and down. The proposals in the Bill introduce a more flexible system that can respond to those changes in income, and that has been widely welcomed. All hon. Members will recognise that it is important to strike a balance between making the system responsive to income changes and keeping it straightforward for claimants. There must be certainty in the guaranteed amount of income over a fixed period that the family will receive. That has been vital in working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit, and in family credit before that. We must provide that certainty, but we must also be able to respond to dramatic falls in income or changes in family circumstances. The Bill allows us to take a flexible approach to income changes.

We need to have further discussion of this issue, which I am sure will occur in Committee, so that we can refine the system in the light of experience once the tax credits have been functioning for some time, and enable it to be changed quickly.

Finally, the problems of compliance and fraud are ever present.

Mr. Willetts *rose—*

Dawn Primarolo: Does the hon. Gentleman want to intervene before I move on to compliance and fraud? I know that I am going to regret giving way.

Mr. Willetts: I intervene only because the hon. Lady said "finally", and I wanted to clarify a simple point of principle to which she has not yet referred. Will she pledge to the House that no families will lose as a result of the changes in the Bill?

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman tries again to introduce the subject of thresholds and tapers. Families are considerably better off than they would have been had we had the misfortune of his party being re-elected.

On compliance and fraud, it is important to ensure that only people who are genuinely entitled to the tax credits receive them. Everyone suffers if money goes to the wrong people, including the people who receive that money and then have to return it. The compliance regime for the new tax credits will be based on two principles: encouraging people to claim everything to which they are entitled, and providing an effective deterrent to the small minority—it is small—who try to cheat the system.

The Bill contains provisions to deal with non-compliance, including inquiry and information powers to uncover false claims, financial penalties when tax credits are falsely claimed, and powers to investigate and prosecute cases of criminal fraud. The Inland Revenue has a long history of tackling fraud successfully. The compliance strategy for the new tax credits will make full use of the automated systems and data sources available to the Inland Revenue, which will enable it to use systematic risk screening techniques to identify the riskiest cases. It will also be important that such a regime does not deter people who are entitled to the tax credits from claiming them.

The Bill builds on our achievements in the last Parliament, but we need to go further. It is the next step in the programme to tackle child poverty and make work pay. It will produce a more coherent and streamlined system of support, and will extend the coverage of that support.

Child tax credit will provide a secure stream of income for families with children, regardless of whether they are in work. It will bridge the gap between welfare and work more effectively, and reduce stigma. Working tax credit will improve work incentives by making work pay, relieve in-work poverty, and extend the principle of in-work support through the wage packet to those without children.

I urge Members to support the Bill, and ensure that we continue our fight to eradicate poverty in our society.

4.15 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): The Paymaster General has presented a "motherhood and apple pie" case for supporting the Bill's objectives rather than appraising whether it can deliver them effectively, and identifying the various problems that the changes raise.

In fact, Parliament is being asked for a blank cheque. We shall not know the amounts or the costs of the proposed benefits until next summer. Many of the important details have been presented sketchily, and await prescription in subsequent regulations. The Law Society fears that many important issues and principles relating to the new tax credits and their administration will not be considered properly by Parliament as a result.

As has already become apparent, we do not know whether a million families in which both parents are working will lose out under the new child tax credit arrangements next summer. Nor, indeed, do we know whether the Chancellor or the Prime Minister has won in the row over tax credits. The Paymaster General noticeably refused to be drawn into answering that question.

The Prime Minister, we understand, believes that the Chancellor's tax credit schemes will be too expensive and too complex to yield a political payback, and wants Government expenditure to be directed more towards clear-cut objectives such as higher health spending.

[Mr. Howard Flight]

Moreover, the Chancellor confirmed in his pre-Budget report that the forecast for Government expenditure did not take into account the additional costs resulting from the new tax credits, as financial decisions on rates have yet to be made. Under sections 20 and 23(b) of the Government's "Code for Fiscal Stability", the extra expenditure should have been noted as a special fiscal risk in the pre-Budget statement.

What I think we all know is that Britain cannot afford massive extra spending on health, transport and education, as well as very generous tax credits, without major tax increases that could damage the economy in the present uncertain economic climate. Some journalists have suggested that the Chancellor is trying to warm us up for tax increases by focusing on the needs of the national health service, when his real additional spending intentions are more modest. Health expenditure equal to the European Union average of 8 per cent. of gross national product back in 1998, which the permanent secretary described last week as the Government's target, actually represents only 0.2 per cent. more than the Government's existing plans to increase health expenditure to 7.8 per cent. of GNP.

Phil Hope (Corby): The hon. Gentleman seems to be saying we are spending too much on the health service and on education, and will now be spending too much on what I think he described as "generous" tax credits. Which area of spending would his party cut if it were in government?

Mr. Flight: The hon. Gentleman should not waste the House's time. *[Interruption.]* It is the Government who are governing. The point that I have made, quite simply, is that as the Government have agendas in all those areas it would be helpful if they told us precisely what they are, and to what extent they will be affordable.

The bill for the Chancellor's tax credits, and including pension credits, is likely to top £10 billion by 2003-04 and to rise substantially thereafter. Has Prudence Brown experienced a major character change? Is he becoming a big spender, or is he up to his old tricks of spinning more than he intends to deliver?

The real issue is: have the Government got the approach right this time? The Chancellor repeatedly trumpeted the working families tax credit as his main flagship of welfare reform. It was described as a once in a lifetime shake-up of the tax and benefit system. The working families tax credit took effect only in 2000 and the children's tax credit only in April this year, but now the Government are ending those and proposing a different, more complex system of credits.

Aside from the substantial work and costs to the Department for Work and Pensions and to the Inland Revenue, the different arrangements will be confusing for beneficiaries, who are only just getting on top of the working families tax credit and children's tax credit systems. Labour Members should take that matter seriously, because one of the problems has been lack of take-up. The Paymaster General was extraordinarily reluctant to comment on what the number eligible for working families tax credit has been, but the Bill effectively admits that the previous measures were not correct, and that the Chancellor did not get it right last time. Many of the Opposition's criticisms of the working families tax credit and the children's tax credit have proven to be correct.

The Government made great play of the 1.5 million eligible for working families tax credit but after two years, less than 1.3 million have claimed it. This very day the Government argued that over-spending on working families tax credit has been the result of the number claiming it being greater than expected. How can that be when the Government said that 1.5 million were eligible and less than 1.3 million have actually claimed it?

It is a serious point that claimants will find the new system very different. The conflicting aims of targeting and, allegedly, simplifying credits have forced a compromise on simplicity and predictability for families whose income and composition may change significantly during the year. The new arrangements will heighten existing complexities. The adjustments required to pay-as-you-earn records are complex and a significant burden for employers, who may not be able to implement changes promptly.

Entitlements to the credits must be based on annual income—either annual income in the previous year or an estimate of annual income for the current year. The arrangements will not be capable of operating in the way that was promised in the Queen's Speech, or of responding more quickly to changes in a family's situation to meet their financial needs effectively. There is no evidence that the Inland Revenue responds more speedily and appropriately than the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Social Security have in the past.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): The hon. Gentleman is making a case against the whole principle of tax credits. Does he intend to return to a benefit-based system? If so, what was it about that system that he so loved?

Mr. Flight: I am grateful that the hon. Lady expects us to return to power and to address those issues, but the task of the Opposition is to raise the issues and the problems. As the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) would say, the issue is whether a tax-based system is indeed capable of dealing more effectively with people's needs, particularly poor members of society, than a Department for Work and Pensions-based system. I did not hear the Paymaster General cite arguments on why greater success is achievable under such a system. I will come to many of the problems and criticisms that have been raised, but may I comment first on the underlying principles?

Hon. Members will recollect that it was the Conservatives who introduced family credit, as the Paymaster General said, from which 817,000 people benefited. We pioneered the case for pricing people into work and making work pay, at a time when for many the welfare system had acted as a disincentive to work. The Chancellor, in his pre-Budget speech, drew particular attention to the failures of the rest of the EU and made the point that if we had the EU system we would have double the level of unemployment—another 1 million people out of work. It was also the Conservatives who, 30 years ago, examined the arguments for a negative income tax, which is largely what is proposed in the Bill, but we concluded that it would be less effective in addressing real needs than the social security system.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): I am confused about what the hon. Gentleman is trying to say. He started by saying that what my hon. Friend the Paymaster General was saying was apple pie and all things nice, but now he is claiming that the previous Conservative Government should take the credit for all the good things that we are doing. If he thought things were so good, what has my hon. Friend said that has really pleased him?

Mr. Flight: I will comment shortly on the aspects of the Bill that we like, but the structure of the Bill raises some problems that have not been addressed and that might prevent it from addressing the issue of real poverty in our community. The easy assumption that moving to a more tax-based system for delivering welfare will solve all the needs of our society is over-optimistic, for the reasons that I am giving.

The Bill raises two crucially important issues. One is the level of balance that needs to be struck in measures to price people into work. Subsidising wages can entail the danger of depressing pay, demotivating skills improvement and personal advancement and depressing productivity growth. Secondly, the crucial issue is whether to use the tax system increasingly for welfare delivery or to continue with a mixture and use the existing Department for Work and Pensions system, which may be more effective at addressing real need.

The Chancellor's pre-Budget report described the objectives of his proposed tax credits as helping to tackle inadequate work incentives and to tackle the unemployment poverty traps. However, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux has pointed out that topping up low earnings is now often serving to entrench low pay.

Caroline Flint: The difference between this Government and previous Governments is that when we had the old family credit system there was no national minimum wage to put a floor under poverty pay. The Government have provided a basis on which pay cannot go below a certain level, and can then be supplemented by in-work benefits.

Mr. Flight: I do not agree in principle, but a minimum wage is just a universal minimum for everyone and is not relevant to whether people receive the right rewards for different skill levels. It is merely a floor and we could spend hours debating whether it is sufficient.

The Government's recent report on skill levels has admitted that Britain's skill base lags far behind that of other developed economies. The Government predict that thousands of jobs could be left vacant because of the lack of skills. The report points out that the growth in the proportion of the work force with intermediate vocational skills has been slower than in the rest of the OECD. Many who participate in skills councils have expressed concerns that, increasingly, the right reward signals for the enhancement of skills are not clear. Under the Bill, take-home pay for many will bear little relationship to the market remuneration for their skills. The Chancellor's economic objective is to increase Britain's declining rate of productivity growth under the Labour Government. Has he understood the contradictions between the very worthy social objectives and the very necessary economic ones?

Kali Mountford: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that one of the biggest barriers to attaining skills is an extended period of worklessness? Is it not good to incentivise going to work, so that people are back in the labour market and increasing the skills base?

Mr. Flight: That is why I said a few moments ago that it was the Conservatives who started the principle of pricing people into work. This is an important issue. A delicate balance needs to be struck between pricing people into work and having a system of pay-packet remuneration with signals in terms of people's rewards for enhancing their skills. Getting that balance right is difficult, but crucial. We do not know whether the Bill will get the balance right because we have not been told what the level of credits will be. The House should focus—as should the Chancellor if he wishes productivity growth in this country to recover—on the fact that this is a crucial area to get right.

According to the Government, for many, the working families tax credit should increase the incentives to get a job. However, as Donald Hirsch pointed out in the *New Statesman*, some people—not all—will, as they earn more, lose more than 90 per cent. of the extra income through tax and withdrawal of housing benefits. He said that while Ministers preached about improving individual opportunities and productivity, they risked sending signals that encouraged individuals and companies to go for low-grade, low-paid jobs.

The second major issue of principle is whether it is right to move increasingly towards using the Inland Revenue, as opposed to the Department for Work and Pensions, as the administrator and the payer of such benefits. While there are attractions in using the Inland Revenue—it has people's PAYE records—it being the administrator of welfare benefits runs the risk of leading to even greater bureaucracy and complexity in our tax system and of it failing to be able to deliver to the needy when they are particularly in need of support.

Much additional information beyond PAYE is required to administer benefits appropriately relating to family circumstances, receipt of housing benefit, disability and—for the Bill's particular purposes—average hours worked and child care costs. At the heart of the concerns of the Institute for Fiscal Studies is the need for claimants to monitor annual income, average hours of work and child care costs, which it believes will lead to the risk of considerably greater non-compliance. Pressure may also develop for those and other relevant items of information to be required to be included in citizens' tax returns, increasing the bureaucratic burden on everybody.

The proposals to simplify the administration system for paying tax credits by moving to an annual system based around the tax year—essentially to save administrative costs—runs the risk of the system being unable to respond quickly and specifically enough to people's changed working circumstances. The Paymaster General expressed the view that the Bill would bring about great improvements in that area, but she did not describe

[Mr. Flight]

precisely how that was to be achieved within the simplified administration. That is one of the areas that awaits the further regulations.

In addition, there is the risk of increasing fraud. The right hon. Member for Birkenhead has pointed out that the less precise administrative arrangements for benefits proposed by the Bill run the risk of resulting in spiralling costs as people learn to play the system. The new arrangements also run the risk of offering large bonuses for dishonesty, inviting employers to connive with employees to the benefit of both parties and pulling employers into a spider's web of potential dishonesty. The right hon. Gentleman points out that as well as rewarding employers to pay low wages, the arrangements also take the pressure off improving productivity.

The former Select Committee on Social Security expressed concerns that the potential for fraud could increase if priority is placed on prompt payment at the expense of rigorous checking of eligibility, but when families face hardship, welfare payments need to be made promptly.

Similar systems overseas have experienced widespread abuse. Fraud became such a major problem with the Canadian working income supplement that Canada has moved back to a benefit system. In America, the earned-income tax credit has met with similar problems.

Under the Bill, in line with the move to encourage electronic application, claimants for the new tax credits, unlike even those claiming the existing working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit, will not be asked to provide documentary proof of income with their application. Also, despite the known efficiency of the Inland Revenue in tax matters, it is not, in administering the new tax credits, subject to the powers of the new Social Security Fraud Act 2001.

The accounts that are required under the Bill and should be available for full parliamentary scrutiny do not include statistics relating to the number of payments and the location of employers affected, yet those are needed to make a proper assessment of where the greatest impact of the legislation on the community is felt.

In increasing the extent of benefits paid through the pay packet by employers, beneficiaries are also taking on an increased credit risk. An employer could receive funds from the Revenue and become insolvent before those funds had been paid on to the employees. It may sound like a remote risk, but it is very real, particularly for smaller companies in an uncertain economic environment.

The crucial issue is whether the new arrangements will tackle the problems of poverty in our community. The Chancellor has made much of his boast that the Government's measures to date have achieved a major success in reducing child poverty and have taken 1.2 million children out of poverty. However, according to the Department for Work and Pensions statistics, the increased spending on the working families tax credit has not yet reached those in the greatest need and at most risk of suffering the ill effects of low-income deprivation. This has been due in part to ever more complicated means-testing and in part to the fact that the focus overwhelmingly on work does not help families for whom work is not an option for health reasons, because the jobs are simply not there or because of problems with child care or transport.

Between 1994 and 1995, as the Paymaster General cited, and 1999 and 2000, there was little change in the proportion of children below the threshold's contemporary mean income. The Child Poverty Action Group report points out that the published figures for 1999-2000 showed that 34 per cent. of children were still living in income poverty and that one in six families fall into poverty as the result of the birth of a child.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): The hon. Gentleman has now been on his feet for 23 minutes, outlining what is wrong with the Bill. When will he give the House his alternatives to the Bill's proposals?

Mr. Flight: In just a minute I will point out what is in the Bill's favour. The job of the Opposition is to offer a critique of legislation, and I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman should have burnt up yet more time.

Martin Barnes, the director of the Child Poverty Action Group, recently pointed out that the figures released by the Department for Work and Pensions cast some doubt on Labour's claim that by the June election it had lifted more than 1 million children out of poverty.

The New Policy Institute and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have commented that a major change will need to take place for the Chancellor's claim that 1.2 million children have been taken out of poverty to be achieved. The recent Barnardos study affirms that one in six of the poorest children—those in the bottom decile—will be worse off. They are most vulnerable to being pushed deeper into poverty.

The Government's intention towards couples and parents who wish to care for their children at home also needs to be clarified and, possibly, challenged. We all agree with the objective of reducing the number of families with no one in work, but let us be clear that that is not a universal panacea to address the problems of child poverty.

The Government's increasingly tax-based approach to administering welfare will also place an increasing administrative burden on business. For the new credits to work, employers will have to make complex and burdensome adjustments to PAYE records, especially if the new arrangements are to be sufficiently flexible to address changes in people's earnings. The real problem for small businesses, which have been promised some help in the pre-Budget report, is that they need to devote all their limited resources to running their businesses.

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman refers to complex calculations involving the employer. He is simply wrong when he refers to the PAYE system. Employers will be told how much to pay during the year and when circumstances alter. The information in the tax system—the P60s and the P45s—will be used to determine a household's total income. Although he might want to make points about whether there should be a working tax credit at all, he is totally wrong to suggest that greater burdens will be put on business by the Bill; it will reduce them. He is completely wrong to suggest that the employer will be involved in any way with the calculation of payments.

Mr. Flight: I thank the Paymaster General for her comments, but I was not suggesting that employers will be responsible for calculating the payments; I was making the point that, if the Inland Revenue is to make the correct adjustments, it will be extremely necessary for employers to be absolutely bang up to date with all current adjustments to their PAYE records.

Dawn Primarolo: All that will be required is for employers to discharge their current and long-standing obligations under the tax system to ensure that their employees are properly informed of how much they have received and how much has been deducted.

Mr. Flight: The Paymaster General is raising an issue that we shall debate at great length in Committee. *[Interruption.]* No, this issue is very important—it is not funny. The system is based on annual earnings, but we need a system that can address changes in earnings and circumstances speedily and effectively, and which is not open to fraud. The precise mechanisms by which the PAYE system is expected to do all that reliably are not spelled out clearly in the Bill, and that issue awaits further regulation.

Dawn Primarolo: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way yet again. I agree with him that having the correct information and being responsive to change in the system are crucial, but his misunderstanding seems to be that somehow employers are involved in those matters through the PAYE system—they are not. The households that apply and the Inland Revenue are directly involved in those matters. With the working tax credit, employers receive notification of how much should be paid. The child tax credit does not go through the employer at all; it goes direct to the claimant.

Mr. Flight: I thank the Paymaster General for that explanation, but all Members are well aware that the child tax credit will go directly to the main carer. That is one of the great benefits of the Bill and one of the key Opposition arguments that the Government have accepted.

I do not wish to prolong discussion on this point any longer, but I did not suggest that the employer would be responsible for calculating the working tax credit. However, for the Revenue to be able to provide the right support at the right time, there needs to be dialogue between the employer and the Revenue to get things right. If there is no dialogue, the risk of wrong payment and fraud will be greater. That point lies at the heart of whether the measures will work.

Mr. Ruffley: I find myself in the dangerous position of agreeing with both the Paymaster General and my hon. Friend. Be that as it may, he makes a genuine point in that, although there is an annual assessment basis to the new regime, the Bill also provides for in-year assessment. Almost by definition, the in-year assessment will involve notification to the employer so that, in year, the employer can adjust the amount of working tax credit. My hon. Friend is right, even though the Paymaster General is correct to say that the employer will not do the calculation.

Mr. Flight: I thank my hon. Friend for encapsulating the point that I was driving at.

Last week, the Paymaster General was asked about the burdens placed on business in administering welfare, and I was somewhat surprised when she argued that business should appreciate the extent to which the Government are subsidising employment. As has already been said, we are in dangerous economic territory and it will do employees no good if the Government see the working tax credit as, essentially, a subsidy to employment.

I note that, although the child care tax credit is to be part of the working tax credit, it will be paid alongside the child tax credit. Will the Paymaster General explain the administrative arrangements that that will involve, as it would seem more logical for the child care tax credit to be part of the child tax credit rather than the working tax credit?

Dawn Primarolo: The child care tax credit and the payment of child care expenses will be attached to the working tax credit because many lone parents have said that they want to return to paid employment. However, by the time they have paid for child care, they are worse off and in an unemployment trap. The child care tax credit will be paid to remove a barrier to work, so one has to be in work and in receipt of the working tax credit. The trigger is the working tax credit but, after consultation, we felt that, as regards a couple, the main carer should receive the child care tax credit as the person likely to be responsible for arranging the child care. However, child care tax credit cannot be accessed unless an individual or household is also in receipt of the working tax credit.

Mr. Flight: I am glad that the Paymaster General has clarified the fact that the carer will receive the credit. I appreciate the point of principle involved, but this is a case in which two neat boxes do not operate as two neat boxes. For the reasons that she gave, someone has to be in work to receive the child care tax credit, but it is administered out of the other box, which will involve the Revenue attempting to operate the two credits together efficiently.

In assessing the case for a further shift towards tax rather than benefit-based welfare, the Government have again employed the stigma argument, but they are wrong. The evidence does not support their claim. Instead, it suggests that payment through the wage packet can stigmatise recipients rather more than benefits do. Many individuals understandably do not want their employers to know of their entitlements and circumstances, or for the employer to use that as a reason for holding down their remuneration.

It is also likely that workmates will know who is receiving such benefits. As the Institute for Fiscal Studies commented, for some people even the payment of the

> "WFTC through wage packets has been more stigmatising and certainly more hassle than direct payment."

In short, the Paymaster General has not presented convincing arguments on the key issue to support the need to make a further substantial shift to administering welfare payments via the Inland Revenue, and there is a major risk that the administrative costs saved will be more than offset by an increase in fraud.

We accept that the Bill makes some improvements. I am pleased to note that it addresses several of the issues that we raised in relation to the working families tax credit and children's tax credit. Payment of the child tax credit

[Mr. Flight]

to the main carer is crucial, although the Bill is not clear on how that will work in the case of broken families. However, the point about the main carer is secure.

We welcome the fact that there will be no capital limits. We also welcome the extension of the tax credit to support about 100,000 families who are currently excluded, including students and nurses, and the fact that it will support families with young people who are in full-time education up to the age of 19. We are pleased to note that the child tax credit will end the unfair treatment of single-earner families, although we continue our quest to know whether, in principle, 1 million people will be worse off.

We have reservations about extending in-work support to those without children who are over 25, from which 400,000 are expected to benefit. Some of the poorest families in our society are also those in which the parents are under 25, and they will not benefit from the working tax credit.

On costs, the IFS analysis expects the new tax credits to add £2.8 billion a year, assuming no double-earner families are made worse off, and £2.2 billion extra if 1 million families are disadvantaged. It is clear from page 39 of the explanatory notes that the measures will also transfer a further £4 billion of expenditure that relates to income support and the jobseeker's allowance from welfare expenditure to a netting off of tax receipts, thus effectively concealing that expenditure. Allowing for the £2.8 billion expected additional costs, the total welfare expenditure that is not shown as expenditure but simply netted off tax receipts, will be up to £15 billion per annum. I am sure that that constitutes a major part of the Chancellor's real reasons for the existing and further move to Inland Revenue-administered welfare payments, which has less to do with the fundamental case—the Paymaster General did not argue it—that the Inland Revenue can administer them better.

Welfare expenditure will increase by 36 per cent. from 1996–97 to 2003–04, which is an increase from £92 billion, to £125 billion a year, at a time when unemployment has fallen. That gives the lie to the Prime Minister's pledge to cut social security costs to pay for higher health and tax spending. Is that the outcome that the Government privately expected, or has the Chancellor outwitted the Prime Minister's intentions?

Will the 725,000 people who come from overseas to work in the UK, mostly for a limited period and often taking low-paid jobs, qualify for the working tax credit and, if relevant, the child tax credit, particularly as a result of the central annual income qualification? If so, how much do the Government estimate that will cost?

Having observed for the past four and a half years the way in which the Chancellor's mind works, may I ask whether political objectives are the main reason for the Bill? Has the Chancellor remembered that Herbert Morrison built council houses to secure votes? Could it be that the real objective of paying benefits through the payroll is to try to gain votes, by creating the mentality that it is a Labour Government who are giving out these benefits?

Given the administrative costs and hassles involved, does it seem necessary for 40 per cent. of all families, 30 per cent. of those of working age and 56 per cent. of those in retirement to be eligible for means-tested benefits? At least 40 per cent. of them will be getting benefits financed by taxes that they themselves have paid. I am well aware that most do not pay significant amounts of income tax, but much of the tax that they pay is extremely regressive.

The Bill creates a mass of income-tested complexity, which many will not understand. It looks likely to provide less, not more, flexibility and looks less able to support those in real need. Apparently, the Chancellor is keen to learn much in other policy areas from the economies of north America, but he appears to be blind to the problems experienced by Canada and the USA with large amounts of income-supplement welfare. We are concerned that, as well as risking an increase in fraud, the measures will increase the burden on businesses, particularly small businesses. There is a risk that small businesses will not always address the requirements made of them. We are concerned also that the measures will fail to help those who are most in need.

We will not vote against the Bill today, substantially because we do not know what it proposes for the value of credits, what they will cost, or how, in practice, the arrangements based on annual income assessment will address needs arising from changed circumstances.

Dawn Primarolo: Does the fact that the official Opposition feel unable to vote against the Bill mean that they will not table amendments in Committee?

Mr. Flight: That is a very strange comment from the Paymaster General, who has always enjoyed discussing the amendments that we table. I assure her that the Opposition will table a substantial number of amendments to tease out the problems presented by the Bill, and the Government are not allowing sufficient time in the allotted Committee sittings for those amendments properly to be discussed.

What the Chancellor has described as a seamless system of income-related support for families with children is in reality a complex extension of his means-testing agenda, which involves considerable dangers, and we are suspicious of the real political motives behind it.

4.59 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Nobody outside the House should be unclear about the Government's commitment to tackle poverty and child poverty. The Bill means that, as a party, we forgo a 3p cut in the standard rate of tax. When the whole of the Government's tax credit proposals are unfolded, we forgo something like a 5p cut in the standard rate of tax. So when we go into the next election, we will be setting aside the chance of campaigning on a 17p standard rate of tax and defending our tax credit strategy. I hope that, when they face the electorate, Labour Members will not be under any misapprehension about how costly the anti-poverty programme is or how seriously the Government are attempting to tackle poverty. It is clear that there is a big divide in the House. It is easy to speak about our concern for people on low income and our wish to see them on higher income but, when it comes to action, we have to put taxpayers' money where our mouth is. The Government are doing that handsomely. Later, I shall consider whether it is wise to put so much taxpayers' money in one basket, but no one should be unaware of the seriousness of the Government's attempt to counter the growing poverty that many of our constituents first experienced under the regime that existed when the Opposition were in government.

I compliment the Paymaster General. When Labour Members are in government, I wish that we always heard Ministers who commanded both the respect of the House and their brief as she does. The Opposition deliberately bowled her a number of difficult balls that were not always relevant to the Bill, but she had no problem in hitting them to the boundary. It certainly raises morale on this side of the House to have Ministers with such qualities and expertise.

Of course, it is difficult for a Member of whatever party to speak against a Bill that tries to ensure that poorer people have more money. When I was in opposition, the Conservative Government introduced measures to initiate housing benefit. Who could be against a measure to help poor people pay their rent? I was one of the Members who spoke against the proposal. It was extremely attractive on the surface, but I thought that it would lead to extraordinary problems. I thought that when it came to fruition, it would push rents up so much that most working people would be unable to pay their rent without assistance; far from freeing people from poverty, we would increase significantly the extent of dependency in our society.

My warnings in those debates carried no weight with the House of Commons. Hon. Members thought that I was scaremongering. The Opposition were embarrassed by my warnings and the Government were set on introducing housing benefit. However, rents have been pushed up, an ever-increasing number of people are dependent on housing benefit and fraud is so extensive that it frightens those of us who have glimpsed it. The present Government, like the previous one, do not know how to get off the treadmill of rising welfare bills. As with housing benefit, so with the tax credit proposals. Although I have no doubt that the Paymaster General will have no difficulty in countering arguments that may be made in the years ahead, today she is dealing with the easiest part of the argument. Once the benefits or credits kick in, real life will start to impinge on our image of how they work.

I wish to discuss five bear traps that are already apparent. People around the country have written to me about them, and they will take up more of Parliament's time than they currently do.

The first problem posed by the Government's approach to tackling child poverty is that many employers who employ people on lowish wages cannot make their employees better off by raising their wages, and can only suggest to their employees that they claim the relevant tax credits, while the employers plough back profits that they would have paid in increased pay. I do not criticise employers or employees for working the system in that way. I blame the House if it passes such measures, because we give them no option other than to behave rationally as economic men and women. Already, employers are aware that if they increase pay, that pay increase will be clawed back by the tax credit proposals.

Mr. Ruffley: I have been listening carefully to the right hon. Gentleman, and I want to agree with his analysis, but can he explain how the proposed in-work benefits differ from family credit? Did not the problem that he identifies exist under the family credit regime?

Mr. Field: Of course it did. Both sides are tarnished. The only defence that the Opposition can come up with against my argument is, "Well, guv, we were shopped, but we were not nearly as generous with taxpayers' money, so fewer people were affected." That does not counter my argument.

The second point concerns the exchange between the Front-Bench spokesmen about how the payments would be made. The crucial point is that they are made through the pay office of firms. Although information in pay offices ought to be confidential, and people ought to be discreet in what they say, sometimes, if they see an injustice, they are less discreet than we are with information that might come our way.

People are already noticing what others are taking home in their pay packets, and what that is doing to pay hierarchies within firms. An employer writes to tell me that he is employing someone who has not worked before, and he is very pleased to have that person on the payroll, but after the tax credits are paid, her pay moves from £12,000 to the equivalent of £19,000 a year. There are many people in the firm who earn much less than that who are skilled, have acquired extra qualifications, and feel that that is a huge injustice. The issue will not go away, but become more current in our debates.

The third bear trap is that we will be encouraging our constituents to work the system, like employers. I shall give an example from one of the Revenue offices, where staff failed to get their bosses to act against fraud. They and the staff of other offices have therefore leaked information to me. I hope that the word goes out from our debate tonight that we will be as careful with taxpayers' money as we are with our own.

The example involves someone who is disabled and who pays her daughter £2.50 an hour to look after her. That is well below the minimum wage, as was pointed out by the officer, who was told by the senior officer to agree it. The push is to get claims registered; that is what is required. The officer comments that this example of "taking in washing" would be complete if the grandmother could qualify as a child carer, so that she could be paid to look after her granddaughter while her daughter is paid to look after her, all at the expense of the hard-working constituents whom I and other right hon. and hon. Members try to represent.

Again, that leads to the question of fraud. How keen will the Government be to act when officers raise the issue of fraud but senior officers say that they are anxious to boost claimant numbers to meet targets, rather than ensuring that people are claiming correctly? When inspectors checked up on employers who were likely to be committing fraud in relation to family credit, they often found that employees were paid appallingly low wages and discovered a pattern in which employers regularly withdrew large cash sums from the bank, but could give no account to investigating officers of where that money was going. Obviously, cash deals were being struck between employers and employees, who decided that they should work the system and maximise family credit, as it was then called, while taxpayers picked up the bill for the fraud that both parties were committing.

[Mr. Field]

For 13 weeks, I was Minister of State with responsibility for dealing with such fraud. In that time, I requested that we carry out a benefit review to consider the avenues for fraud in respect of the working families tax credit, but what happened is deeply disturbing. I asked for the review so that the Treasury would have the information when it came to design the working families tax credit so that the opportunities for fraud could be minimised as far as possible, but it was not undertaken and the papers that I signed in relation to that whole period have gone missing. I raise the issue merely as a sign that some people in Whitehall are less keen on countering fraud than hon. Members. When my hon. Friend the Paymaster General said that she gave the matter priority, it was news to our ears and to those of our constituents. I hope that she will equal the effort that she has put into launching the measure in taking the measures needed to counter fraud.

In the longer run, I do not believe that a free society can be run in such a way. We cannot let people buck the system to the extent that about 85 per cent. of working families with children are on means-tested assistance and assume that it will not affect their behaviour one iota.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): While I recognise my right hon. Friend's distinguished record in fighting child poverty and family poverty, as well as the truth of much of what he is saying, what alternative measures would he suggest to tackle such poverty?

Mr. Field: I shall deal with that matter in a moment. I suggested that forgoing a 3p or 5p cut in the standard rate of tax on every pound that our poorer-paid constituents pay is an opportunity cost that we are taking on ourselves, but an opportunity that they do not have. When we discuss anti-poverty measures, we need to think especially about the tax burden for people on low pay. It is fine for us to discuss whether we should take money out of the pockets and purses of some of our constituents and give it to other constituents, but we should also be aware that income tax is a cause of poverty, as well as of a reduction in living standards, especially for those below the bottom level. One should not lightly forgo substantial income tax cuts merely because one is in favour of paying benefits or awarding tax credits. That is one of the proposals that we need to have in our armoury if we are to counter child poverty effectively and reinforce the natural instinct of families to try to improve their lot by their own efforts.

The real worry that the Bill presents was revealed on the BBC's six o'clock news after the Chancellor's pre-Budget statement. A low-paid worker with children was wheeled out. The spinners must have been delighted with his initial comments because his gratitude to the Government for increasing his family's income to the extent provided by the tax credits knew no bounds. However, instead of putting a full stop there, he used a comma, which must have given the spinners nightmares. He continued, "I now know that I will never be able to improve my family's living standards by my own efforts. It's up to politicians and bureaucrats to decide my take-home pay."

I do not believe that we can run a free society through politicians determining people's living standards and thus negating their natural impulses to want their efforts, length of working week, extra pay, skills and pride in looking after their household and families to count. We should not take over that role and keep it to ourselves.

It is important that we do not simply concentrate on the Government's success with the minimum wage. The Opposition said that there would be mass unemployment even at the level that the Government were setting it. It has been an effective floor for many of my constituents, and I pay tribute to the Government for keeping their nerve and introducing it. I compliment them on increasing child benefit and on the contrast between our record and the poverty of the Opposition's approach when they were in government.

Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): I defer to my right hon. Friend's great experience, but does he accept that his trumpeting of the national minimum wage makes the position that he outlined earlier contradictory? Is not the minimum wage an example of the Government intervening to improve people's conditions?

Mr. Field: Of course it is. We intervene if we increase or decrease taxes. I do not argue that we can wash our hands of and have nothing to do with such matters. The minimum wage is an example of intervention and the Government used their judgment in setting it. They now realise that unemployment did not result from it and that we should be confident about progressively increasing it. I hope that the Paymaster General will take back the message that no credit approval should be given if it is clear that the wage entered on the form is below the minimum wage. There is no point in our passing measures if we do not implement them.

There is a worry that stems from national insurance benefits and child benefits. Today's debate could give the impression that all our tax credit proposals erect a wonderful buttress against existing forms of welfare provision. Alternatively, they may prove to be cuckoos in the nest. I want us to think five years ahead. We shall be told how well the tax credits are working and the argument will change subtly. Is there a need for two welfare states operating next to each other? Given that the tax credit concentrates help on the poorest, should we place the same emphasis on the other welfare state, which comprises national insurance benefits and child benefits?

The Government rightly claim credit for establishing a child tax credit. When it works well, what are the long-term consequences for child benefit? The debate will subtly change; we shall hear talk of the wastefulness of the other benefits and of what the revenue could be spent on. It may then be too late for some people to object to the plan that is unfolding. I believe—as my hon. Friend said in his intervention—that there is a case for placing floors under people and allowing them to grow by their own efforts, and for praising and rewarding them and letting them take pride in their efforts.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): I am reluctant to challenge my right hon. Friend, because of his record on welfare benefits, but some employment is very poorly paid, and the employers concerned will not improve wages. What would he say to people working in those conditions, who are in poverty and cannot get out of the mire? Would he tell them that they should not have working families tax credit, or children's tax credit? The crucial issue is how we direct this support and get it to the people who most need it.

Mr. Field: My plea would be that we should not get into that position in the first place. What do my hon. Friends have to say about housing benefit? Not one of our local authorities has a proper report on how we administer it. Every report produced shows the extent of fraud involved.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): Given my right hon. Friend's great knowledge, it is difficult to challenge him, but does he agree that the problem with housing benefit stems not solely from its introduction but also from the deregulation of rents at the same time, which led to the increased housing benefit bill?

Mr. Field: All that I was suggesting was that we are arguing now that we should have these tax credits, but in five years' time, we shall face the same arguments about them that we, as constituency Members, have to face now over housing benefit. Many of our constituents cannot afford to pay their rent, but what are the Government to do with the escalating housing benefit bill? How do we get off that helter-skelter? We are now in the early stages of tax credits; I am merely pointing out the direction in which we are moving, and sounding a note of caution.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): I am sure that the situation in my right hon. Friend's constituency is very different from that in mine. The reason that we have a benefit and rent crisis in London and the south-east is that the shortage of housing supply has pushed rents up. The availability of property to households on housing benefit in London has halved since 1996. The relationship that my right hon. Friend mentioned might well apply in the north of England, but it does not apply in London, and that must call into question the validity of his argument.

Mr. Field: As someone born in London but who does not represent a London constituency, I would say that London is an island unlike other parts of the country. In many areas of Birkenhead, for example, there is a surplus of housing. That does not mean to say that landlords do not try to push rents up or to bleed taxpayers. I hope to introduce a Bill shortly that will allow local authorities not to pay housing benefit to bad landlords who do not look after their properties and care nothing for their tenants or for the hell that can be inflicted on neighbours and the rest of the street. I am sure, from the nodding that I see around me, that I shall gain widespread support for that measure.

On Second Reading of the Bill that introduced housing benefit, I was challenged by other hon. Members. I was asked how foolish I could be, and told that I was trying to prevent their constituents from obtaining help with their rent. No attention was paid to where the benefit would lead us. I merely wish to suggest, by power of analogy, that we need cautiously to attend to the way in which we introduce tax credits.

Kali Mountford: My right hon. Friend's analogy with housing benefit seems flawed. I am sure that many hon. Members want some changes to the housing benefit system, but surely a more relevant analogy would be with the system that the credits will replace—in particular, family credit. His argument is about the effect on the workplace. What does the working families tax credit do worse than family credit did?

Mr. Field: My problem is that, when I sat on the other side of the House, I put those arguments against family credit. The whole Opposition also put those arguments. Thankfully, I now sit on this side of the House, although I continue to apply to tax credits the arguments that I applied to family credit. The measure is more generous, but it does not change the substance of the matter one iota.

In what was intended to be a brief contribution, I have tried to show the extent of the red water, or the third way water, that divides this side of the House from the other. Even though I have criticised the measure, I do not want to conclude without drawing attention to this most fundamental difference: there is no question but that the Government and the Members who support them are as keen to tackle child poverty and other forms of poverty as I sensed, when I sat on the other side of the House, that the previous Government were not.

I wish to underscore that major difference with all the energy in my body, but I am fearful of where the measure will lead us. Although it is about increasing the income of low-income people, that does not mean that it will be satisfactory. To tackle poverty successfully, we must increase the income of the poor and widen their freedom. The measure successfully increases their income, but it limits their freedom.

5.27 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) raises important concerns about the Bill, but they can be addressed by amending the detail in a manner that I shall explain. In a break with tradition, I can tell the Government that I am minded to encourage my 51 colleagues of this morning and the 52 of this afternoon to support the Bill. More are welcome to join us, and I understand that the Government Whip can advise me on leading my 52nd colleague into the correct Lobby.

I am minded to support the Bill and to encourage my colleagues to do so for three reasons. First, the Government have delivered additional support to families with children. Indeed, I confess that I am struck by the substantial nature of some changes made over the last Parliament, particularly with respect to families with young children, and I welcome the fact that support has been concentrated on those families. It was increasingly becoming apparent that paying them less was a mistake, although that was a long-standing tradition in the benefits system. The evidence is to the contrary—there should at least have been a levelling up—and the Government are to be applauded for what they have done on that front.

To the extent that the Bill levels up support for the children of those in and out of work—I would like to think that it will do so, but I suppose that Ministers will not give me that assurance—I welcome it. Furthermore, previously excluded groups such as students with children and student nurses are included, which is also welcome.

The second reason for welcoming the Bill is the potential for streamlining. The current system is a dog's breakfast; it will be marginally less so after the Bill

[Mr. Steve Webb]

becomes law. Any streamlining, any continuity between being in and out of work, getting rid of the hours rule on support for children and getting rid of the capital limits are welcome as they make the system somewhat simpler, although it will probably still be more complicated than the one we first thought of four or five years ago. The Bill is a move in the right direction, however, so we welcome it.

The third main reason for that welcome involves our reason for opposing the Tax Credits Act 1999: payment through the pay packet, whose emphasis is diminished. I recall the Paymaster General assuring me that lone parents needed payment through the pay packet, which was a requirement of the existing system, to show them the value of paid work.

I am pleased that the Government have thought again about support for children, and that that support will now go direct to the main carer. I welcome that move. Some current recipients of the working families tax credit who are within the taper will get no in-work payment through the pay packet: support for the children will be paid direct to the carer. That group of people will still understand the benefits of working. I welcome the Government's second thoughts on that issue.

We broadly support the Bill, but I want to raise a number of concerns that we will pursue in more detail in Committee. I hope that the Financial Secretary, when he responds to the debate, will address some of my points, as I am approaching the Bill as a critical friend of the Government's proposals.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) referred to the burden on business. There is an issue to be addressed, but it is not the one he raised. As the Paymaster General said, the burden on business will be reduced with annual assessment and with the streamlining of the process. The regulatory impact assessment puts the figure at £10 million. However, the starting point is the £100 million burden on business: it costs businesses £100 million every year to deliver the working families tax credit. The Bill may reduce that figure to £90 million, but that is still a substantial burden on business, and the House needs to justify that.

I contend that, because of the reforms in the Bill, support for children will be paid outside the pay packet, so what is left does not need to go through the pay packet either. We could take this opportunity to get rid of that £90 million cost on business. I shall set out how that could be done.

Phil Hope: I find it distressing that, although the hon. Gentleman acknowledges the £10 million-worth of benefit to business, he says that it is not enough. Could he not accept that the Bill reduces the burden on businesses and celebrate that fact along with Labour Members?

Mr. Webb: I am not sure that it is my role to celebrate these provisions. The hon. Gentleman should listen to what I am saying. A £10 million reduction in the burden on business is welcome, but there is now an opportunity to get rid of a further £90 million burden, which perhaps he would celebrate.

What is left when support for families in respect of children is removed? There is the adult bit of the old working families tax credit, and there is the new bit for people without children—that is, people working 30 hours a week aged more than 25. Why are we paying these people tax credits rather than giving them support in another way, which I will set out?

The Government have put two arguments. They argue that we should support those people to relieve poverty and to improve incentives. The poor childless people who will be brought into the system do not work more than 30 hours a week and are not likely to be over 25. The poverty rates among childless people are higher for those not working 30 hours—indeed, not working at all—and are higher for those under 25 than for those over 25. If poverty is our concern, we should pay this employment credit to all childless people in low-paid work, not just to those over 25 working 30 hours.

On incentives, I invite the Financial Secretary to come up with one piece of empirical evidence that suggests that the reason why childless people are not working or are not working longer hours is to do with incentives and free choices about jobs that they could take but are declining to take. I accept that there are plenty of jobs that families with children and a mortgage cannot afford to take, because they get plenty of help out of work and not as much in work, or barely more. However, childless people do not get much support when they do not work, so they already have a leg up into work.

Benefit rates for childless people are not very good, and they would not want to live on them for long. Incentives already exist, and there is not much evidence to suggest that those who work 30 hours a week and are aged over 25 need additional labour market incentives. There could be a poverty argument, but the statistics suggest that the scheme is targeting the wrong people.

If there is a case for supporting all low-paid workers—with or without children, single or married—do we need to do so by costing businesses £90 million a year? My argument is that we do not, because we have the personal income tax allowance. If we want to deliver an average of £15 a week—which is the sort of figure we are talking about for the working tax credit—we could do so by raising the income tax allowance.

If that alone were done, every Member of Parliament would benefit as well. For these purposes we would not want to do that, but other adjustments could be made to tax thresholds enabling all the benefit to go to those just inside the income-tax structure, rather than some of it going to those with higher incomes. We could lower the starting level for higher-rate tax and raise the personal tax allowance, which would give Members no net benefit but would target help on all in low-paid work. That could be done through the PAYE code, and would impose no burden on business. Indeed, it would save businesses £90 million a year

Kali Mountford: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting differential tax thresholds? Is he saying that different tax bands should involve different starting rates?

Mr. Webb: No. I am sorry if what I said was not clear. I am suggesting that the personal tax allowance, which currently applies to all taxpayers, should be raised, and that—so that the hon. Lady cannot benefit—the higher-rate income-tax threshold should fall. That would merely change two of the premises of the existing system. It would prevent Members from benefiting, while enabling those in the basic-rate—lower-rate—band to do so. It is a fairly straightforward proposition. As I said, it would save businesses £90 million a year in administration, and would deliver to broadly the same groups an anti-poverty benefit of equivalent cash value. It would also deliver a labour-supply benefit: when people took low-paid jobs, the tax burden would be lower.

The detail of what I propose is of course not identical to what the Government propose: there will be slight differences between the position of those who benefit from a tax-allowance rise and that of those who benefit from employment credit. I feel, however, that the onus is on the Government to justify continuing to impose a £90 million burden on business, rather than simply raising tax allowances, in terms of the extra benefit they receive as a result of paying working tax credit. If we are all interested in simplifying and streamlining the existing system, we may conclude that a tax-allowance rise would be better than employment credit.

Intervening on the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs, the Paymaster General suggested that he might want to question the whole existence of employment credit. That is an important point, but although I support the Bill—principally because of what it will do for families with children, and because of its streamlining effect—I have considerable reservations about working tax credit. I am not sure what it will achieve that a tax allowance could not achieve.

Mr. Ruffley: For the record, did I hear the hon. Gentleman say that he wanted to lower the threshold for the top rate of income tax? If so, will he tell us what effect that would have on the average earner of more than £25,000 a year? I am thinking of those whose incomes, in terms of thousands, are in the late 20s and early 30s. Many such people are nurses, sergeants—and police sergeants—and other public sector workers.

Mr. Webb: It would have no effect whatever. Because we would raise the personal income-tax allowance, those people would gain an average of £15 a week—the sort of sum they would receive through working tax credit. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is with me so far: it is a straightforward proposition. When the tax allowance goes up, nurses, doctors and everyone else in that bracket will get £15.

Assuming that we want this to be a targeted measure to support the low-paid, we reduce the starting point for higher-rate income tax by an amount that will take away £15 at that end. The net effect will therefore be nil. In other words, the effect will be neutral for those on higher incomes because they are gaining from the tax-allowance rise and losing from the higher-rate threshold fall. Those who gain will be those receiving working tax credit—the low-paid, whom we are targeting. That, then, would be an alternative way of lifting burdens from business.

There is another problem, which has also been mentioned already. The proposed integrated system adds couples' incomes together. Whereas children's tax credit is currently assessed on the basis of individual incomes, the proposed child tax credit will be assessed on the basis of joint incomes. Let me return to an example given by the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley). At present, a nurse married to a teacher, with children, receives the full children's tax credit because neither earns above the threshold, but, when added together, their incomes will be well above the threshold. Unless the threshold changes, they could lose up to £520.

When we raised that with the Paymaster General, her response was essentially, "Wait and see." She said that the thresholds and allowances would not be announced today. I understand that, but this is the position: either the Government must find £600 million to prevent people from losing out, or some families who are receiving the current benefits—they are not necessarily filthy rich; I gave the example of a nurse married to a teacher—could lose significant sums.

That brings me to a key point. Those of us who are potential members of the Committee that will consider the Bill would like to see regulations before we deliberate. We would like to know what we will be talking about. It would be helpful to have some idea of the ball-park figure that the Government are thinking of. I appreciate that we cannot pre-empt the Budget, but is it unreasonable for the House to know whether we are talking about a measure that will take up to £520 off 1.4 million constituents, or one that will cost no one anything? We simply do not know. For the Committee to have an informed discussion on those issues, some idea of how the system will be delivered and of the framework within which the threshold rates will be set would make a big difference.

The right hon. Member for Birkenhead made some points on fraud and how we may respond to it. The nub of the fraud problem is payment through the pay packet. That makes matters so much worse because the money benefits the employer before it is handed on. The fact that the employer has a stake in the process makes collusion potentially much worse.

If the money goes directly to a recipient and the employer is not involved, it is not a problem. That is another compelling reason not to have a working tax credit at all and to put tax allowances up to deliver the money to the low paid. In that way, the employer will not get his grubby hands on the money, the good employer will be happy because he will not have to administer the thing and the bad employer will be denied the opportunity for fraud. Again, that could save the Government money. The scope for fraud could be substantial; it could run into hundreds of millions of pounds.

Kali Mountford: I am at a loss to understand how the hon. Gentleman's proposal would benefit those people whose income keeps them below the tax threshold in any event? How would he get money to them?

Mr. Webb: The vast majority of people whom we are talking about are income tax payers. The working families tax credit is currently paid above certain bands. The children's tax credit goes to people beyond the higher rate threshold. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady makes a fair point. I do not know how many of the people whom we are talking about are not taxpayers. For those with children, there is no problem. We can deliver the credit through other mechanisms.

The childless non-taxpayer earns about £80 a week. As I have said, I am not convinced that there is an incentives issue for the childless non-taxpayer, but the hon. Lady makes a fair point. I do not know how many people we are talking about. My suspicion is that it is very few. I would be interested to know what the figure is. If the Financial Secretary to the Treasury has an idea of the order of magnitude, I will be grateful to hear it.

[Mr. Webb]

There are a few other concerns. One aspect of the proposal that has had little attention and debate so far is annual assessment. Trying to line things up with the tax system and reducing the bureaucracy of frequent reassessments is an interesting idea. However, in one respect the system will not line up with the tax system. It will go in the opposite direction: from a single assessment with the children's tax credit to joint assessment for the child tax credit. Therefore, in one important respect, there will be a move away from integration with the income tax system.

If we were not to go for annual assessment, I hope that the Government would not say, "We cannot support that because that is not in line with income tax." In respect of the unit of assessment, the Government have rejected the income tax approach and have gone for a social security approach. Therefore, I hope that they will consider the issue of annual assessment.

If we do not tackle the problem of people in fluctuating circumstances, we will face it in our advice surgeries for years to come. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has examined fluctuations in family circumstances using the labour force survey. It says that 225,000 couples with children break up in a given year and 200,000 lone parents start to co-habit in a given year: nearly 500,000 families with children experience a change that would affect their entitlement. One million families with children change employment status within a given year, so there is an awful lot of change. *[Interruption.]* Indeed, it was an IFS report I was quoting from, my former employer.

The key question is: how should the system respond to that? Obviously, there is a trade-off. If the system responds to every last little change, it will be all over the place, administrative costs will be enormous and we will gain nothing. If the system is rigid, it will not fit people's individual circumstances.

The problem is asymmetric. In other words, when people's circumstances change to their detriment, we want a substantial response. People should not have to go for prolonged periods without change. For example, if someone loses £10 a week because of a loss of overtime, the system should respond quickly. However, if they gain a tenner a week through doing overtime, it would probably cost the taxpayer an equivalent sum to recalculate the entitlement. For that reason, the taxpayer has no incentive to worry about upward changes, but we would need to worry about equal downward changes.

Contrary to the Government's views in their consultation paper that we must have a symmetric threshold for reporting, we should be more worried about downward than upward shifts. That is not just because the wishy-washy Liberals want to throw money at everything, but because the taxpayer might not gain by trying to spot small upward shifts in people's incomes. Conversely, we would not want to leave people who have experienced a downward shift in the same position for 11 months. I hope that the Government will consider the suggestion that the threshold should be different for those who get worse off compared with people who get better off. I think that the Paymaster General is nodding.

The issue of annual assessment troubles me. I can see what might be attractive about it, but some of the Government's consultation documents suggest that people on low pay might have the option to forecast their income for the coming year. We all know constituents who would find that very difficult, because their lives are chaotic, they are in and out of work and their family circumstances change. If they were to forecast their income, they could be badly wrong. At the end of the year, if the situation had not been re-assessed, they could have been substantially overpaid. Potentially, in extreme cases, they could have to repay thousands of pounds of tax credits. How long would they have to repay the money? Would there be a maximum amount that they would have to repay? I would be very concerned if low-paid households had to repay large overpayments that might have arisen because they had to guess their income.

I hope that we will be able to explore in Committee whether a year is the right timescale. At the moment, the period is six months, but that is a rigid time with no opportunity to re-assess income. If we change to a system of 12 months with scope for re-assessment in that time, I wonder whether we will have missed a step. Perhaps six-monthly assessments could be considered. I appreciate that that would involve twice as many notifications to employers, but given how often people's circumstances change, there will be lots of reassessments anyway. My worry is that some people who need a reassessment might not realise that they could have one and might try to get by with the wrong amount not just for six months, but for a year.

Mr. Ruffley: I agree with almost everything that the hon. Gentleman has just said, but does he know what would trigger an in-year assessment? The Bill does not tell us that.

Mr. Webb: I understand that events such as the birth of a child, marriage, relationship breakdown or changes in employment would do so, but I am concerned about less obvious changes, such as stopping doing overtime or taking a second job. One of the issues is how much the onus is on the claimant to be aware of the effect that such changes will have on their entitlement. Anything that requires folk to understand that complex system, with the possibility that they will be penalised if they fail to report changes that they might not realise are significant, is a possible problem.

I am concerned about take-up. The Paymaster General would not give us a figure for the number of families eligible for WFTC who do not claim it. If the take-up is about 75 per cent.—the sort of figure that is often quoted—it might be as many as 300,000 or 400,000 families. We know that of the 5 million entitled to the children's tax credit, 3.6 million receive it and perhaps another 1 million self-employed parents will get it through their tax returns. It may be that another 300,000 or 400,000 are missing out on that one.

In terms of employment credit for people who have never been in the benefits system before, apart from housing benefit—the childless low-paid—there is an issue of take-up. Studies of various pilot schemes have suggested that take-up is a real problem, but there is not a problem with the take-up of tax allowances; everybody gets the tax allowance. If we deliver support through tax allowances and not through the working credit, we will not have a take-up problem. I am convincing myself more as I go on that tax allowance rises would be better than the employment credit.

The interaction with housing benefit has been mentioned. In terms of the pension credit, the Government have said that they will raise the housing benefit thresholds so that someone getting maximum pension credit will get exactly the same housing benefit as before; the thresholds will go up in line. There is a hint in the Bill that the Government are thinking of putting housing benefit thresholds up so that people who are brought into the tax credit system—the childless in particular—would not find that they were losing 85 per cent. through housing benefit tapers. We seek some reassurance on that. It would be perverse if people were given £20 with one hand and then had 80 per cent. of that taken away by another through the housing benefit system.

The money we are talking about must be paid into an account. For those with a bank account, that is not a problem. For those without, it is. The scheme is to begin in 2003. Previously, the Government said that the universal bank and the card system—the switch to automated credit transfer—would be phased in over 2003 to 2005. However, the Bill requires payment into accounts from April 2003. If the Government are falling behind schedule on the universal bank, that will cause great concern, as these payments need an account. I hope that the Government can reassure us that the universal bank will be in place by April 2003.

Clearly, this is a complex Bill, and the regulations will tell us a great deal. It would inform the Committee's deliberations to have sight even of draft regulations or indicative statements from the Government on the levels of thresholds and their thinking on other points. That would make a huge difference to our judgment of the Bill.

Because the Bill, in principle, moves in the right direction—particularly with regard to families with children—I and my colleagues welcome it. We have considerable misgivings about the working tax credit that we hope to address in Committee but, on balance, we are minded to support the Bill.

5.52 pm

Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): The fact that this debate so far has been couched in technical terms and complex language may lead an outside observer to believe that this is an esoteric matter. It is not. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) did the House a service by bringing this debate to life. He is more sceptical about the Bill's implications than I am, but he was right to say that while the Bill is complex, it affects the lives of many people, as is often the case with social security measures.

The Bill is a substantial step forward in the Government's campaign to end child poverty and to improve the lives of many people who continue to live on low incomes. The debate has brought to light the philosophical and political divide that exists, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead was right to refer to that. The Government are proceeding down this course, rather than seeking tax cuts. They are putting their political credibility on the line and seeking to implement measures that are, on any view, seriously redistributive and will mean a real improvement in the lives of many people.

The Bill builds on the Government's work, and there are many tools in the toolkit; it is not just a question of relying upon tax credits. Reference has been made to the need to bring low-income people out of tax liability, but that is already happening. The 10p starting rate for tax has been extended, so that many people are not paying tax at all. The national minimum wage has made a big difference, as has the working families tax credit, the predecessor of the child tax credit and the working tax credit.

The figures from my constituency reflect the degree to which the Bill is of immense practical value. No fewer than 8,111 families in my constituency have benefited in a big way from increases in child benefit. No fewer than 1,840 low and middle-income families are, on average, £30 better off thanks to the working families tax credit. I am pleased that the Bill extends the scope of the tax credit regime to a greater number of people.

Some 1.25 million children already have been lifted out of poverty. I am sure that the Government are under no illusions and are aware that a considerable amount of further work needs to be done. We live in a society in which, due to the legacy of the previous Conservative Government, the divide between rich and poor has widened. I am convinced that the Bill is a big step in the right direction. It is right for us to move away from the culture of welfare dependency to a system in which we promote incentives to work, make work pay and further improve financial support for children.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead mentioned elephant traps, but there other traps; the unemployment trap and the poverty trap. I am certain that the regime of tax credits will be one of the most effective ways of bringing an end to the culture of dependency and improving the lives of a considerable number of people.

As a former member of the Social Security Committee, I agree with its findings in the last report that it produced in the previous Parliament. The Committee concluded that tax credits will help to tackle child poverty, increase work incentives and produce a simpler and more coherent system of administration for the benefit of recipients.

The Committee was particularly exercised by the question of what work was being done to ascertain the absolute measure of poverty to which the regime of tapers, rates and thresholds will be addressed. One appreciates that the devil is in the detail, but could the Minister give an indication of the Government's thinking on that matter?

Will the Government respond positively to a briefing that I have received from NACAB, which has expressed concerns about two issues? The first is the number of hours worked. In terms of eligibility, how many hours would people have to work before they can qualify for the working tax credit? It is the view of NACAB—and I suspect many others—that the current figure is rather too high, particularly with regard to disabled groups.

On the vexed question of housing benefit, I wish to refer to paragraph 45 of the Social Security Committee report, concerning the perverse effects of differential tapers. It states:

> "With a taper of 65 per cent. for Housing Benefit and twenty per cent. for Council Tax Benefit, a family currently in receipt of Working Families Tax Credit can find themselves as little as five pence better off for each additional £1 of gross earnings."

The Committee went on to suggest that serious consideration should be given to a free-standing housing credit as part of the planned reforms. It concluded that it was pleased that the Government were looking at the

[Gareth Thomas]

interaction of child tax credits and housing benefit but felt that the aim should be to improve marginal deduction rates rather than simply not making them worse than they are at present. As I understand the Government's position, they were, until recently, looking seriously at that issue, because it cuts across the philosophy behind the Bill and the Government's approach, which is to make work pay.

The Bill is a substantial step forward. I am particularly pleased that the Government have accepted the need for child tax credit to be paid to the main carer and that the Bill will disregard child maintenance. I am also pleased that it strikes a balance between predictability and certainty, which is so important for many low-income families, while taking into account the need to respond to changed circumstances. I welcome the Bill, which offers an opportunity to have a more streamlined system of support and makes a reality of the principle that work should pay.

6.1 pm

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): I much enjoyed the speech of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). It was hugely important and was listened to with rapt attention and great respect on both sides of the House. I, for one, agreed with almost every word he said. I fear, however, that I will make a slightly more partisan contribution than the right hon. Gentleman.

I have not been a great fan of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's tenure of office. That is partly because some of his alleged achievements are damaging to the economic national interest. I believe that the Bill contains another set of his meddling measures that issue from No. 11, which will not redound to the credit of the tax and benefits system.

Incapability Brown, as I call the Chancellor, has shown himself unable to enhance the landscape of tax and benefits since his first Budget in 1997. In my judgment, the Bill bears five Brownian signature defects. In July, the Chancellor said that he would give us a draft Bill, and give us some detail. We have not had that. He said that the Bill would simplify and streamline the system but, as we have heard, more complexity is being introduced. He said that he would lighten burdens on business, yet we heard of many examples today where the burdens on business will increase. We have heard that the right hon. Gentleman wants an open debate on tax and spend, yet the scoring of tax credits—about which I will speak in a few moments—gives him and Ministers the ability to massage the national tax burden figures downwards by scoring tax credits as negative revenue. Of course, they are nothing of the kind—they are good old-fashioned public spending. Finally, the Chancellor says that under the Bill, working people will be better off. That is hardly the case when we know that hundreds of thousands—perhaps millions—of working couples who receive children's tax credit may, under the joint assessment regime in prospect, lose all, or substantially all, of the £520 a year they receive.

Let me deal first with the Chancellor's unwillingness to publish a draft Bill and much necessary detail to which many Members have referred. It is true that a consultation document with a regulatory impact assessment was published on 19 July. That is fair enough. However, it was such a detail-free zone that the Institute for Fiscal Studies was prompted to say:

> "it provided no quantitative evidence on which one might base a sensible response."

We have no idea at what level the credits will be set, what the withdrawal rates will be and at what level they will kick in. Andrew Dilnot of the IFS signally understated the problem of the lack of detail that has been given to us today when he said that it was all "very disappointing indeed".

It is virtually impossible to have a meaningful debate when the Government simply say that we should not worry because it will all be dealt with by regulations under clauses 7, 9 and 11. We should at least have some basic indicative numbers for the thresholds. The Paymaster General said that we were talking about a "framework" today, but such a framework is not meaningful without the detail. I urge those on the Treasury Bench to ensure that draft regulations are presented to the House far in advance of the Bill's Committee stage.

That leads me to my second Brownian defect. The claim is that the Bill will simplify the system. In truth, it will become more complicated because the Government are seeking to introduce means-testing on an annual basis, credit entitlement being based on the previous year's income and fixed for one year in advance. The problem is that families' financial circumstances change greatly within a year, and the Bill pays insufficient attention to that. How will changes be monitored effectively by the Revenue in-year? What will the notification requirements be? How will they be consistently—rather than erratically—enforced? Surely potential underpayments and overpayments, to which the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) referred, will be greater under an annual system of assessment than under a six-monthly one undertaken for working families tax credit or, indeed, a weekly one for income support. Those are some of the questions that outside commentators are asking, and it is a great shame that we are not able to discuss them today.

The scale of the problem of having an annual basis for assessment rather than a shorter period is highlighted rather well by the labour force survey. It shows that 360,000 adults and couples with children and 90,000 lone parents change employment within three months in an average year. For those groups in which employment is changed within 12 months, the figures are 840,000 and 180,000 respectively.

An annual basis of assessment can, by definition, achieve greater simplicity only by ignoring, to an extent, changes in financial circumstances within the current year. If those circumstances are not ignored, the Revenue will have the problem that the Benefits Agency has—frequent and complicated in-year reassessments at various intervals. The Bill does not address that point; it simply says that the matter will be settled in regulations, which is regrettable. In particular, how easy will it be for claimants to estimate, with any degree of certitude, how changes in their current year income might relate to their previous year's income? Estimating changes will, in practice, be difficult to do over a year. Clause 7 attempts to provide an answer by stating that the regulations to be laid before the House could give claimants some leeway to ignore any potential change in their current year income as against their previous year's income.

In other words, a threshold will be set in which changes in income—either up or down—will be ignored. The problem is that, if that band is too narrow, the Revenue will have to instigate reassessments. If it is too broad and too much income is disregarded, huge overpayments to certain people whose financial circumstances improve in-year are possible for long periods, as are severe underpayments to those whose circumstances deteriorate in-year. So the setting of the threshold is critically important. The hon. Member for Northavon talked about asymmetry, and the reference to asymmetry applies to the point that I have just made.

For us to form a judgment about the delicate balance that Ministers will have to strike, we need to have at least some indicative numbers before us as soon as possible, so that we can debate this issue, which involves a fine judgment. It is not an easy judgment, but it is one that the House has to make. Regrettably, we do not have that information today.

I have assumed in my speech that claimants will make accurate or reasonably accurate estimates of current year income compared to previous years and faithfully report them. But I know some possible claimants in my constituency who, for whatever reason, will be confused about this issue or are not very good at numbers—a lot of hon. Members are not very good at numbers. So, in reality, it is a bit much to expect all claimants to be particularly adept at estimating current year income.

Although we know that, the Government will ask those people to make notifications of changes in their circumstances during the year. There is a severe risk that they will get that wrong and that they will continue to claim payments to which they are not entitled. They may not be acting fraudulently, but such things may happen by accident or through their incompetence in that regard. They will then be hit with a huge bill from the Inland Revenue for the repayment of overpaid credit at the end of the year, and I can envisage that causing severe problems.

The Revenue simply has not had to bother about those problems before because any errors or overpayments of that kind have been picked up through the payment of income support, because the assessment period is very short, or even by the working families tax credit, which involves a six-month assessment period. So we could be letting ourselves in for a great deal of trouble with our constituents by introducing annual assessments on that basis.

Ministers should tell us their thoughts on another issue—the hours test. I understand that, under the Bill, claimants will have to calculate their own average of hours worked to determine whether they satisfy the eligibility criteria. That is a change from the working families tax credit, under which employers typically carried out that work, and I wonder how the Inland Revenue will monitor it. Of course, in the United States, the earned-income credit regime does not require any proper checks or certification of hours worked to be carried out, and it is a bit of a disaster as a result. The Government are trying to do better than the American system, but how will the hours worked be monitored if not by the employers?

Thirdly, there is in the Bill a typical Brownian trademark measure—more burdens on business. Labour Members refer to reductions in burdens on employers, and there are one or two, but I suggest that there will be net increase in such burdens. I shall refer to my concerns and the concerns of those who are in business in the constituency, but, before I do so, I congratulate the Government on deciding to pay the new child tax credit directly to the carer. That is an important reversal of their policy. We are returning to a wallet-to-purse policy, reversing the purse-to-wallet policy effected by the working families tax credit. However, the payment of working tax credit through the pay packet will only reinforce the enormous payroll burdens that are already placed on too many businesses in this country today.

The Treasury and several hon. Members have argued that payroll payments reduce stigma, but that is not the case, and the right hon. Member for Birkenhead made that point rather well. There is no quantitative evidence to show that such payments reduce stigma, and it would be nice to know the results of the working families tax credit evaluation programme. If that evaluation can show that take-up of the working families tax credit has been increased and improved, fair enough. However, no such evidence exists, and I am rather surprised that the Government continue down that route without providing any evidence to show that the system reduces stigma and improves take-up.

The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux suggests that the qualitative evidence shows that payments through the payroll do not stop the stigma, and it gives two examples. First, some employers decide not to take on possible employees because they fear the paperwork. They simply do not take people on if they think that they will be involved in in-work benefit paperwork. Secondly, employers insist that employees work fewer than 16 hours. In fact, they reduce their employees' hours of work the better to ensure that they do not meet the eligibility criteria for the working families tax credit. That qualitative evidence comes not from the Opposition but from NACAB.

It is undoubtedly the case that businesses feel rather put upon. They feel that they are being turned into unpaid tax collectors and benefit administrators for the Department for Work and Pensions and the Inland Revenue. The Chancellor's assertion that burdens will be reduced will comfort them not. Ministers think that the burdens will not increase because of calculations that they have done, probably on the back of an envelope, showing that the number of new childless claimants of working tax credit, who were not eligible for the payroll regime under the working families tax credit, is exactly matched by the number of families that will receive child tax credit not through the payroll but direct from the Revenue.

In other words, those figures balance out. But that depends on the assumptions about eligibility that Ministers are making, so we return to the tapers and the thresholds. Without the evidence, we cannot judge the burdens on business and whether more businesses will have more payroll work. We cannot answer those questions, so it is incumbent on Ministers to undertake today to report back to the House when the system is up and running—if the Bill is passed—to show whether more businesses incur more compliance costs under the new regime compared with the working families tax credit.

If the Minister deigns to answer that question, it would be helpful if he would explain why the Federation of Small Businesses thinks that there is a lot of mileage in moving away from payment through the payroll to the

[Mr. David Ruffley]

Inland Revenue paying working tax credits direct. That has been done for the child tax credit, so why not for the working tax credit?

Fourthly, depending on how they are scored, the tax credits in the Bill can seriously affect the national tax burden—a politically sensitive subject, as we all know, in some cases to the cost of Ministers. The enthusiasm for tax credits as a general concept is in my view not unrelated to the fact that they afford hyperactive and meddlesome politicians the ability artificially to massage downwards the tax burden figures. The current Chancellor does not appear to like benefits very much, because they count as public spending, so he calls them tax credits and, miraculously, they stop being public spending items and become tax reductions. Put like that, it sounds completely outrageous if not downright absurd, but that is what the Harry Potter of the tax and benefits system is doing in the Bill. He is magicking out of existence public spending and scoring it as a tax reduction.

The Chancellor has done that already with the working families tax credit when he defied international conventions set out under the European system of accounts—ESA 95—which was adopted by our Office for National Statistics. He defied the ruling by counting all the working families tax credit as negative income tax in his preferred measure of the national tax burden.

The problem with such an approach is that it is a breach of international standards, because only 20 per cent. of working families tax credit claims relate to relieving an income tax liability. The other 80 per cent. of claims cannot conceivably be described as negative income tax, because there is no income tax liability to be relieved. I hope that this is parliamentary language, but that is a complete fiddle of the tax burden numbers by the Chancellor. He knows it and we know it, but I fear that such dodgy creative accounting will be perpetrated for another few years if the Bill's tax credit regime is implemented.

Fifthly, another signature Brownian touch is evident in the Bill—our dear old friend the stealth tax. Under the Bill, we face the prospect of a new regime of joint assessment of income. This time the stealth tax could be imposed on middle-income families with children in middle England who currently receive the children's tax credit. When the Chancellor abolished the married couples allowance, he said to couples with children, "Don't worry. You'll be compensated." However, they lost out for a year and they had to wait until the children's tax credit was introduced. As we know, that was worth £520 to those who got the full whack.

If one person in the couple earned more than £33,395 a year but less than £41,735, the couple would receive a proportion of the £520 on a sliding taper. If both members of the couple earned less than £33,395, the family unit received the full whack of £520. That is fine, but if they both earned below the threshold, their gross income could be well over £40,000. It might be nearer £60,000 but the couple would receive the full £520 under the rules that operate now and as we understand them.

However, if joint assessment is introduced, Opposition Members have expressed the fear that people on moderate incomes—for example, a couple earning £25,000 a year each with a gross income of £50,000 a year—would receive absolutely nothing because they jointly earn more than the threshold of £41,735. They would lose the entire £520, and that is the prospect with which the Bill presents us, It is another Brownian stealth tax.

On House of Commons Library figures, 1.4 million couples with children who currently claim the children's tax credit will lose out: 500,000 will lose part of their credit and 900,000 will lose the credit in its entirety because they will receive nothing. Will the Minister allay the concerns of many couples with children in middle England and even of observers in the City? Ann Redston, the senior tax partner of Ernst & Young, observes:

> "The Chancellor was strangely reluctant to give us any idea of how many families will be able to take advantage of the Child Tax Credit. He should show his hand."

He certainly should.

The Bill's author is a Chancellor who constantly repackages and chops and changes the tax and benefits system. Too much policy has been made on the hoof since 1997 and I fear that it has been driven by his desire to run other Departments from the Treasury. The result is a lack of true strategic vision in the system and more complexity.

As I have said, the Bill discloses a desire for more stealth taxes, but we have had little debate about the detail of them because the Chancellor wants to leave that to regulations and to consideration in Committee. Incapability Brown has, unfortunately, left too many unanswered questions in the Bill. He is not so much Incapability Brown as Complexity Brown. That is bad news not just for the Departments that will have to try to administer the new system and the businesses that will face more burdens as they try to operate it, but bad news for the men and women who the Bill is most designed to help—those who want genuine incentives to return to work. That is why I am glad that Conservative Members will not vote for the Bill in the Lobby tonight.

6.26 pm

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): There is another Government trademark to the Bill, and that is their demonstrable commitment to tackling child poverty. We have heard Labour Members refer to that subject but little about it, I am sad to say, from Conservative Members. The Bill must be considered in the context of what the Government have done over the past four years to tackle child poverty. It demonstrates both the commitment and the path to continuing the challenging task that has been set—of eradicating child poverty within a generation.

The figures speak for themselves. In the journal *New Economy*, the independent experts David Piachet and Holly Sutherland have concluded that more than 1 million children have been lifted out of poverty since 1997 and that there has been a 7 per cent. increase in the number of lone parents working. The Child Poverty Action Group published the document "An End in Sight" before the general election and I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) is not present to hear what it said:

> "In the weeks leading up to the general election in 1970, the Child Poverty Action Group published a pamphlet, co-written by Frank Field, maintaining that poor people had become worse off under Labour . . . CPAG would not be justified if it were to assert the same . . . there is no doubt that when the election takes place there

> will have been a substantial reduction in poverty by any measure you care to use . . . This reduction in child poverty has been achieved, of course, partly as a result of the buoyant economy and falling unemployment".

Unlike Conservative Members, I do not believe that that happened entirely by accident and, as the document makes clear, the reduction in child poverty is mainly the result of redistributive social and fiscal policies.

Independent organisations, and organisations that are rightly not slow to criticise the Government when they think that we are taking action that is not beneficial to the poorest people in the country, have confirmed the success of the policies so far. However, although a great deal has been achieved, there is still a very long way to go.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) was quite dismissive about that objective in his speech. If I heard him correctly, he suggested that we could not afford to take effective action to tackle poverty, even though he confused me by asking for assurances that the Government's policy would not result in any losers.

Mr. Flight: My point was very clear. I simply said that, if we were to have massive increases in expenditure on health, transport, education and tax credits, they would together amount to more than the country could afford. I merely asked which of those areas would be chosen for expenditure.

Ms Buck: I am not sure of the extent to which that illustrates the hon. Gentleman's point. The fact is that child poverty—this applies also to pensioner poverty—is an obscenity in the 21st century, especially in a country with the fourth largest economy in the world. That obscenity was allowed to develop and multiply during the years of Conservative Government.

We cannot afford not to tackle poverty, partly because of the cost of maintaining people in workless households, which make a major contribution to poverty, and partly because of what poverty does to our public services. Poverty and public services are two sides of the same coin and cannot be addressed separately. Children born into poverty carry with them a legacy of disadvantage that they will take literally to their graves. People from poor families are 12 to 20 times more likely to die prematurely, of a range of conditions, than those from wealthier families. Poverty is still, sadly, a key determinant of educational achievement. We know that we cannot improve our public service outputs—a healthier and better educated nation—without tackling poverty.

The Government are right to put poverty at the centre of their social and fiscal policies. Tax credit legislation has been an important tool to achieve that end, together with the action that the Government have taken to help the children of families that are out of work, with an 80 per cent. increase in the child component of income support. That important point has not been made. It relates to the Bill, in that there is an explicit understanding that although work is the best way out of poverty for many families—I am evangelical in my support for that objective—many families cannot work, and many children are trapped in poverty as a consequence. There is a clear link not only between worklessness and poverty, but between social security expenditure and poverty, as the United Nations Children's Fund study of child poverty in industrial nations clearly demonstrates. The Government's twin-track policy of promoting work incentives in tax credit legislation and supporting children who are in families that are out of work has achieved a great deal.

To digress slightly, this morning's media reports referred to the study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Based on figures that were extant as of April 2000, it concludes that progress—albeit relatively modest—has been made on tackling child poverty. Will the Minister talk to his colleagues to ensure that the statistics on which we base our debates on poverty and the progress we are making to tackle it are up to date? It is nonsensical that such an important debate is informed by a media commentary on statistics that are a year and a half out of date.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West (Gareth Thomas) talked about the need to develop an objective policy indicator. The Social Security Select Committee reinforced that when it considered integrated child credits. We will always need a twin-track policy to measure poverty. We need to get closer to an objective that applies a constant benchmark for child poverty, and to an indicator that is based on, and related to, average earnings, so that we measure income inequality as well as objective poverty levels. The Government have been so bold as to set themselves the target of halving child poverty by 2010 and then eradicating it entirely. They have also established multiple indicators of proxies for poverty, such as housing conditions and health, in the "Building on Opportunities . . . for All" document. It is a great shame that they have not taken the further step of commissioning research that will allow us to have that benchmark around which we can conduct the debate.

Tax credits have been successful. Their take-up has been positive, and considerably more people have taken advantage of the WFTC than of the family credit system. In addition to my comments being guided by the statistical evidence, I spent time in the past couple of years sitting in my employment office with personal advisers, listening to people undergoing a better-off assessment and talking about work opportunities. I watched their faces when they were told how much better off they would be if they worked even in relatively low-paid service economy jobs. As a consequence of their housing benefit, school dinners and help with transport costs, they expected to find that there would be almost no difference between benefit entitlements and their take-home pay. They were stunned to discover that they would be £40 a week better off. The small extent to which people know about the benefits that are available to them when they are in work is an important issue.

We know that there are weaknesses in the WFTC. The Select Committee considered the WFTC and, after a heated debate on wallet-to-purse transfers, was fairly relaxed about it. It was always a judgment call as to whether the WFTC would have a detrimental effect on household incomes. On balance, I am pleased to hear that the Government will deal with that.

We also know that the WFTC system is complex. Unlike the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs. I think that the new system will be simpler. It will not be completely transformed, because anything that does not involve an absolute guarantee of universality and fixed-level payments will never be free of complexity. Although in an ideal world that would be the best way to proceed, unfortunately it is prohibitively expensive. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead made a

[Ms Buck]

powerful case about the dangers of a means-tested system, and I had sympathy with some of his concerns. However, he has to recognise that an alternative would be prohibitively expensive. We have discussed that with him at several Select Committee hearings on the contributory principle and pensioner incomes.

My right hon. Friend referred to the parallel dangers in housing benefit, but as I said in my intervention, that is not a fair comparison. It is possible to argue that the big problem with housing benefit was that it signalled a shift from bricks-and-mortar subsidy for millions of council and housing association tenants to a personal subsidy, which had detrimental side effects. The core problem with housing benefit, however, is rooted in housing issues that are not intrinsic to the housing benefit system. I mean not administration, but entitlement and eligibility. We could have many arguments about the abolition of rent controls, but it clearly contributed to the problem. The collapse of new social housing building in areas of high demand across much of the country also pushed up private sector rents.

The Government can do a great deal about these problems. They can proceed with the licensing of homes in multiple occupation and some private sector tenancies, which they are committed to doing. The work on improving administration of housing benefit will also help. Changes could be made, some of them set out in last year's Select Committee's report on housing benefit, to tackle the structural weaknesses in the housing benefit system. I do not agree that housing benefit was of itself a doomed enterprise. Where would we be without it? London has phenomenally high housing costs and high demand, and the private rented market for low-income claimants collapsed in recent years. I cannot imagine what the system would be like in London without the security of a housing benefit system that most people can rely on to meet all their rental costs. The alternative would make households deeply fearful for their security.

Undoubtedly, there are weaknesses in the system, some of which are unavoidable unless we are to spend billions and billions of pounds on a universal system that is adequate to lift families with children out of poverty, and that is not feasible. The integrated child tax credit will have advantages over the existing system, and it will build on the strengths of that system. Much will depend on the level at which it is set, and I share some of the criticism by hon. Members of the fact that we do not have information about thresholds, which would have enabled us to have an informed debate about what are likely to be the crunch points for individual families.

The introduction to the system of a single children's component that is common to families in work and families out of work enables us to deliver a real, targeted increase in benefit to the poorest children in the country, and that in itself is something to be celebrated. It also, as the National Council for One Parent Families has said, gives us the opportunity to exercise a lighter touch in means-testing, and I shall return to that point. There are advantages to the system being proposed, especially when it is compared with the day-to-day changes in the benefits system which have been fiercely resented by many families as highly complex and intrusive.

The new structure for the child tax credit will also have the positive effect of giving families the security of being able to predict their income. It will be portable between work and unemployment, so families will know that a chunk of their income is untouchable. Anecdotal as well as statistical evidence shows that it will be enormously beneficial and will enhance work incentives.

What, then, are the problems that we need to look out for? As I said, we need to know what level the child tax credit will be set at, and we need to scrutinise that very carefully, particularly to ensure that there will be no losers at the lower end of the income spectrum. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that if there are to be no losers, families who are currently on income support will need an extra £4.05 a week for the first child, and £3.40 a week for each subsequent child. I certainly hope that such levels are being considered, although I am sure that we will not receive more details from Ministers tonight. Hon. Members have made the point, which I support, that the basic requirement is that there be a levelling up for families on the lowest incomes.

I very much welcome the discounting of child maintenance. Another issue that we will want to scrutinise closely is the passporting of benefits. We have had discussions and disagreements about school dinners, certainly in relation to the working families tax credit. I am familiar with the argument that the school dinners component is factored into the WFTC. It is also possible to argue that parents value the ability to pay for school dinners because it is a symbolic freedom from dependence on benefits. I understand that, but if a parent is paying £13 a week for school dinners for two children out of the working families tax credit at the lower rate, that is a significant chunk out of their income. I would welcome it if the passporting of free school dinners were built into the lower end of the income spectrum for the working tax credit and the child tax credit.

Several hon. Members have referred to the difficulties of an annual assessment. We know that other countries, including Canada, Australia and the USA, have based systems on an annual assessment. The American situation is slightly different, in that there is a cultural difference in the attitude towards annual assessments. The early evidence from Australia, where information is only beginning to feed back, is that, as predicted, the annual assessment has caused hardship for families whose income fluctuations took them over the threshold for the credit, so they found that they were asked to repay significant sums. That is a serious danger. I fear that if we do not consider carefully what can be done to prevent such problems, our surgeries will be full of people who have been asked to repay £1,000 or more out of a relatively low income, something that they were unable to predict. That will cause debt hardship and undermine what is generally an excellent system.

The Select Committee had a few words to say about the annual assessment. Although there is no easy answer, one solution would be to have the widest possible band of income for people on the maximum child tax credit. I sympathise with the points made by hon. Members about having an asymmetric approach to the assessment. We must, at the earliest opportunity, build into the legislation ways of ensuring that if families receive large overpayments, they are not asked to repay a lump sum. Will people in receipt of housing benefit be asked to repay that as well? That problem could quickly become very significant, so I hope that Ministers will take it extremely seriously, because I would not want it to undermine the whole tax credits system.

I turn now to an issue that is dear to my heart—regional variations in entitlement. My hon. Friend the Paymaster General is nodding. I have bent her ear to the point of tedium about this on a number of occasions, and I am afraid that I am about to do so again. I thank the House of Commons Library for its excellent work on this matter. Some 10 per cent. of households with children in London and 22 per cent. of such households in Yorkshire receive the working families tax credit. The variation across London and, to a certain extent, other areas in the south-east, is dramatic.

With all due respect to the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), we might expect that area to come at the bottom of the table, alongside Chelsea, because we know that in some areas of London the average income is extremely high, as are property prices. We would not expect many people living there to be in poverty or to be entitled to the working families tax credit. However, in Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush, only 3 per cent. of eligible households receive the WFTC, and in Islington, South and Finsbury and in Hammersmith and Fulham, the figure is only 2 per cent.

My constituency, Regent's Park and Kensington, North, is 472nd in the national league table of 641 constituencies where working families tax credit is received, which means that about 3 per cent. of eligible households are in receipt of it. Yet we have the seventh highest eligibility in the country for free school dinners and the 60th highest level of unemployment. Clearly, something is going badly wrong. In London in particular—I do not doubt that other hon. Members can make a similar case for other parts of the country—there is a mismatch between poverty and unemployment, which are extreme in many areas, and the entitlement to working families tax credit.

There are two possible explanations. The first concerns take-up, and it is probably partly true. When I go to nurseries and elsewhere in my constituency and talk to people, I find that there is a profound ignorance of the working families tax credit. People simply do not know whether they are eligible for it. The quality of advice given in employment offices is variable, and not many people get to the Employment Service or other agencies to receive better assessments, so they do not have the figures to show them whether they will be better off with the WFTC.

Secondly, there is an obvious correlation between ethnicity and take-up. When 130 languages are spoken in an area, as in Greater London, it is much more difficult to explain entitlements to all the different communities. It is not just about take-up, however. We must also address structural problems involving entitlement. We know among other things that entry-level wages are slightly higher in London, so the added value of the working families tax credit is not as great there. Housing costs are significant and child care costs have to be taken into account. I have talked about housing benefit, and shall not overstate the point. However, rents in London are obviously higher; 50,000 families are in temporary accommodation, which means that ridiculous sums of money are paid in housing benefit—so almost certainly, those people are never freed up to be able to work.

A group of clients with a particular problem are families on income support receiving mortgage assistance. In 1996 which, I think, is the last year for which research information is available, 41 per cent. of mortgage holders on income support told the former Department of Social Security that the prospect of losing help with their housing costs was a disincentive to leaving benefit. If that applies to the country as a whole, it is particularly true of London, where the higher cost of mortgages means that the value of the assistance that will be lost is much greater. That is a genuine problem; if we are going to try to get the significant cohort of unemployed households in London off benefit and into work we have to tackle the housing costs both of tenants and of people with mortgages.

The issue of child care costs is dear to my heart. I welcome the fact that the child care component of the working families tax credit was increased significantly last year. However, London child care costs are on average the equivalent of the working families tax credit maximum, and higher earnings in London mean that the credit tapers away much more quickly. In central London, people routinely pay £300 a week for a full-time nursery place. Unfortunately, child minding places are impossible to come by. My early years development partnership is losing child minders faster than it can recruit them. For all the excellent work done by such partnerships, the neighbourhood nurseries initiative and the national child care strategy, in London we are not keeping pace with the demand for child care and certainly not with the demand for affordable child care. That is exacerbated by the fact that, in London, the proportion of households able to call upon family members to provide their child care is about a third lower than in the country as a whole. In many parts of the country, people can call on grandparents and others to help with child care, but that is much less likely in London because of the high social mobility which brings people into the city.

We need more child care, whereas in fact there is less. Establishing it is capital-intensive; recruitment and retention difficulties mean child care workers are at a premium, and we cannot recruit child minders. Taken together, that means that it is genuinely difficult to attract parents with children into the workplace, safe in the knowledge that child care will be available. I am therefore slightly anxious about the child care component of the working tax credit. I fear from what we know about the system that it will not make the situation better; I want to look closely at the tapering to make sure that it will not make matters worse. Unless we use this opportunity to refund people's child care costs virtually in full, in high value areas like London—and, presumably, across the rest of the country—we will simply not overcome that barrier to work.

In summary, we must build on tax credit legislation, which is excellent and has achieved a great deal. The Chancellor and his team are to be congratulated on all that they have done to tackle child poverty. The Bill will advance that effort, but we have a great deal to do on take-up and tackling the problems of housing benefit, thresholds, and/or a significant increase in the earnings disregard. We should tackle the issues of school dinners and of child care; more child care help is needed in London, and we should consider an increase in the percentage reimbursed by the child tax credit, to ensure that families paying London child care costs can draw down the assistance that they need.

[Ms Buck]

If all this comes together, we will find, depending on the level of credit and trusting that targeting will be generous, that tax credits will do what they were intended to do: they will continue to tackle child poverty, but they will also give us a leg-up in the process of getting another cohort of families, especially lone parents, into the workplace. Without such assistance, the Bill may be valuable, but an opportunity may be lost to enhance work incentives, especially in high-cost areas like London.

6.55 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): This Bill was represented earlier as a simplifying measure that would make life easier for businesses, claimants and other people. Clause 1 refers to

> "a tax credit to be known as child tax credit"

and

> "a tax credit to be known as working tax credit."

That sounds straightforward. The clause goes on to list the existing benefits that will be abolished by the Bill, including the children's tax credit, the working families tax credit and the disabled person's tax credit. It will also abolish the family premium in respect of income support and income-based jobseeker's allowance and

> "increases in benefits in respect of children under sections 80 and 90 of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992".

It will abolish the relevant sections of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Act 1992 and the employment credit for older people known as new deal 50-plus. It sounds like a great simplifying measure yet, as with a number of such measures, simplicity is an illusion. In the clauses on child tax credit and the working tax credit, there are 14 different elements or calculations, which specify that entitlement is dependent on the age of children, the number of children in the family, whether someone is disabled or severely disabled, whether they are above a certain age and the number of hours that they work.

Regrettably, therefore, the Bill is not the simplifying measure that it was described to us as, and still includes many aspects of the previous benefits regime, which will cause much dissatisfaction among my constituents, whose biggest complaint about navigating the benefits system is its complexity. They feel that they cannot be certain how benefits have been, are being or will be calculated. Indeed, one of the biggest items on benefits in my postbag is what happens when benefits change, which causes many problems for my constituents. They would welcome a simplifying Bill because it is hard for them to predict what will happen if their circumstances change. In that respect, the Bill is disappointing.

The Bill is also disappointing because it does not include the detail that we need to scrutinise it effectively in the House and in Committee. The lack of detail affects three important areas: the cost to the Exchequer, the people who will benefit, and businesses. Regrettably, in the pre-Budget report, the Chancellor did not see fit to comply with the provisions of the Finance Act 1998, which requires Ministers to adhere to the code of fiscal stability. The code requires the Government to assess the fiscal impact of policy changes and disclose that in a note in the pre-Budget report. It is disappointing that the Government have not done so because it is difficult to discuss the Bill without knowing how much they intend to spend on tax credits as a consequence of introducing it.

The reason why the Government have not done that may lie in the continuing disputes between the Prime Minister and the Chancellor about how much money should be spent and where. Should money be spent on education or the health service, or should more be spent on tax credits? When we get the answer to those questions, we will be able to engage in a necessary debate in the House to discuss how the Bill will affect my constituency and constituencies throughout the country.

We need to know the rates of the tax credits, the tapers and the thresholds, for without that, how are we to judge whether the framework Bill will help those who need help most? The Bill is vague and unsatisfactory in that respect. It is not surprising that external commentators such as the Institute for Fiscal Studies have been forced to rely on sophisticated guesswork as the basis for the assumptions that they use to model the impact on ordinary families of the changes that will be brought about by the Bill. That will minimise the scrutiny that the Bill will receive in this place.

The lack of detail in the Bill will affect the assessment of its impact on businesses. The Paymaster General was upbeat about the regulatory impact assessment and spoke about a £10 million reduction in the costs that businesses face, but until we know how many people will benefit and how many will lose from the Bill, it is difficult to assess the benefit to business, if indeed there is one. The Government trumpet the virtues of the annual assessment, but the obligation to look at the change in circumstances of people who benefit from the Bill will lead to a great number of changes in the money that people receive, either directly from the Inland Revenue or through their pay packet, and each of those changes will have an impact on business. Until the Government produce the detailed figures, we will not know what the impact on British business will be.

Phil Hope: The hon. Gentleman may not have seen the research paper produced by the House of Commons Library on the Bill. On page 42 there is an excellent breakdown of the Bill's impact on businesses. I will not bore him by reading it out—you would not let me, Madam Deputy Speaker—but suffice it to say that the reduced burden on businesses is estimated to be £10 million a year. That directly contradicts almost everything that he said.

Mr. Hoban: No, it does not. I said that the Minister identified a £10 million saving, but because the Bill does not deal with the number of people who will claim benefit and at what rate, we cannot be certain how many people will be covered by the Bill. We do not know.

Phil Hope: I shall not quote it at length, but the Library research paper states that the regulatory impact assessment

> "estimates that the total number of employers paying tax credits will remain unchanged at around 300,000 during any one year."

Again, the hon. Gentleman is wrong on that point.

Mr. Hoban: I am not wrong. Until the Government publish the details of who will qualify for the tax credits, it is impossible to determine how many people will benefit from them. The Government have made some assumptions that handily cancel each other out, but until we have the full details—the regulatory impact assessment does not take into account the extent of the Government's changes, and we have not been told what the impact of those changes will be—we do not know how many people will receive the tax credits. The Government have not told us. Any assessment of the regulatory impact is based on assumptions that will be proved valid only when the rates and the tapers are announced by the Chancellor in the Budget. The estimates to date are based on assumptions, not reality.

We know from what the Minister said earlier that at the time of the changeover there will be winners and losers from the reforms, and a great deal of disruption to business. The Government have rightly recognised that there is a risk of people not being paid their benefit during that period. That is why I welcome the Government's suggestion that in the run-up to the changeover, the payment of working families tax credit and other tax credits should be made directly by the Government and not by employers.

The lack of detail in the Bill masks its likely effects on the Exchequer, on people who receive the benefits and, in spite of the comments of the hon. Member for Corby (Phil Hope), on business.

Specific aspects of the Bill cause me concern. Historically, benefits have been calculated on the basis of people's needs at that time. The Bill moves away from that to an annual assessment, taking account of changes in their circumstances over the course of the year. I am not clear what parameters will be used to assess whether a claim should be submitted for reassessment.

In some circumstances, that is clearly necessary—for example, if a child is born, if a couple breaks up or if a couple gets married—but what happens to someone who works more than 30 hours a week, and receives an additional credit, as at present? At what point will he have to register a reassessment of his tax credit if he works fewer hours? Will a reassessment be necessary if he works 29 hours, 29 hours 55 minutes or 28 hours a week?

We need to know such details. We are asking people to keep a record of their hours and make an assessment of future hours. I hope that in Committee the Minister will present the draft regulations, so that we can see what parameters will be used in such situations. We must reduce the burden of keeping detailed records for people, while recognising that we need to target help where it is most needed. By disregarding a change in hours, we may be giving help to people who do not require it.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that that is a particular problem in seasonal employment such as tourism, which is a major employer in my constituency? The problems may not be lessened by the Government's proposals.

Mr. Hoban: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point about people who do seasonal work or whose hours vary significantly, depending on other factors. I am worried that we are placing a great burden on those who need help most and who may have difficulty in predicting the number of hours that they will work in the course of the year. We need to think carefully about the people who are subject to the regulations and claim credits for certain aspects of their work or their family life.

We should be equally mindful of the fact that when people's circumstances change, it can have a significant impact on the benefit that they receive. It may not be clear to people that they need to apply for reassessment. They may forget that a change in their circumstances leads to a change in their assessment for tax credits. I recently dealt with a case in my constituency in which a constituent was landed with a large bill as a consequence of a change in circumstances that she had not realised would lead to a change in the assessment of her benefit.

The Bill sets out penalties where information is supplied to the Inland Revenue fraudulently or negligently. Some people may supply information incorrectly, through no fault of their own. I hope that the provision will not apply to them and that they will not receive fines.

A further aspect of the Bill that concerns me is the treatment of children. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) and the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) raised the treatment of child tax credit in two-earner and single-earner families. I shall not go down that route, but another concern is the child care tax credit. It is important to encourage parents to decide how best their children should be cared for. The Bill perpetuates the mistake that was made in the previous legislation on child care tax credits by placing financial value only on formal child care. Many parents would prefer sisters, aunts, mothers, fathers or grandparents to look after their children, rather than sending their children to a nursery or a child minder. Of course, they will not receive tax credit in respect of child care because informal child care arrangements are not covered by the Bill. Baby-sitters who are required to come into the home to look after children while parents are working on a night shift are not covered either. I ask the Paymaster General to reconsider the issue, because I believe that we need to recognise the value of child care even if we are not required to pay for it.

Dawn Primarolo: First, does the hon. Gentleman recognise that where the taxpayer pays for child care, our preoccupation should be the quality of care and the safety of the child, which must be paramount before we agree to pay for the care? Secondly, does he accept that the whole point of the child care payment is to remove a barrier for parents to whom no form of support is available, which means that they cannot return to work? That proposition is quite different from his suggestion that we should pay relatives to care for their nieces, nephews or grandchildren.

Mr. Hoban: On the first point, the reason why many parents place their children in the care of mothers, grandmothers or grandfathers is that they believe that they will provide the best and most appropriate care for their children. That is the choice that they make and we should respect it. Of course, they will have considered the options that are available. One reason why informal child care is used is that parents cannot afford other child care even with the help that the Government have offered. The hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) referred to the problem in her constituency, where child care costs are very high and cannot be met by the child care tax credit as it stands. In such a situation,

[Mr. Hoban]

parents may want their children to be cared for in a formal setting, but cannot afford to pay for such care because the credit is insufficiently generous.

Phil Hope: The hon. Gentleman suggests that the child care tax credit may not be generous enough, but the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) said that it was too generous and that we should cut some of these benefits. Does he stand by his remarks or those of his Front-Bench colleague?

Mr. Hoban: I was not disagreeing with my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) or saying that the rate was too high or low, but trying to respond to the Paymaster General's intervention and to set out the reasons why people may decide to place their children with parents and grandparents rather than in formal child care arrangements for which they will receive the benefit provided by the tax credit. That was the point that I wanted to make; I was not arguing about whether the rate should be higher or lower. Of course, we will know about the rate only when the Chancellor deigns to inform us of it in March in the Budget.

The second point of detail that I want to raise relates to qualifying hours. I think that clause 11 ensures that couples' working hours will be aggregated to achieve the current 30-hour limit in respect of receiving additional tax credit. The couple can decide how to work those hours. For example, the husband could work 10 hours and the wife 20, and they would get additional credit for working 30 hours. They could, therefore, sort out their domestic child care arrangements to suit their working pattern. However, the problem for single parents is that the 30-hour limit remains and they will be forced to find alternative child care arrangements. I hope that hon. Members will have the opportunity to explore in Committee whether it would be appropriate to prorate the 30 hours for single parent families, to ensure that they are not put at a disadvantage in comparison with married or cohabiting couples. Of course, that debate should not take place without some consideration of clause 39, which relates to polygamous marriages. I wonder how the 30-hour limit will interact with such marriages. Perhaps the Paymaster General wants to intervene now to expand on that point.

The Bill tries to address two worthwhile objectives. They are goals that we all share: the alleviation of poverty and the encouragement of people to move from welfare to work. Few would criticise those aims. I am concerned, however, that the Bill lacks the definition that we would like. Some 16 regulations have yet to be laid before us and we have not seen the rate or taper in relation to the 14 elements of the two tax credits. We do not know how many winners and losers there will be as a consequence of the Bill. Thus, notwithstanding our earlier discussion, we do not know what the full burden on business will be. The goals of the Bill are generous, but the generosity of the Government in providing information to us has been very limited on this occasion. I regret that we have not had the opportunity to discuss the Bill in more detail on the Floor of the House. Before supporting it, we need to know a great deal more about the details in terms of the rates and tapers, the winners and losers and the people who will benefit from it.

7.16 pm

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): This has been a very complex debate on a very complex subject. I am trying desperately to keep up with some of the technical detail, on which, I must admit, I am not an expert. So far, it has struck me that some of that complexity seems to be adding to confusion on the Opposition Benches. We began by hearing about the Opposition's view that the legislation would be an open cheque book and would lead to a rise in public expenditure comparable to the acknowledged increase in respect of health and all the other Government programmes. Later on, however, we heard about the idea that it would impose a Brownian stealth tax, which seemed to suggest that they held the opposite view. So, while the debate might be complex, I cannot say that I am very much wiser about some of the aspects on which the Opposition have chosen to focus. In general, I can see that their approach would be to salami-slice away all the complexity until there was no Bill left. Where would we be then in terms of our stated aim of trying further to tackle the poverty trap?

I welcome the changes to the tax credit system that the Government are making in the Bill. They will build on the successes of the children's tax credit and the working families tax credit in tackling child poverty, ensuring that the transition from welfare to work is easier. I think that that is what the Bill is all about. The simplicity should lie in making it easier to climb out of the poverty trap. One matter that has not been discussed at any length is the Bill's extension of the system of tax credits to people without children, which is wholly correct. It will also make the whole tax credits procedure simpler, which has been a focus of the debate.

I believe that the Bill will lead to greater simplicity in general. Simplification may not be its overarching aim, but it is a very important part of it. I speak as somebody who ran small businesses for about 15 years, mostly under the aegis of a Conservative Government, and operated PAYE—a rather unenviable task. Trying to understand the tax system and at the same time to run a small business with only a handful of employees is not easy. Every March, the nightmare package would arrive from the Inland Revenue, filled with the extensive information that all employers need in order to pay their staff. Sometimes, that information felt like a job lot of European treaties—essential reading, no doubt, but not many people's cup of tea. In the end, I would carefully file the information away—I imagine that many small employers would do the same—hoping never to have to read all of it. I was, therefore, very pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Paymaster General make it clear that employers will not have to face extra costs in calculating payments. There seems to be cross-party agreement that £10 million will be saved to employers and that perhaps the savings will be even greater.

Employers may take a dangerous attitude when they have to cope with all the information. That was shown by one of the first cases that I tackled after my election. A constituent was told by her employer that if she took time off sick and thereby reduced her hours in any week to less than 16—the qualifying number for working families tax credit—she would lose her entitlement and have to reapply. That information was clearly wrong, but it shows that when the details of a scheme are examined, complexity creeps in, if only in the minds of the army of people who are asked to implement it.

Given the increase in the number of small businesses, I hope that the Government are alert to the problem; I believe that they are. Before the Bill is enacted, I hope that there will be a review of the means whereby employers and employees can gain easy—I emphasise "easy"—access to accurate information about tax credits. Employers sometimes have to ring round and speak to different people; employees have the same problem. That needs attention.

Another WFTC case that arose last week illustrates the difficulty. A single mother of four young children had waited 12 weeks for a decision about her WFTC. That is three months—far too long. She works part-time and had previously received the tax credit for 18 months. She was told that her renewal claim was caught in a backlog and that her employer had filled in the form incorrectly. Her employer does not know what extra information is required. She has telephoned daily those responsible for her employment and for the WFTC. Every time she phones, she speaks to a different person. She now faces financial difficulties and is consequently clearly suffering considerable stress.

People trapped in such circumstances must feel as if they are undergoing a Kafkaesque trial. Someone who is merely trying to speed up the system ends up feeling treated like a nuisance. When dealing with such cases on behalf of my constituents, it would be useful as a Member of Parliament to have a dedicated number to ring. I have been told that there is currently no such number, but perhaps I am wrong about that.

The Bill will help to alleviate the difficulties that I described by lengthening the period between applications from six months to one year. That will be a relief to thousands of people, perhaps the majority. It certainly applies to the hundreds or thousands of people in my constituency who currently benefit from the WFTC without problems. It may not be the Bill's overarching aim, but we cannot overestimate the significance of simplification to anyone who has to claim. I hope that simplification will ensue.

In moving towards more flexibility whereby a family's tax credits can be reviewed as and when their circumstances change significantly, we need to be sure that we will be geared up to providing a service that can cope with the changes. If it does not already exist, a telephone hotline should be available for claimants out of normal working hours at weekends and on week nights as well as week days. We must acknowledge that people's working hours are far more varied nowadays.

It could be argued that the best way to simplify the system would be to revert to the days when as many payments as possible were paid universally. The TUC, which is a critical friend of the Government's, was one of the respondents to the Inland Revenue's consultation on tax credits. It has voiced its anxieties about the increase in the means-testing that the Bill proposes especially for child dependency awards. I share those worries, although my anxiety is mitigated by the simple fact that, since coming to office in 1997, the Government have placed more money in the hands of poorer families than any Government for at least a generation.

The Library's research paper stated:

> "Between April 1998 and April 2000, personal allowances for children aged under 11 grew by 73 per cent. in real terms, while those for children aged 11 to 15 grew by 18 per cent. in real terms. At 2001-02 prices, this latter measure is estimated to have cost around £2.5 billion over the lifetime of the last parliament."

The inevitable delay in compiling research on those measures means that some newspaper headlines in the past 12 months or so have proclaimed that Labour has not reduced child poverty.

Only this morning, *The Guardian* included an article entitled "Research throws doubt on child poverty claim". It claimed that in 2000 only 300,000 fewer children were classed as being below the poverty line than in 1997. The article was based on research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. It states that the foundation

> "found that there were more than 4 million children living below the poverty line in the year to April 2000."

That shows the scale of the problem that we inherited. Is it possible even to imagine how we could overcome the problem of 4 million children in poverty in only a handful of years? At least we have set a target of halving child poverty by 2010. Previous Conservative Governments did not make the same commitment.

We must sometimes read behind the headlines. Research is crucial, and we should consider the research that is carried out when the measures are in place and the WFTC has had time to take effect. Those who oppose our anti-child poverty strategy—they do not oppose our objective openly, but vote against the means of achieving it—will have to wear their Scrooge-like smiles elsewhere on their anatomy in the not-too-distant future.

The TUC is not among the churlish, carping Government critics. Its overall assessment is that

> "tax credits have been one of the government's successes."

That is an objective view with which I agree. If the price that we have to pay for losing some element of the principle of universality is the Government spending more on ending child poverty, I shall sign up to it.

Child benefit continues to be a universal benefit and the increases in it have been staggering. It has risen from £11.05 for the first child in April 1997 to £15.50 in April this year.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Does my hon. Friend agree that, as in the case of pensions, a mixed strategy is beneficial so that some benefits are payable to everyone, thus enabling everyone to feel involved in the benefits system, and others are targeted at those who are most in need?

Mr. Challen: That is an important point. The Government are committed to that strategy for pensions. We have defended the basic state pension, which we will maintain in line with rises in prices. That is contrary to policies that Conservative Members have proposed in recent election campaigns. The Conservative Government froze child benefit for several years. They obviously intended that benefit to wither on the vine.

No one can accuse the Government of trying to prevent the redistribution of wealth to those who most need it. More people are receiving WFTC—500,000 more than received family credit. On average, families with children are £1,000 a year better off than in 1997. The bottom one in five families are £1,700 better off.

[Mr. Challen]

Another welcome reform proposed in the Bill will ensure that the gender bias in the working families tax credit distribution can be tackled, by ensuring that moneys are paid to the main carer in families and not necessarily through the wage packet, as now. Three quarters of those wage packets went to men, so there was a massive switch away from women being paid directly. Now it is proposed that couples will have a choice as to which partner receives the payment. This is a welcome step, but I envisage problems arising through a third party sometimes having to decide who the main carer is—that is, the person who will be designated as the recipient of the tax credit. I hope that clear guidance will be available.

These are, in the main, matters of detail that do not impinge on the principle, now firmly established, that, through tax credits, we are able to target poverty and build pathways out of it. The poverty trap of previous decades is being eradicated and, combined with measures such as the national minimum wage, it is now possible to see real progress in improving people's living standards, based on the idea that work pays. The only danger with this strategy—and it is a big danger—is that wage levels will be kept too low, and that the excessive growth in part-time working will continue apace. Let us be clear that well-paid work is the ultimate pathway out of poverty, and we must be on our guard against accepting as a substitute anything that falls short of that. We do not want to see a growth in the payments of tax credits because employers start paying less; nor should we seek to build a full-employment economy predicated on the idea that low wages will sustain it.

However, that argument is clearly weaker when more people are in work, as they have been since this Government came into office. Under the previous Conservative Government, we had a Dutch auction in which unemployment could be used as a tool to force wages down and to force people out of work. Who could forget the sentiments of "Je ne regrette rien" and "If it ain't hurting, it ain't working"? Nevertheless, I hope that the Government will continue to monitor the impact of the new tax credits closely, so that we can fine-tune the system—as we are doing today—to make it even more responsive and able to deliver our strategy of getting people out of poverty.

7.32 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): I am pleased to be able to speak in this debate because I believe that the working families tax credit, the child care tax credit and the minimum wage are the pinnacles of achievement by the Labour Government. They introduce a range of benefits that manifest a principle that we all believe in, and that the Chancellor has frequently repeated, which is that if you can work, you should work. That will not seem like a revolutionary concept to hon. Members, but it is to many people in my constituency, because they have lost the notion of the obligation to work. That has happened for a number of reasons—perhaps because the work was not there, or because they had not seen members of their families working, or because simply getting out and doing it was so hard.

While the Government try—as any Government will—to enforce the values and morals to which they adhere, there must also be physical laws that will allow that to happen. The working families tax credit has done that. For me, this is a question of morality. I have no problem in believing that receiving one's benefit through one's pay packet while in work is far better than receiving it through an order book or by having to claim it from a benefits agency. Most of my working life before entering the House was spent working as a receptionist in a large south London benefit office, in a housing benefit office and in the reception of a homeless families unit. Enforcing the idea that to go out to work and to receive a pay packet is fundamentally important will provide a legacy that will last long after we have achieved many other things.

The child care tax credit allows people to consider going out to work. It is easy to give anecdotal evidence of this. In my own circle, my best friend at school trained to be an occupational therapist, and she loved her job. She had two pre-school aged children and, unfortunately, two and a half years ago, her husband died. He had stayed at home looking after the children until his death. All of a sudden, Bernadette had lost not only her husband but the person who had cared for her children, and she was about to lose her ability to return to the work that she loved because she could not pay for the child care that would allow her to go to work.

Because Bernadette was entitled to 50p working families tax credit, she made her way in to the child care tax credit and received £74 a week. That allowed her to continue in a job for which the NHS had trained her—and everyone knows how short we are of occupational therapists. We must all be delighted to have played a part in creating a provision that can do something for people in those circumstances, because this is about helping those who are desperately trying to help themselves.

I welcome the decision to pay the child care element of the working tax credit to the main carer, usually the mother, which will mean that the money will find its way directly to the children. I also welcome the decision to continue to ignore the income from child maintenance, which will continue the considerable financial incentive to work for lone parents receiving child support. I hope that this will also continue to give people confidence in the means of obtaining child support, mainly from absent fathers.

I also welcome the decision to align tax credit rules with the improved rules for carer's allowance, by continuing the entitlement to child tax credit for eight weeks after a child's death, or while a child is in hospital—both very difficult times for families. Given the Government's commitment to encouraging more young people to make the most of their potential in education, I welcome the aim to pay the child tax credit until the September after a child reaches the age of 16, or 19 if they are in full-time education.

As a London Member, however, I have some concerns about the working tax credit. My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) expressed them much better than I am about to do, and I am very glad that there has been such a gap between her contribution and mine. As a London Member, I regularly see people at my weekly surgery whose housing costs are incredibly high. The way the benefit is structured at the moment, the more housing benefit a person receives, the more they lose as the working families tax credit comes into play, because the working families tax credit is taken into account as part of their income for housing benefit purposes. About 35 per cent. of the people who receive the working families tax credit in London are also on housing benefit, which means that tens of thousands of people are not getting all the benefit that they should from working and from the working families tax credit, compared with people in other parts of the country where housing costs are lower.

This disincentive works also in terms of child care costs, which are about one fifth higher in London than in most other parts of the country. That means that a single mum on £200 a week is £6 or £7 a week worse off than her equivalent in other parts of the country, because she is paying that much more for child care, and has to find that 30 per cent. differential. I realise that it is difficult to compare regional variations—we were reminded by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) that London's housing costs are pretty spectacular in comparison with much of the rest of the country—but I hope that we can consider this issue. London has the highest proportion of single parents not in work, and they and their children would benefit from any changes that the Government might consider.

A number of hon. Members have mentioned the fact that only registered child minders are taken into account for the purposes of the child care tax credit. I would have a problem with the Government paying for informal arrangements, and I completely understand their reluctance to do so. However, I have a problem when child care is available in the home from a well trained person, but benefit cannot be claimed for that.

May I cite an example similar to one used frequently by my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint)? A lady in my constituency was a nurse at St. George's hospital. She owned her own home, but her partner left her with two children. To carry on her job, which involved a rota of nights, earlies and lates, she employed a National Nursery Examination Board-qualified nanny in her own home. Although she was financially entitled to benefit, she could not get it because that person was not a registered child minder.

The NNEB-qualified nanny must, by all accounts, be a better qualified person—should I say, a more qualified person—than a number of child minders, but the result of that lady's dilemma was that she sold her highly priced house and moved to Birmingham to work as a nurse. Another key worker has moved out of the capital, where we desperately need them, so I hope that we can consider the form of child care. I appreciate that that is a matter for the Department for Education and Skills, but we desperately need redress.

I have raised points that concern people in my constituency and similar London constituencies, but I must emphasise that the working families tax credit and its basis helped to get me involved in politics. I am here to help people to help themselves. I believe in a hand up rather than a handout, and the working families tax credit is the best example of that.

7.41 pm

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): We have heard some extraordinary contributions from Members who are obviously gifted not only as speakers in the House, but particularly in their knowledge of and expertise in such legislation. I feel somewhat inadequate, but perhaps more adequate than some Conservative Members, not because I denigrate their speeches, but because it is a sad fact that too few are taking part in the debate. However inadequate my contribution, it must be better than no contribution at all, or at least I hope so.

Some speeches have shown the consensus across the House on the principle behind the Bill. To an extent, that surprises me. Some reminded me of speeches made in Committee, so detailed was their content, but I shall not go into such detail. I prefer to consider the broader points, especially those involving the principle of tax credits, what got us to this debate and where we are going in terms of the relationship between people in and out of work and the benefits that we can accrue to support them.

I must do that because it has been suggested today that we are limiting people's scope and disabling their progress through their working lives. I fundamentally disagree with that argument, even though it was proposed by a most well regarded Member, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field).

Phil Hope: My hon. Friend wondered whether her contribution would be better than those of Conservative Members. Has she realised that no Conservative Back Benchers are present?

Kali Mountford: I am glad that my hon. Friend recognises that, whatever humble words I say to the House, they are better than none, although I am not sure whether he is damning me with faint praise. Thanks anyway.

I have a problem with the assertion that giving in-work benefits of any kind limits people's prospects. We are acting as though the debate is taking place in a vacuum, but we are in an extremely stressed world economic market. I cannot remember a time in the past 20 to 25 years when we could say that we could do nothing to benefit the low paid. Often the battle-cry was, "A fair day's work for a fair day's pay." People also said, "I want enough pay for a working family to live on." That presents another problem.

Employers may say, "My business can support only so much, those skills attract only so much pay and the economic situation allows my business to develop only at a certain rate in this market." To follow the argument through to its logical conclusion, we could say, "Pay a higher rate for the job—not the market rate—and skew the market so that people are paid according to what they need rather than what the market demands." Then we would be in a completely different situation. We would be telling employers, "You must pay what your business cannot afford." That begs a question about the minimum wage.

It now seems to be accepted across the House that a minimum wage underpins the labour market and provides a base below which people cannot fall. That wage in itself is an interference in the marketplace, but it is minimal and we are telling employers, "There are standards that we expect you to keep." We are right to do so, but are we also saying that they should never employ people with several children, many obligations or high housing costs, because their businesses could not afford them on such a basis? That cannot be right.

Dr. Palmer: Does my hon. Friend agree that the minimum wage and the working families tax credit are

[Dr. Palmer]

two sides of the same coin? If we had the working families tax credit without the minimum wage, we would subsidise people paying low wages.

Kali Mountford: My hon. Friend shows his wisdom in anticipating my next point. I would go further and say that family credit acted as a dynamic. It was argued often and rightly that family credit interfered in the marketplace. Tonight, however, we must consider not only the new tax credits that we are putting in place, but what the working families tax credit achieved and what happened previously. There was a difficult dynamic acting between people who were in work and out of work, and the tax regime.

My meagre thinking on the subject before 1997 took in examples such as benefit tapering rules to get round the problems of a lumpy system that dealt with problems in a lumpy way. I cannot think of a better word for it than "lumpy", as people got benefits in lumps, their assessment was done in lumps and the system was a lumpy instrument for dealing with what was, for people whose circumstances changed routinely and regularly, a complex and difficult problem.

I did not have the imagination to consider the tax system instead, but I am glad that someone did, because we are moving to a more flexible system that will change the relationship between people in work, taxation, benefits and their ability to pay their own way. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead pursued the argument that we will damp down wages by interfering in the marketplace and that we are preventing people from aspiring to break out of the cycle. I would argue that that was true under the benefits system and that the flexibility in the tax credits system allows people to develop their skills.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) advanced the argument that the skills base would be damped down completely by the introduction of tax credits, but both he and my right hon. Friend are completely wrong. People excluded from the marketplace who cannot get into the world of work have no opportunity to extend their skills. If people have no opportunity to extend their skills, they have no opportunity to develop in the workplace, get better pay and break out of the downward spiral of decline that comes with the poverty of worklessness.

Phil Hope: My hon. Friend has shown by her eloquence that she knows a lot more about this subject than she has let on. I agree with her that low wages and low skills hold people back, and are a problem for people on low incomes living in deprived areas. The tax credit system provides the trampoline for them to get into work, which is essential if they are to develop skills and go beyond the minimum wage.

Kali Mountford: I refer my hon. Friend to the contribution of our hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck). In her eloquent and detailed speech she explained how people are affected by lengthy periods of worklessness. No one in the House should suggest that the tax credit system is a panacea for all ills, because there will always be people who, for a variety of reasons, are not able temporarily or permanently to enter the world of work. However, for those who can—I am not sure whether we can put it as strongly as an obligation or even a right—there is an opportunity to do so. We should encourage people to understand the effect on their lives of lengthy periods of worklessness, and its effect on generations.

Before I came to the House, I lived in Firth Park in Sheffield, which is one of the poorest areas in the country. There was great deprivation after the closure of the steel mills. Generations of families were out of work, and great social change resulted from that. It was burdensome for individuals, because their working lives, their relationships with colleagues and their sense of self-worth were altered, and their children did not grow up in an atmosphere in which people expected to go to work and look after themselves throughout their lives. There was also a cost to us all socially and economically. There is a cost to us if we do not have a full employment strategy. Recognition of that lies at the core of the tax credit system.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), who is on my left—politically or literally—rightly referred to the relationship people have with work in her very good speech. We must recognise the intrinsic nature of that relationship: it is how people identify themselves and how they move forward in their lives.

Both those contributions from my hon. Friends were telling. I was disappointed in the contributions of Conservative Members—if I can be even more disappointed in them than I was by the absence of those Members—because they rarely touched on poverty and how people get themselves out of economic poverty and poverty of expectation. Values and aspirations come from the world of work, and although the tax credit system is not a panacea, because some people will be excluded from the world of work for a variety of other reasons, there are measures to encourage and give people hope when, through disability or illness or other circumstances, they have been unable to work. Under the tax credit system they may be able to change those circumstances some time in the future.

We can at least give support to people who are currently able to work, so that they can move into the world of work and it can make some sense to them. What I value about the system is that it gives people advice before they take final decisions about what job to take and what job they can afford to take. The in-work benefit advice is crucial and has made a significant change.

When we try to combat fraud in the system, we should consider the main motivations for fraud. It is easy to get into a major argument about organised crime—I put it no less than that—in the benefits system. It has been suggested that we cannot handle fraud in the tax system. If anyone has ever made a mistake on their tax form, they will know only too well how responsive the tax system can be when people make mistakes—honest mistakes by some of us, but less so in other cases. The tax system has proved itself well able to deal with fraud. To compare the ability of the tax system and the benefit system to deal with fraud is to underestimate why people get themselves in a pickle. In the benefits system, it often arose out of ignorance.

Some useful suggestions were offered about how we deal with such ignorance. Ignorance in the benefits system often stemmed from people's belief that if they moved into the world of work they would be worse off, not only because of the loss of passported benefits, but because the work they would get would not pay enough to cover their rent or mortgage and their bills. I have frequently come across people who make a false judgment that if they take a particular job they will be worse off, so they take work on the black market. They put themselves at risk, as well as the whole economic structure, because the black market does nothing for any of us. Giving them advice beforehand prevents that problem and by moving people into a world of work where they are given the correct advice about how their employment can affect them, we are helping them to help themselves and to help their families into a world of aspiration, which they have so far been denied.

Other criticisms have been made about means-testing. I have discussed that issue in the House on many occasions. Some call it means-testing, but I prefer to call it targeting because that makes me feel so much better about myself. The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) referred to the subject. I was concerned about how we think about targeting and how we help people through targeting—the hon. Gentleman may want to call it means-testing. There is a growing acceptance that we cannot afford everything all the time. Even the Liberal Democrats realise that we cannot afford everything we would like to deliver. I accept that there is a place for universal benefits in some circumstances, but our money is sometimes better spent by focusing it on the people who need it most.

I was intrigued by the hon. Gentleman's seemingly simple and attractive notion that by changing the threshold for income tax we would offer a quid pro quo for people like us and those worst off would gain a great deal, and that it would cost us little compared with a tax credit system. On the face of it, that sounded like a clever idea and I wanted to applaud the hon. Gentleman, until I gave a little moment's thought to the objective of the tax credit, which is to help the poorest. I understand his argument that those of us who are better off would pay more tax—we could talk about other ways of doing that, such as considering the starting and the top rate of tax—but we would not necessarily help those who need it most.

The hon. Gentleman says that he does not know of many people who earn so little that they are below the tax threshold. Unfortunately, I do know some people in that situation who are outside that threshold. I suggest to him that tax thresholds change for other reasons, not least if a person has paid too little or too much tax in the previous year. It is a mechanism used by the tax office to amend someone's tax for the following year, so it is not quite the tool that it seemed when the hon. Gentleman set out his proposals.

Mr. Webb *rose—*

Kali Mountford: I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene. I shall give way to him.

Mr. Webb: I shall resist the temptation to go into detail, because these are detailed matters. I did not say that I do not know anyone who earns too little to pay tax. I said that I suspect that there are relatively few people who earn too little to pay tax and who would be entitled to the employment credit for which they have to work 16 hours a week. Sixteen hours a week at the minimum wage does not quite get them to the tax threshold, but it is not far off. I suspect that that is less of an issue.

On the issue of raising tax allowances and not helping the rich, that could also be done by starting the basic rate band lower down, so all the increase in the tax allowance would benefit the poorest taxpayers. There are various permutations. It is the principle that is important. It does not have to be done through an in-work benefit: it could be done through the tax system as I suggested.

Kali Mountford: I asked similar questions recently during a Select Committee meeting. I asked whether we should simply change the starting rate. I see the simplicity of the proposal and understand why the hon. Gentleman finds it attractive, but it does not solve the problem of ensuring that those who are not in a position to pay tax will gain some benefit.

Conservative Members, who are not here now, said that no stigma was involved in claiming benefits, and that they saw no difference between benefits and tax credits in that regard. I think there is a difference between receiving benefit through a pay packet and receiving it by means of an order book. I can only say that anyone who has ever had the misfortune to stand in a queue at a post office with an order book and who says no stigma is attached to that cannot have had the experience for long. In areas like my constituency, which is made up of many villages, everyone knows who is receiving benefit and who is not.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead said that some pay clerks got to know how much was in wage packets, and that that led to jealousy in the work force. I think that much more stigma is attached to the use of an order book. For some it means a huge disadvantage, especially when it is used to claim in-work benefit. The prospect of collecting such benefit in that way is not attractive. We are moving towards a system in which more people will receive benefits or tax credits through bank accounts, but, as the hon. Member for Northavon pointed out, we do not yet have a universal bank.

I think that receiving benefit through the pay packet is a benefit in itself, in that the benefit of being in work can be easily recognised. A social structure is involved, which makes sense to me—although other Labour Members have criticised the arrangement, for a party political reason that I abhor. They suggest that a benefit book makes it clear immediately that the Government have provided the money, whereas a tax credit makes the connection between the Government's generosity and the receipt of money less clear. I think it good for people to see the tax credit not as some act of generosity by the Government, but as something they have earned through their own efforts. That, I think, deals with the point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead.

I did not set out to issue a critique of my right hon. Friend's work, because I admire him greatly. Today, however, flags have been flown bearing words writ large, as though they were true and unchallengeable. I felt strongly that I should take the flags down and have a closer look. Having done so, I do not think that they deserve to be flown.

Before I begin to sound like someone from a naval outfit—such a person might, in fact, address the House by means of semaphore, but I have no gift for that—let me say this: no matter how learned or respectable Members

[Kali Mountford]

may be, I think we should give detailed consideration to every suggestion that is made here. Today we have been presented with a direct challenge to the system that we propose. I am not talking about the points made by many Members about how we could tinker with the system and make it more workable, or about reasonable criticisms that might enable us to improve it in Committee. I am talking about what I consider to be a direct assault on a principle relating to whether tax credits can work. One or two Opposition Members made particularly challenging points. I think it worth spending a little time considering the principle of tax credits, and asking whether the flexibility gained from them is worthwhile.

My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North cited the example of Australia, and asked whether a system involving a yearly check was fair and proper. I think she was right to ask that, and to ask whether it would lead to greater poverty and hardship. I ask her, however, to look at the Bill more closely, as I did when she made her suggestions. The Bill makes it clear that under this system—though not under the Australian system—people can present new evidence during the year. They can tell the Inland Revenue that their circumstances have changed substantially, and their tax credits can be altered as the year goes on.

To my great disappointment, Members continually spoke of anticipation of the following year's income. The Bill, however, does the reverse, in that it asks us to consider the previous year's work, hours and income. That is not an impossible request. Under the previous "lump" system, there was an absolute requirement for the slightest change relating to those on any kind of benefit to be presented on the day; otherwise benefits would not be paid for that fortnight, for that month or, in the case of family credit, for the six months involved.

In all cases, there will be winners and losers. One factor must always be balanced against another. From time to time, we incurred substantial losses through the system of family credit operating for six months in advance, because people's circumstances changed during that time. Sometimes we made substantial gains, however, so the factors would balance out—although whether they balanced out fairly is another question.

Dr. Palmer: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way to me again.

Do not all these systems involve a specific problem for those whose incomes fluctuate wildly during the year? I am thinking of people doing casual work or working on commission—people who cannot, in all honesty, predict whether their income in a few months' time will be much higher or much lower than it is now. Does not the tax credit represent a more flexible approach than the old benefits system, with its brutal cut-off points? I think that is probably what my hon. Friend is saying.

Kali Mountford: My hon. Friend has characteristically answered his own question. He is a thoughtful person, and he is absolutely right. Whenever we look at legislation, we are balancing one factor against another. We must ask whether we are balancing some crude implement against flexibility, or whether we are balancing cost with effectiveness. What are we achieving, and what is the main objective? At some points, the House has seemed unclear about the Bill's main objective.

Siobhain McDonagh: Is it not particularly important to consider the continuing need for child care support during the period of benefit entitlement? A group of child minders from Pollards Hill in my constituency wrote to me saying that under the current system people were asking them to sign their forms for child care tax credit, and then, after a week or two, leaving them to some informal system. They felt that they would be penalised by the Inland Revenue, which would assume that they had received payment that they had not received. They were also concerned, as taxpayers, that people were walking away with benefits to which they were not entitled.

Kali Mountford: My hon. Friend is right. I have encountered similar situations. I would not expect the House to devise a foolproof system—all the systems we have devised in the past have been open to some form of fraud or abuse—but I think it imperative for us to seek at least a minimisation of abuse.

My hon. Friend used the phrase "child minder". I am glad that someone in the House is using that phrase. Hon. Members have talked about the informal child care market, with relatives taking care of children. I have no objection to parents choosing their own parents to look after their children. That is the matter for them, but the child minding system is an extremely valued and valuable way of providing child care. My hon. Friend the Paymaster General made the point that child care should be regulated and be of a high standard. That fits with the point that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden about standards and who should qualify. It should be about standards.

People forget that those who want to enter some informal arrangement can register as child minders. It is a great pity that in some of the debate it has been forgotten that the child minder system regulated by the local authority has a useful part to play.

Hywel Williams: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kali Mountford: I will, although I have not quite finished answering my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden.

Hywel Williams: On that point, does the hon. Lady accept that in some parts of the country, particularly in rural areas, there is an absolute lack of child minders? In my constituency recently, the only child minding available was in large towns—when I say large towns, I mean towns of about 3,000 people. In large tracts of the country, whatever sort of child minding one wanted was not available, despite the best efforts of the national child care strategy and the National Assembly for Wales.

Kali Mountford: I have come across areas where child care availability is limited. This Bill does not seek to improve the number of child care places, although there are measures in place to attempt to do that. Introducing some cash into the system changes the marketplace for child care. The attraction of being paid for work that was previously unpaid may entice more people into child minding than were attracted previously.

The role of child minders has been undervalued. The formal system of nursery care, creches and child care provision out of school hours is valuable, but the child minder also has an important role to play. Local authorities would do well to look at their home assessments of prospective child minders and encourage more people to be child minders. They play a valuable role not only for the family who need child care, but for all of us economically.

I do not know about availability in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but there has generally been a rundown in the child care system. We are in the process of improving the position. I hope that in similar debates in years to come in the House about how to get people out of poverty, the hon. Gentleman will not describe the same problem.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): My hon. Friend makes a strong case for not treating tax credits in isolation and for looking at things that link. I am fortunate enough to have a Jobcentre Plus pilot office in my constituency—on those days when there is no industrial action at that office—and the joined-up approach is exactly the strategy being adopted there. When jobseekers go into the Jobcentre Plus to discuss a particular job, they are given not only an instant assessment of what their working families tax credit and all the various components will be—we have talked about the necessity of giving people confidence to go back into the labour market—but advice on issues such as child care, which is bound to have a beneficial impact. Does she agree that more remains to be done and that there is a role for local authorities, along with the Inland Revenue and the Employment Service? They must continue to work closely together to ensure that the joined-up approach is cemented.

Kali Mountford: I go one step further and point my hon. Friend to the ONE project, a pilot of which was run in my constituency, where the local authority, the Inland Revenue, the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service were all part of one system. The great thing is that people only have one place to go to get advice. *[Interruption.]* I can see the hon. Member for Northavon laughing, but the name "ONE" is absolutely suitable in that particular circumstance. Those people have one place to go where advice is streamlined, comprehensive and right for the individual. It has changed the relationship between people working in the system and the recipient of the service.

One person said to me when I visited our local pilot project, "I bet you wish you were still in the system now." I would rather keep the job I have, but I could see what civil servants were saying to me. By changing the dynamic between the people giving a service and those receiving a service, we change the quality of the service. I hope to see more of that. Although not perhaps directly related to this Bill, such an approach plays a part in the general relationship between the world of benefit, the world of work and the world of paying tax. If we can go one further and say, "in the world of getting a tax credit", we will all benefit from that.

8.16 pm

Phil Hope (Corby): My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) has been passionate, enlightening and persuasive. I feel educated as a result of her contribution. For all hon. Members, having these debates is an opportunity to discover more not only about others' constituencies, but about the expertise that Members bring to the debates. Her contribution was truly excellent, unlike the contributions from Conservative Members.

We started the debate at around 3.30, when five Conservative Members were in the Chamber. Most of the time, however, there were two. Then it went down to one, and in the past hour or so not a single Conservative Back-Bench Member has bothered to appear in the debate. If it were a debate on inheritance tax, it would be packed out. The fact that it is about poverty and dealing with the issues that concern our constituents clearly illustrates the priorities of the Conservative party.

In pressing some Conservative Members for their views on the Bill, I found myself slightly confused. When asked what the Conservatives would do, we were told that they did not know. They will not vote on the Bill because they have not made their minds up yet. That does not tell us much about their priorities or concern for tackling the issue of poverty.

We heard the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) say that the Labour Government are promising more on health, on education and on all these extra tax credits, but when pressed on what he would cut, he would not say. Clearly, he regards these as generous commitments to the poor, but by not voting for them we know where the Conservative party stands. He was then contradicted by the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban), who said that the child tax credit was not generous enough because people could not afford to pay for the child care that was required. So we heard one Conservative Member complaining that it was too generous and another saying that it was not generous enough.

I would like to know what the Conservatives think about tackling poverty. In fact, I would like to hear—it would be very rare—an apology for the fact that, in 1997, when the Labour Government came to power, one in three children were living below the poverty line, and one in five households with children were workless. That was the poverty that we inherited. Instead of packing out the Opposition Benches this evening to try to discover what they did wrong, apologising for it and learning how to get it right, Conservative Members have absented themselves from the debate.

Vera Baird (Redcar): I do not want to give my hon. Friend too difficult a task at this late stage in the evening, but having made the comments that he has, can he help me by listing any attempt to alleviate poverty that has ever come from the Conservative Benches?

Phil Hope: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. I will have to disappoint her because, as a result of the policies of the Conservative party, 4 million people were unemployed. *[Interruption.]* I can hear the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) from a sedentary position—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. We cannot have interventions from a sedentary position, and I hope that the hon. Member for Corby will soon turn to the Bill before the House.

Phil Hope: We hear from Conservative Members the cry, "Has the gap between rich and poor widened or

[Phil Hope]

narrowed?" If benefit after benefit is cut, as they were when the Conservative party was in government, the poor will get poorer. If child benefit, which is a universal benefit, is frozen, the poor will get poorer. If 4 million people are thrown out of work, the poor will inevitably get poorer. The point is that the Conservatives do not care, and they have not come here tonight to see how we might put things right.

Kali Mountford: Does my hon. Friend think it better to try to lift families, especially those with children, out of poverty or to concentrate on limiting the resources of the very wealthy?

Phil Hope: The crucial thing is to lift the floor and raise the level for everyone—like boats on the sea—to give all an opportunity, as opposed to abandoning them on run-down estates in constituencies that the Conservatives failed to represent adequately.

The Bill builds on the last four years of successful intervention in meeting the needs of the poor. The national minimum wage was introduced by the Labour Government, and the tax credit will be a vital addition to that. I remember an all-night debate in the last Parliament during which the Conservatives made every effort to oppose the introduction of the national minimum wage. The general election saw a huge U-turn by the then shadow Chancellor, but he is no longer a member of their Front-Bench team. What is the Tories' real position now on the national minimum wage? If they got back into power, would we see 2 million people thrown back into the poverty pay that they had to live on under the Conservatives?

The Conservatives opposed the WFTC, the child care tax credit, the 10p starting rate of income tax and the increases in child benefit. The fact that they are abstaining this evening tells us that they may be wondering whether they got it wrong. They may be asking themselves whether it was wrong to keep cutting people's incomes. They may be having second thoughts. Unfortunately, I doubt it. They do not want to vote tonight, because they do not know what to do. They do not understand the people who live in poverty.

Mr. Kevan Jones: The Conservatives may be abstaining tonight because the measures in the Bill are popular with the public and they do not want to admit that a Labour Government have brought in policies that are popular with the public. Those policies are why the Labour Government were returned in June.

Phil Hope: That is an excellent point. We are doing the right thing in the Bill by seeking to meet the needs of people in most need. It will provide not a handout, but a hand-up. These measures will provide people with the building blocks to move themselves out of the poverty into which the Conservatives seemed so casually to throw them.

The impact of measures that we have already taken has been significant. Lone parents have come up to me as I have been walking through the town centre just to say, "Thank you." They are doing their shopping with their kids in the buggy and they come over and say, "Mr. Hope, I just want to say that, for the first time, I have got a job." That actually happens.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng) *indicated assent.*

Phil Hope: My right hon. Friend was with me when that happened and thought that I had set it up for his visit, but it was spontaneous. People are now, for the first time, on the ladder of opportunity that we have provided. That is especially true for young women who left school early and had their babies early. For the first time, they have access to child care and financial support, and that has helped them to start to reconnect to their communities and develop relationships with friends and colleagues who can help them out. Community regeneration starts in that way, and that shows that the Bill is not just about money. It is about bringing people together and finding ways to lift them out of poverty.

Tony Cunningham (Workington): In my constituency, generations of people have not only not worked but have had no opportunity of, or aspiration towards, further or higher education. It is not just work that is important. The Bill will give people the opportunity to take a job and obtain training and education themselves, and their children will see how important it is to have a job and to go on to further education. I taught in my constituency for many years and many young people did GCSEs but never went any further. They never thought of further education or university as being for them. The Bill will change that for many children, and that is just as important as its other proposals.

Phil Hope: My hon. Friend is right, and the passion with which he speaks illustrates all too well why Labour Members are here debating this issue and why Tory Members are all too obviously absent. The people we represent find that these measures lift their hearts, aspirations and expectations. We talked in the general election about supporting the many and not the few. These measures are for the few among the many who so often get overlooked. They are the bottom 10 per cent. to 15 per cent. who live in difficult circumstances and who have not had a decent education. They and their children live in disadvantaged areas, but if we can bring together the support contained in the sure start programme, the education action zones, the neighbourhood renewal funds and the new deal for communities—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are debating the Tax Credits Bill. I have brought that to the hon. Gentleman's attention before and he should now address his remarks to that subject.

Phil Hope: As I was about to say, poverty is not just about money. It is about the lack of all the other opportunities. However, money is crucial, and the Bill will give families the cash they need. It will provide the means to get the resources to those who do not have them.

The new child tax credit is important, because it contains extra elements for particular children. For example, it has a higher element for children under one year of age. I know that the most painful time financially for parents is the first 12 months of a child's life. The mother has not gone back to work and the family does not have everything it needs, be it a pram or the other necessities for bringing up a baby. The extra amount for that first year will be vital. As other hon. Members have pointed out, the fact that it will be paid to the carer is a vital factor in the successful targeting of the measure. The regulatory impact assessment suggests that 5 million families will benefit from the measure. We are removing the stigma from obtaining benefits for a low-income family, and that is vital in regenerating individuals, families and communities. We do not want the negative stereotyping and stigmatising of lone parents; we want people to have the money they need to bring up their children.

The working tax credit is important, because it extends support from those with children who work to those at work without children. The regulatory impact assessment suggests that 400,000 individuals will benefit. That is vital, because we want to help people out of the unemployment trap. Someone who is unemployed and has no children should have an incentive to get back into work and get on the ladder of opportunity.

I note that the extra cash will go to workers in low-income households who are aged 25 or over, and the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) wondered whether that was targeted correctly. My understanding is that it is targeted on the older age group because they find it hardest to get back into work. I have campaigned heavily on youth issues in this Parliament, and I know that young people under 25 do not stay on low incomes for long. None the less, I am nervous about creating another age break in a system where someone who is 18 is considered an adult. I have argued this point also in relation to the national minimum wage and the right to vote.

Education maintenance allowances are not affected directly by the Bill, but there is a link. Where 16 to 18-years-olds in pilot areas have received the allowances, they have stayed on in education a lot longer. I would like that scheme to be extended to Corby, if I may put down a marker for Ministers. If we can encourage young people to stay on in school, they can get a higher-paid job and can start to benefit from the working tax credit.

I wish to refer to fraud. I am a former member of the Public Accounts Committee, which had an annual ritual in which representatives of the Benefits Agency would be slapped round the ears and sent on their way for failing to make the system work well. I hope that under the system of tax credits, using the Inland Revenue, we may see a reduction in the error and fraud that have bedevilled the system under Administrations of both parties.

Child care is a barrier in terms of parents getting to work, and reference has been made to the problems of child care in rural areas. My constituency contains the town of Corby, as well as a rural area of 60 villages. They have established a system of co-operation between very small playgroups in small villages, through which they pass on items of equipment and joint training takes place. This indicates that the child care tax credit can help to provide new services for such groups. That can reduce the isolation felt by many young parents who are bringing up a child on their own in a small village.

On passporting benefits, it is important that people receiving a means-tested benefit under the old system which then entitled them to another benefit should not lose these benefits. The new system must protect people's passports to those additional benefits. One example is the sure start maternity grant. I have a sure start programme in my constituency, and it is astonishingly successful at supporting parents in the poorest areas. Those individuals can now claim the grant, and I hope the new system will protect the benefit.

I have mentioned a panoply of measures in which the Bill plays a part, but what counts when one is poor is cash. We know the impact of taking money away from people; we saw that under the long, bleak, 18 years of Conservative rule. We are now seeing a new commitment to people in our constituencies.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I have been fascinated by the strong and sound case that my hon. Friend is making. However, has he had contact with the small employers in his constituency on whom falls a disproportionate burden in relation to the operation of the tax credit system in all its glory? There is a problem, and I would appreciate my hon. Friend giving some thought to it before he concludes.

Phil Hope: I know of the support that my hon. Friend gives to small businesses in his constituency, which provide a vital source of employment for so many people. I can reassure him that the regulatory impact assessment on the Bill shows that the new scheme will cost employers £10 million less than the current arrangements. Going over to an annual cycle will reduce the cost by some £9.5 million; not having to issue a certificate of payment will save some £400,000; and not having to issue an earnings inquiry form will save £1.1 million. If my mathematics serves me right, that comes to savings of about £11 million, rather than £10 million. *[Interruption.]* I picked that figure up from the hon. Member for Northavon, and now I remember the old adage—in Corby, anyway—about never trusting a Liberal Democrat's figures.

In conclusion, some impassioned speeches and important interventions have been made today. We are committed to tackling poverty in this party and in government. We have already made a substantial change to people's lives. The Bill is another major step along the historic route to halving and eventually eliminating poverty in the United Kingdom.

8.36 pm

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): I welcome the Bill, which is also warmly welcomed in my constituency, certainly among the poorest members of the community. It builds on the work done since 1997 and underlines the key themes of our Government: to support families, to make work pay and get people into work and, vitally for communities such as mine, to tackle the scourge of child poverty.

The Bill builds on measures that have already been outlined at length by my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope). It includes measures that were opposed by the Conservative party and will bring in measures that will be welcome to many in my constituency. I refer to the children's tax credit, which we introduced in April this year, and the higher baby tax credit, which will be introduced in April 2002. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is looking forward to receiving the benefits of that particular credit.

[Mr. Kevan Jones]

The Bill builds on measures that have been put in place by the Government since 1997. I know that they are making a real difference because people come up and say that they have more money in their pockets. This June, the people of North Durham realised the benefits of having had a Labour Government since 1997, and, with good and wise counsel, elected me as their Member of Parliament. More than 11,000 families in my constituency have been helped by the working families tax credit, the children's tax credit and the record rises in child benefit since 1997.

Constituencies such as mine went through very rough times in the 1980s and 1990s as the local pits, steel works and factories were closed. The despair of unemployment in those communities was real, and the hardest part was the scourge of child poverty in many of the former pit villages in North Durham. Unemployment has put serious pressure on those communities, and the pit villages in my constituency have been resourceful and resilient in resisting those pressures.

Tackling unemployment and aiming to benefit the poorest in our community has to be the right approach. Those in South Stanley and Pelton in my constituency will welcome the Bill; it will provide the support that those communities need, and help them in their regeneration. The Bill is all about helping to regenerate communities and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Corby said, helping people to get on the ladder of opportunity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) eloquently explained what the Bill is about. It is about giving people their dignity back. We are all used to turning up to work every morning, talking to people and knowing our place in the world. The first question that most people ask when they meet someone for the first time is, "What do you do for a living?" Many people in my community and in other constituencies have not had that dignity, but they will certainly be given that dignity under the Bill.

The Bill will also help to rebuild communities. It will certainly help to put the hope back into those in parts of my constituency. It will tackle some of the scourges, such as crime, that go with poverty in many constituencies and give youngsters a fair start in life, which is vital and something in which I believe passionately. Hon. Members have referred to despair. My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) talked about the cycle of despair that involves a lack of opportunities not just in work, but in education. The Bill must be about giving those people a fair start in life.

The Bill will benefit single parents, and I am pleased that the National Council for One Parent Families has publicly welcomed it and recognised that it will make real progress in tackling poverty among one-parent families. The Government have rightly set a target of ending child poverty in 20 years, and the range of measures outlined already since 1997, which the Bill builds on, will help to tackle the scourge not just of child poverty, but poverty among the children of single parents.

Progress has been made already. Since 1997, more than 1 million children—520,000 of whom are in one-parent families—have been lifted out of poverty by the Government's measures. That has got to be good news. Another good news story since 1997 is that the proportion of one-parent families in work has increased from 44 to 51 per cent. That will make a real difference to a lot of families who are struggling. Clearly, one-parent families are at greatest risk of poverty in the United Kingdom, and the measures outlined today in the Bill will make a real difference to many of them.

I should like, however, to draw the Minister's attention to a couple of concerns that I have about the Bill, one of which is take-up, which has already been mentioned eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck). Take-up has been a problem, especially with the working families tax credit, and I hope that the Minister will give some thought in his reply to how to ensure the maximum take-up.

I cannot understand why we have not previously linked take-up with, for example, free school meals. Schools have a register of children who receive free school meals, and we could use it to try to target their parents. We should involve local communities when we roll out the child tax credit. Local citizens advice bureaux and community groups should be encouraged to get involved in promoting the new credit, and the citizens advice bureau in my constituency would welcome that. Like my hon. Friend, I know that there is sometimes frightening ignorance about such proposals in certain parts of my constituency, and we need to put extra effort into dealing with it.

My hon. Friend referred to the problem of charging for child care, but another problem is the number of available child care places and carers. Alongside the Bill, we need to do a lot to encourage people to enter child care as a career, so that we ensure that child carers are in place to assist parents.

Child care in rural areas is also a problem, because people have to travel long distances. We need to ensure that child care facilities are available in some of the smaller villages and rural communities for those working parents who wish to take up offers of work and the assistance that the new tax credit will provide.

David Taylor: Does my hon. Friend agree that in areas such as ours, which have lost many jobs in one industry over a short period, there is a risk that the working tax credit might perpetuate relatively low wages into the medium term? That might be economically and socially bad, so might not the preferred alternative be to attract more high-paid, high-skill and high-tech jobs into former mining areas such as North Durham and North-West Leicestershire?

Mr. Jones: I accept my hon. Friend's point, but the two approaches should go side by side. We need to get people out of a spiral. In some villages in my constituency, people's hope has gone and, even if high-tech jobs came to the area, they would not be ready for them. They do not have the skills and they have lost the culture of work. The important point about the Bill is that it will get people back into work.

My hon. Friend the Member for Workington eloquently pointed to the need to get people into education and to raise their expectations and aspirations. We must do that not just for the people who receive benefit, but for their children. That is how we can tackle the problems in such communities. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) about getting the jobs that he described back to our constituencies, but we need to raise expectations. The Bill will do that, because it is not just about the financial aspects of the problem but about providing people with dignity at work and in their communities.

Mention has already been made of the approach that Conservative Members have taken towards the Bill. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) said that it was all motherhood and apple pie but, when I challenged him to provide an alternative, nothing came forward. When the Conservative party was in power, my constituents were given not motherhood and apple pie but poverty and gruel. The same applies to many constituencies across this great nation of ours.

I note that one Conservative Back Bencher is present, but it is disturbing that Conservative Members have not taken part in a debate that is important to all our constituencies. I also note the absence of Liberal Democrat Back Benchers. Their Benches were full the other night when they made anodyne points against the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, but when it comes to tackling poverty in our communities, not a single Liberal Democrat Back Bencher has spoken. That fact should be noted. They are more interested in headlines in *The Guardian* than in dealing with the issues that interest our constituents.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) on being in his place now, but the Conservative Members who have spoken have reverted to the same old adages that they used in last week's debate on the Employment Bill. The Conservative party makes great play of its claim that it is the party of the family but, when measures are introduced to help the family, we hear the old chestnuts about how they will affect business. We heard that when they said that the Employment Bill's provisions to help people with families would affect business. There is a recurring theme and my hon. Friend the Paymaster General dealt with it eloquently.

The new tax credits will be popular in constituencies such as mine. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs said that it was designed to buy votes, but it will obtain the support of our constituents. It will not only benefit people directly, but rebuild communities in my constituency. That is the most important point, and that is why I shall support the Bill.

8.49 pm

Vera Baird (Redcar): I must confess that I was rather pleased with the result of my modest intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope). I asked whether he could list all the poverty alleviation measures that could be attributed to the Conservative party, and he was able to come up with none. The massed battalions of Tory poverty campaigners who are overcrowding the Opposition Benches were able to come up with one—the tax credit which, if I remember rightly, they subsequently froze.

I may be more charitable, or perhaps more unrealistic, than some of my hon. Friends, but I suspect that the marked absence of Conservative Members goes beyond simple indifference to well earned and much deserved guilt, backed up by well earned and much deserved shame, for the state of communities such as Redcar, which was raddled with inner-urban poverty for the past decade or more until this Government came to power and introduced measures such as tax credits. Step by step, refinement by refinement, detail by detail, particular by particular, the Government are starting to pinpoint those in greatest need and to work out the best way to alleviate their poverty. I nominate the term "Conservative measure for poverty alleviation" for the dictionary of oxymorons. Enough of them, however, and more about the excellent Bill.

I am going to concentrate on the child tax credit, which builds on the children's tax credit, of which we have some experience. The Government learn as they go, as I have said in relation to a wide range of measures, and the child tax credit is a refinement and improvement on that former tax credit. It has welcome features, the ramifications of which I should like to work through tonight.

A much mentioned facet, but none the less one of particular importance to feminist campaigners such as me and some of my closest friends, is that the child tax credit is paid to the main carer direct. It is not paid through the wage packet, so it is likely to be paid into the purse, not the wallet. Women's equality campaigning groups, such as the Fawcett Society, of which I was pleased to be vice-chair before I came into the House, have campaigned for that simple step for many, many years. It means that the money is always put with the child. Research that goes back as many years as the campaigns to introduce that measure shows that payments that are designed to lift children out of poverty are most effective if they are paid to the primary carer of the child. I congratulate the Government on taking that step.

Another excellent facet of the child tax credit is that it will be paid to families that are out of work and those in work, so there will be a reassuring, consistent source of income on which families can rely as they move out of unemployment and into work, which they are beginning to do in constituencies such as mine. A disruption to benefits seems to be part and parcel of attaining employment, and historically the uncertainty about what specific support will continue in their place has clearly been a disincentive to seeking employment. Jobseekers are not clear about what will replace their benefits and which benefits will entirely be lost. The adaptable concept of the child tax credit, meshed into the taxation system, should encourage people to make that move into work with confidence.

It is hard to overstate how vulnerable people are, especially lone parents who are out of work and people who have been thrown on the scrap heap and made redundant, which the heads of some families on the council estates in my constituency experienced again and again as the older industries restructured and newer ones came and went.

Tony Cunningham: May I stress once more the importance of breaking into the generational cycle of unemployment? There are young people in my constituency who have no experience of work and whose parents, uncles and neighbours have no experience of work. If we do not break into that cycle, we will never establish the role models and routines that work provides and that children need as they grow up.

Vera Baird: My hon. Friend is right. An important benefit of the continuity of the credit while people are in work and while they are unemployed is that it will safeguard against very poor people slipping, even for a week, into greater distress. Consistency and stability are extremely important characteristics of the tax credit.

[Vera Baird]

There is a further, admirable element of consistency and stability in that the child tax credit will be assessed for up to a whole tax year at a time, which means that changes in a claimant's circumstances that change the rate of credit will not end its payment. There will not be an interruption in their receipt of benefits for one, two or three weeks—gaps in the supply that can occur now while benefits of the kind that we are used to are reassessed.

Gone are the days, I suggest, in this sphere of poverty alleviation when a mother with two small kids queued with her book at the post office for a difficult and noisy half-hour, only to have the book removed by the counter staff because some minor alteration in her circumstances meant that her income support, with its child-related element, must be reassessed. That instils the fear—even if it is not the reality—that the process may take a couple of weeks to put right. Meanwhile, she must worry about the absence of the money, although in the end she will not lose it. Poor families cannot afford to be out of benefit for a day, so close to the boundaries of distress are they. This tax credit offers a better structure, and it offers to smooth out what my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) called the lumpy delivery of benefits.

I turn now to another feature of this excellent benefit. It is likely to encourage the second parent into work. When the rates, the threshold and the amount by which the benefit tapers away as other family income rises are set, Ministers intend that the second adult in the family, who is of course usually the woman, will also be encouraged into work. It is therefore essential, and I am confident that the Government will perceive it to be so, that the new rate is high and the taper gentle enough to ensure adequate support and a smooth transition to facilitate women returning to work as second earners in a family.

In today's labour market, where many jobs are not long term, it is important to encourage second earners to stay in employment so that households will not be solely reliant on benefits if the other job is lost. In addition, given that most lone mothers become single some time after the maternity period, it is important that women can retain the means of earning independently to reduce the likelihood of the household being workless in future.

Dr. Palmer: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important to have a flexible system with a smooth transition so that people, particularly women, coming back to the labour market can start with something substantially less than a full-time job, then move up to a full-time job without experiencing a catastrophic loss in benefits?

Vera Baird: That is an important aspect of the smoother delivery that the new structure implicit in the tax credit will guarantee. It will benefit a good many young women who, in the course of the general election campaign, told me that they found it difficult to get back to work when they realised that they would lose more than they would gain, although they devoutly wished to be properly employed and gainfully engaged in society again.

If that is to happen, the taper must start at a relatively high level with a low rate of withdrawal. Similar systems in Canada and Australia cut out payments at the higher end of the income scale, with the top 15 per cent. and the top 10 per cent. of earners respectively shifting from a poverty assessment to an affluence assessment. Structuring the system to include a large proportion of families will help to build a coalition between middle and lower-income families and overcome any residual stigma attached to receipt of payment. That is another paean to the detailed facets of the tax credit.

A further excellent facet of the credit is the disregard of capital except when it generates an income. It is right that the new credit will be calculated in a way that takes into account income from capital only when it is earned by capital in the hand of the claimant. The current rules count into an income assessment a notional return on all capital at what seems to be a fantastic and unrealistic rate. Once one breaks through the barrier of capital required for assessment, it is assessed at a return of £1 a week for every £250 of capital over the limit, which seems to be the equivalent of a return of £52 on £250 a year or an interest rate of about 20 per cent. If that is a realistic estimate of how capital is treated, I would very much like the assistance of the Minister in giving me the address of the bank that delivers such a return, but I believe that it is an inexplicable and invidious myth.

The disregard of capital rules and the scrapping of a frankly silly system will be of particular benefit to the parents of families in areas such as mine on Teesside, where older industry has restructured and is restructuring further, where there is much manufacturing—a very vulnerable sector at present—and where there have been repeat patterns of redundancy. A lump sum redundancy payment is hugely valuable and often all that a person in that situation can be sure of. However, people in that position have been encouraged by the current rules to spend their redundancy money as quickly as possible to safeguard their new dependency on benefits for however long it takes to find another job.

I conclude my catalogue of the Bill's excellent features with the maintenance disregard, a hugely positive characteristic carried over from the working families tax credit. Because maintenance payments are disregarded entirely, they can be received 100 per cent. by the claimant. That will make a massive difference to many people, especially lone parent families and women on their own. Furthermore, it will be an incentive for lone parents to claim maintenance, and an incentive for lone parents who are receiving maintenance to look for employment.

I have only two questions or caveats. Although the child tax credit has all the excellent characteristics that I have mentioned, perhaps the same cannot be said of the Government's plans to accompany it with the abolition of child dependency increases in non-means-tested benefits. The Government have promised to protect the entitlement of existing recipients, which is extremely welcome, but new claimants will soon lose out. A child-dependent addition is worth about £11.35 a week, paid to qualifying families who receive incapacity benefit, retirement pension, widowed mother's allowance, invalid care allowance and severe disablement allowance. The effect of those additions is to raise the incomes of many families enough to keep them out of means-tested benefits, with their well known poverty and unemployment traps.

Incapacity benefit, retirement pension and widowed mother's allowance are national insurance benefits, and the measure therefore represents a cut in the value of national insurance benefits. An anti-poverty strategy that promotes employment should require the enhancement of national insurance benefits, not a further cut.

Another caveat, to which I invite my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to direct his mind, possibly in his closing remarks, is the position of the second and other children. As I understand the position under the Bill, as with child benefit, the credit will be paid at a lower level after the first child for subsequent children. I assume that the rationale for a lower level of credit for the second child is that the facility is present to pass down items of child care and so on from the elder to the younger.

However, much highly praised research, some of which was presented to the Select Committee on Social Security and some of which I have read, makes it clear that on average that represents a saving of only about 17 per cent., which means that setting the level of credit for the second child at more than 17 per cent. lower than that for the older child will discriminate among members of a family, and will impact hardest on large families.

Is there to be any element in the provisions to reflect the greater needs of very large families, such as the one that came to my constituency surgery all together in a group on Saturday? The family consisted of a mother managing alone with six children aged from the middle teens down. There is no doubt that such families will feel the impact of a lower rate for subsequent children. I invite my right hon. Friend to consider that position.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) expressed his concerns about the Bill and about the principle of the top-up on low wages, the encouragement that that offers to thug employers to keep wages down, and the way in which it robs the poor, as he put it, of the freedom to work themselves up in the earnings scale so as to lift themselves from poverty by their own endeavour. I recall—not personally, as it happened at the time of the agricultural revolution—from being at school, which was almost as long ago but not quite, learning about a system similar to the one that causes him concern. Many other hon. Members may recall the Speenhamland system. I see that failed measures of poverty alleviation are well recognised on the Opposition Benches.

The Speenhamland system was devised in the agricultural revolution and had exactly the effect about which my right hon. Friend spoke. Indeed, it went further. The rural poor, who were on low wages, received from the local poor law relief board a subsidy that made up their pay, which meant that rural employers could not merely stop wages rising, but actively reduce pay, throwing people into deeper and deeper poverty of wage, while knowing that there would always be a top-up from the local parish board to save them from the workhouse.

I am delighted to tell my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead that we have the push of the national minimum wage—despite the best endeavours of Opposition Members—to counteract any such effect on employers from a tax credit top-up to low pay. I hope that the minimum wage will go up and up, and increase to a realistic and acceptable level, so that employers do not have the freedom to keep wage bills down, because we had the courage to take statutory control to ensure that they cannot have such freedom.

David Taylor: Does my hon. Friend agree that one way of achieving a national minimum wage that increases in the way that she described would be to set the level unambiguously at half male median earnings—the policy on which our party campaigned in the 1992 general election?

Vera Baird: There is much to reflect on in what my hon. Friend says and I am grateful for his suggestion. I shall have to leave what I would prefer to describe as the details of the matter to other people, but I hope that I have managed none the less to make the point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead worries too readily about the effects of the Speenhamland system in 2001.

Tony Cunningham: I have heard nothing from Opposition Members about what the Tory policy would be. Does my hon. Friend think that it is wise to remind them of the Speenhamland system?

Vera Baird: I see that I have rashly run into the danger of trying to draft the Tory party's next manifesto. I shall not take another step in that direction.

I should like to add that the danger that my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead saw in respect of the application of such a system to employees is not very real either. He was worried that employees could not take pride in themselves if they could not get themselves out of poverty wages by their own endeavours. That danger—if it has ever been more than theoretical—is completely outweighed by the absolute urgency of helping families out of the poverty that currently diminishes their lives. The figures given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor show that there are more than 12,000 such families in my constituency alone. That poverty lowers the horizons of parents and limits the outlook of children, so restricting them that they are in danger of growing up blind to the possibility of improving their position by their own endeavours. Such children are unlikely, therefore, to miss the freedom to do that.

I welcome the Bill for children and for the equalising effect that it has on the income of mothers and on the power structure of families by putting money directly into the primary carer's pocket. It is a thoughtful, clever, well structured and progressive measure, and it is very welcome indeed.

9.14 pm

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): In the short time that remains, I wish to add my endorsement of the Bill to the enthusiastic support of other Labour Members. If we listen carefully, we may hear something from Conservative Members that rises above their quiet acquiescence hitherto.

I welcome the principle of the Bill. It seeks to underpin the Government's drive to encourage people off welfare and into work, and to make work pay. I welcome the measure's practical implications because it will directly help hundreds of thousands of people throughout Britain, including more than 400 recipients of WFTC in my constituency.

Mostly, I welcome the political vision behind the Bill. It represents another landmark in our determination to reform welfare and eliminate child poverty. The measure will take its place alongside the minimum wage, the 10p starting rate of tax and many other measures that are either already in place or will be introduced by the Labour

[Roger Casale]

Government to lift families out of poverty and break the cycle of dependency and impoverishment of aspiration, which was passed down from generation to generation and characterised the long years when the Tories were in government.

I do not have time to go into detail. The measure will give our programme to support working families a much stronger foundation. It will consolidate the support that different arms of government already provide, making the system more accessible and easily understandable. It will make important benefits available to more families, help them out of poverty and increase their incomes.

I especially welcome the fact that the new child tax credit will be paid directly to the carer, not the person in work. I welcome the annual assessment of eligibility instead of an assessment of weekly income, based on the previous year's income.

The Bill is more than the sum of its practical reforms, important though they are. Behind it lies the idea of negative income tax, which the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) mentioned. He said that the Conservative party had considered and rejected that idea 30 years ago. Although his party rejected it as a mechanism for lifting families out of poverty then, I ask him to consider whether it is right to dismiss that approach today when economic forces are those of the global economy, and families, individuals and communities are subject to its vagaries. However, there are also new opportunities to develop skills and reconnect with the labour market if a hand up rather than a handout can be given.

I must limit my endorsement of the Bill to those remarks, but I should like to refer to two points that other hon. Members have mentioned. Although the measure's benefits are clear and we support them, it is important that we do not shut our eyes to the potential costs. I have received representations from small businesses in my constituency. They understand that the measure is important for getting people back to work and appreciate that more than 1 million have returned to work through our measures and because of economic stability. Nevertheless, they find it difficult to administer some aspects of the programme. I ask the Paymaster General to pay special attention to the needs of small businesses when we implement the measure; I know that she will. Perhaps we can revert to that in Committee.

The Bill will provide a bridgehead from welfare to work and, from there, to a better kind of job and a better kind of future for the people concerned. Rather than simply compensating people for being poor, we are working to liberate their energy and potential. This is not just a question of being compassionate towards the poor; everyone has the right to make a better life for themselves and their families. The Bill will help them to do that.

The Bill represents one of the most important changes in support for families since the Beveridge report in the post-war years. It will help the Government to do what they were elected to do: to tackle child poverty; to boost family incomes; and to help more people back into work. It is central to a modern approach to building prosperity for all by offering opportunity to all. It is a measure that combines a passion for social justice with sound economic common sense, and I commend the Bill to the House.

9.20 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): The speeches from Back-Bench Members today began with what the House will recognise as an important contribution from the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). He made a very thoughtful speech, on which we would all do well to reflect. I say that even though it contained some uncomfortable comments about my own party, but my assessment of his speech is based on the appetite in politics now for a more open style of criticism. We see a certain amount of public disenchantment with the constant diet of spin—a disenchantment that seems to extend to some on the Labour Benches, when they put their heads above the parapet. It is incumbent on us all to listen to important criticisms such as those made by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead.

In the same spirit in which I took the right hon. Gentleman's comments about my party, I hope that Labour Members will reflect on the important criticisms that he made of the Bill—what he described as the "bear traps" at its heart—which left him fearful of where the measure would lead. Labour Members would also do well to reflect on the right hon. Gentleman's comments about the effect of the measure on incentives and relativities among those in work, and about the important issue of fraud, which he has raised in the past, and to which I shall return later.

We have heard excellent speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) and for Fareham (Mr. Hoban). My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds drew attention to the fact that up to 1 million people could lose out under the measure. He also mentioned the fact that the Government's treatment of tax credits violated international accounting conventions and would not be accepted by reputable international bodies. He made further important points about the additional burdens that tax credits have created for business. I shall return to that subject in more detail later.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham drew attention to the complexity of the Bill, which is self-evident. That point was echoed by at least one Labour Member—the hon. Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Challen). My hon. Friend was also right to say that we needed time to scrutinise the Bill properly, and to consider its details, especially as we have only its bare framework before us at the moment. He also made important points about parental choice in relation to how children are looked after.

We heard from the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), and there was a running debate throughout the day about the Liberal Democrats' proposals for an increase in personal allowances and a lowering of the threshold for higher-rate tax payers. The hon. Gentleman was at pains to point out that the higher-rate tax payers who would have their thresholds lowered—as well as the lower paid people—would be compensated by the higher personal allowance. We shall explore those proposals in greater detail in Committee. The only point that I wondered about was that, if the hon. Gentleman's system were tax neutral, there would be a gain for some people at the lower end of the tax scale, with nobody paying for that gain.

Mr. Webb: *rose—*

Mr. Clappison: I think that we shall debate this issue at a later stage, but I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Webb: Lest the hon. Gentleman go to bed confused, the proposal is to replace the employment credit with a tax allowance rise. The money that would be spent on the employment credit would be spent instead on a tax allowance rise.

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman does not yet know the figure for that, and I am suspicious of any Liberal Democrat proposal described as tax neutral under which everyone gains and no one loses, but we shall debate that later. He also made important points of detail, particularly on the way in which the Bill deals with people's circumstances, which change throughout the year. Again, I shall deal with that in a moment.

From the Government Benches, we heard from the hon. Members for Clwyd, West (Gareth Thomas), for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck), for Morley and Rothwell, for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford), for Corby (Phil Hope), for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) and for Redcar (Vera Baird). I do not want to upset the hon. Lady, but she asked about Conservative policies and I am afraid that one of her first and most important points referred to the Conservative policy at the general election that in-work payments should be made to carers. She spoke forcefully about that policy, which was in the 2001 Conservative manifesto.

Vera Baird *rose—*

Mr. Clappison: I shall give way in a moment, although I do not want to upset the hon. Lady even more by saying that she may want to reflect on the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) made similar points to hers about the treatment of capital disregard. I say that gently, given the spirit of her speech, and I shall certainly give way.

Vera Baird: The hon. Gentleman may make the interesting point that, somewhere in the fragmented mists of time, are Tory proposals that almost remembered such people, but they did not get very far, did they? Would they have got far under the current leadership and the current array on the Tory Front Bench? Would they have got anywhere at all? The answer is no.

Mr. Clappison: As to how far any proposal gets, I gently remind the hon. Lady of family credit, which she wrongly described as tax credit. In 1988, Norman Fowler, now Lord Fowler, as Conservative Secretary of State, introduced family credit, which lasted a number of years and helped many low-paid families. It was widely accepted as a well targeted system that worked in practice. It was not greatly complex, it was paid to carers and it helped many poorer people.

Dr. Palmer *rose—*

Mr. Clappison: I shall give way in a moment, as the hon. Gentleman may want to hear this point. In contradistinction to that honourable record of a successful and practical Conservative measure, since the Government came to power ordinary working families have been subjected to a series of changes—the tax credit system—of extraordinary rapidity and complexity. They could be forgiven for feeling that they are on the receiving end of a series of social experiments conducted by social scientists recruited from the ivory towers to the army of special advisers.

Dr. Palmer *rose—*

Mr. Clappison: On the point about ivory towers, I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Palmer: I am fascinated by the hon. Gentleman's thesis that people resent getting additional benefits. As we are going down memory lane, I would like clarification. There was a time when the Conservative party opposed the working families tax credit. Is it committing itself to abolishing the new tax credit as well?

Mr. Clappison: If the hon. Gentleman can contain himself, I shall set out what we consider to be the important aspects of the proposal. We are concerned that dealing with the working families tax credit and all the other credits is like trying to hit a moving target. A feature of tax credits that is striking above all others is the amount of change that has taken place—constant change, and never mind if it is change for change's sake.

On tax credits, *The Guardian*, which the hon. Gentleman may be familiar with, said last week:

> "The Chancellor loves them, and invents new ones every year".

Let us consider the history of the working families tax credit, which the hon. Gentleman asked about. The Chancellor announced his intention to introduce it in his March 1998 Budget. It was to take effect in October 1999, and payment of tax credits by employers through the wage packet was to take effect from the beginning of the next financial year, on 6 April 2000, but before the first tax credit was paid by employers, the Chancellor announced in his March 2000 Budget that it was to be abolished and replaced by the employment credit for working households. The working families tax credit had a longer history than the employment tax credit, because that never even made it to the statute book let alone the pay packet. In his pre-Budget statement, the Chancellor announced that the employment tax credit was to become the working tax credit.

The Chancellor was a model of consistency on the working families tax credit compared with his handling of the child tax credit. In the 1998 Budget, he announced the introduction of the children's tax credit as an allowance for which relief was to be given at a rate of 10 per cent. That was to begin in April 2001. We note in passing that the married couples' allowance ended in April 2000, so that couples with children, including couples on moderate earnings, lost all such tax relief for a year, which was a cruel trick on ordinary working families.

The children's tax credit barely made it to April 2001, because in his March 2000 Budget statement, the Chancellor announced that the children's tax credit was to be replaced by the integrated child credit. The children's tax credit had the distinction of being abolished before it was even introduced. Instead of a tax allowance

[Mr. Clappison]

in the form of the children's tax credit, the integrated child credit was to be a tax credit integrated with the child premium in income support and the working families tax credit.

I hate to report to the House that, since then, the integrated child credit has disintegrated, and we are now left with just the child credit. I shall tell hon. Members a little tale from history. Under this Government, family credit, which had existed since 1988, has so far been replaced by the working families tax credit, the employment tax credit, the working tax credit, the children's tax credit, the integrated children's tax credit and the child tax credit. To look at it another way, we have had a new family tax credit roughly every nine months.

Kali Mountford: The hon. Gentleman is having some fun with the changes in tax credits. Does he accept that, in the Conservative Government's efforts to introduce simplicity in the system, they cut benefits one after the other or withdrew them altogether? Is that the simplicity that we should expect from his party's proposals?

Mr. Clappison: We are dealing with the Bill, and I do not agree with the hon. Lady. Even she would have to admit that, in view of the Chancellor's past form, it would be a brave man or woman who backed the tax credits in the Bill to last very long. The Chancellor has, beyond peradventure, created what *The Guardian* called "a hideously complex system." What is more, he has brought more and more individuals and families into means-testing, which he had turned his face against at the 1994 Labour party conference. Individuals and families who pay more and more tax to the Government are having to undergo means-testing to have their own money recycled back to them.

Phil Hope: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clappison: No, I have given way a lot.

It is fair to say that the simplicity of this legislation is not entirely self-evident, and all hon. Members should accept that. The Bill will require careful scrutiny, not least because it is a framework Bill that leaves the details to be filled in later, as my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs rightly made clear. Ministers must answer questions, and we are still waiting for an answer from the Paymaster General to the question of how many people are eligible for the working families tax credit. She dealt with that question very elegantly, but she did not answer it. I look forward to the Financial Secretary dealing with it, perhaps not as elegantly as the hon. Lady, but I shall be interested to see whether he gives us an answer to that simple question on the working families tax credit, which so many Labour Members have praised. Will he tell us how many people are eligible for it?

Phil Hope: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clappison: No, I shall not give way, because time is short. The hon. Gentleman spoke for quite a long time. His speech was interesting, but I want to finish my speech, if he does not mind. I was being generous when I said that his speech was interesting.

We must consider carefully the issue of fraud. Many people are worried about the potential for fraud, none more so than the right hon. Member for Birkenhead. The right hon. Gentleman spelt out the risk of fraud, including the risks of fraud involving employers and employees. It was worrying for hon. Members on both sides of the House to hear about his request, when he held office, for fraud to be taken into account in the design of the working families tax credit, and that the papers from his time in office had subsequently gone missing. I know that the Financial Secretary will want to deal with the right hon. Gentleman's important comments. He must answer some questions about them.

While we are on the subject of answering questions, let me say that I would be grateful for an answer to a written parliamentary question, for which I have been waiting since 15 October. The Paymaster General was at pains to tell us about the penalties in the Bill, and the framework it established for dealing with fraud. Will the Financial Secretary tell us, then, how many prosecutions for fraud there have been under working families tax credit, and how many have led to successful convictions? I refer to all who have received the award.

Is this a credit that does not attract fraud, and does not involve any fraudulent behaviour? Or is the right hon. Member for Birkenhead justified in being worried and suspicious about the potential for fraud owing to the way in which it was designed?

Fraud, however, is not the only potential source of waste. The sheer complexity of the system increases the risk of error. As has been pointed out by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and also by the hon. Member for Northavon, many people's family circumstances will change during a year. Because of the way in which the Bill will deal with them, there is a serious risk of mistakes.

We shall want to scrutinise carefully the burdens that the Bill will impose on business. The burdens imposed by the tax credits system are already well known, and must be added to all the other burdens created by the Government. The Government claim that tax credits increase people's propensity to enter the work force to take on low-paid jobs; yet the administrative and regulatory burdens the Government have brought about diminish the propensity of, in particular, small and medium businesses to create jobs for such people to occupy.

The greater the burdens thrust upon business, the less competitive United Kingdom businesses become. Jobs, especially manufacturing jobs, go overseas. Worryingly, last month both main measures of unemployment indicated an increase in unemployment in the UK. That must be of concern to Labour Members, in view of all they have said about unemployment today.

It was the Prime Minister, no less, who told the Labour party conference in 1996

> "by the end of a five year term of a Labour government I vow that we will have reduced the proportion of national income we spend on the welfare bills of social failure . . . This is my covenant with the British people. Judge me upon it. The buck stops with me."

It is a fact that the welfare bill in 1997 was £92 billion. Under these proposals, it is set to rise to £125 billion by 2003. It will then have risen by more than a third since the Government took office. What is more, the Government have given up trying to get it down.

We have the Tax Credits Bill before us; in the Queen's Speech in June, however, we were also promised a welfare reform Bill, which has clearly been abandoned. We do not know exactly why—was it shot down during the battle between the Chancellor and the Prime Minister? But we do know that, in the meantime, the cost and complexity of the welfare system has spiralled out of control.

We will hold the Government to account for the way in which they have dealt with welfare, the way in which they are spending taxpayers' money, and their failure to make good the Prime Minister's promises—not for the first time—to bring welfare under control. We will hold them to account by giving the Bill the careful scrutiny that it clearly needs, which hard-working taxpayers would expect us to give it. We intend to give it extremely careful scrutiny; hard-working taxpayers who pay the Government more and more in tax, and get bewildering and complex schemes in return, deserve no less.

9.39 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): Our promise was to move people from welfare to work and it is a promise on which we have more than delivered. In this measure, we are making sure that work pays.

It has been a good debate, which I suspect is a good indication of the quality of debates that we will engage in when the Bill is sent upstairs to Committee; by all accounts it will be, as we have not heard of any intention on the part of Opposition Members to vote against it. In a characteristically generous moment, my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) referred to the Opposition's quiet acquiesence. That is the sort of acquiesence we like from the Opposition. It is more than welcome.

The Bill is a key element in the next stage of the Government's strategy for tackling child poverty and making work pay. The tax credits brought in by the Bill build on the important reforms that the Government have already introduced. During the previous Parliament, we increased child benefit substantially. At the same time, we increased children's allowances in income-related benefits to ensure that extra support was available to the poorest families. We introduced targeted tax cuts for families through the working families tax credit, the disabled person's tax credit and the children's tax credit.

Our policy has been to ease the transition from welfare to work. That is why we halved marginal tax rates for low-income workers through the introduction of a 10p rate of tax, ensuring that they keep more of what they earn. We introduced a basic level of fairness for employees through the national minimum wage. Those reforms are in place now and they are working now. The Government's personal tax and benefit reforms since 1997 have made a real difference.

It is worth while looking at the record of the Conservatives when they were in power. In 1979, 14 per cent. of children lived in households with below 60 per cent. of contemporary median income. By 1996–97, the figure had increased to 34 per cent. Under the stewardship of Conservative Members, the number of children living in poverty more than doubled. That was our inheritance. *[Interruption.]* It is no use Conservative Members saying no, no, no. That is the fact. That is the record. It has been our task through this Bill, among other measures, to bring that number down. It is not an occasion for self-congratulation or for complacency, but we are getting the number down. Opposition Members should delight in the fact that that problem is now being dealt with. We should be working together to find ways of ensuring that yet more children are taken out of poverty.

As a result of the improvements that this Government have made, families with children are on average £1,000 a year better off. Families with children in the poorest fifth of the population are £1,700 a year better off compared with 1997, but we are determined to do more. The Bill and the new tax credits will allow us to take forward the programme of reform.

We have heard some good speeches. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and my hon. Friends the Members for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck), for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Challen), for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford), for Corby (Phil Hope), for North Durham (Mr. Jones), for Clwyd, West (Gareth Thomas), for Redcar (Vera Baird) and for Wimbledon all made the point that an important start has been made, but that we need to ensure that the Bill is targeted correctly, and that the take-up is as good as we would all wish it to be, recognising that there are specific regional variations that should give us cause for concern, including in London. Indeed, we are determined to ensure that we improve take-up in our capital city.

Phil Hope: When my right hon. Friend read out the roll of honour of those Back Benchers who had participated in the debate, I could not help wishing to point out that only two were Conservative Back Benchers.

Mr. Boateng: I did not mention any Conservatives, but as I have been encouraged to do so I shall refer to their contributions. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) made a considered speech. I did not agree with all of it, but I agreed with some points, not least those about fraud which were taken up by the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison). No one should be under any illusions about our determination as a Government to tackle fraud. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead rightly drew attention to the need to ensure that we do not lose sight of the importance of tackling fraud. We do not intend to do so. People should be encouraged to claim everything to which they are entitled—that is part of the take-up issue to which several of my hon. Friends have referred—but we will introduce effective measures for deterring and investigating fraud and non-compliance.

The Bill lays down a clear framework for tackling fraud and two clauses in particular are important in that regard. Clause 33 introduces a new criminal offence of tax credit fraud and clause 34 gives the Inland Revenue new and more effective powers to investigate tax credit frauds. No one should be under any illusions: we intend that those powers should be used and we intend to ensure that the Bill addresses the need for penalties when a person has fraudulently or negligently provided incorrect information in connection with a claim or has refused to co-operate with an inquiry. Those powers are in place and will be used.

The child tax credit will deliver our commitment to introduce a single, seamless system of income-related support for families with children. It will replace the array

[Mr. Boateng]

of different support mechanisms with a single, payable tax credit for families, bridging the gap between welfare and work. It will enable families to take advantage of the credit, irrespective of the employment status of the parents. It will also remove the stigma all too often attached in the past to such measures. Reference has been made to the position of student nurses who will get mainstream support for their children, over and above child benefit, for the first time. Families will be able to get support for their children from a single Department, through a single coherent system that will respond to their changing circumstances.

We will go further to rationalise the way in which families get financial support for their children. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced in June, responsibility for child benefit will transfer to the Inland Revenue so that families will have to deal with only one department to get the support they need. That transfer is also accomplished by the measures in the Bill.

A crucial point was made by my hon. Friends the Members for Mitcham and Morden and for Colne Valley about the importance of child care. We need to get it right so that those who need child care to get back into the world of work, and to stay there, receive it in the manner that is most effective and most directly meets their needs. That is what we are doing, and it is part of a wider package of support for families. Part of the answer to the points that were made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead lies in the fact that the Bill needs to be seen in the context of the wider package of support for families, especially working families, that we are introducing.

The Government have continued to make significant new investment to support vulnerable children, young people and their families. Sure start is part of that. The 2000 spending review more than doubled planned expenditure, with sure start's budget increasing from £184 million in 2001–02 to £499 million in 2003–04. Over 430 sure start programmes have already been announced, and more than 200 are operational. By March 2004, 500 programmes will be reaching 400,000 children at any one time. Around one third of young children in poverty will benefit.

We are working within the context of the children's fund. Through our wider social reforms, we are producing a fairer society for families by improving service provision for vulnerable children. That is the context in which the Bill has been proposed. The Government are committed to improving work incentives and making work pay. The unemployment trap—where the gains from moving into work are too low, or the associated barriers too great, to encourage people to take the step from welfare into work—has in the past led to an unacceptable waste of human resources. The working tax credit will help to tackle that.

The working families tax credit and the disabled person's tax credit, introduced in 1999, were an important start. They helped to make sure that work paid for families with children and for people with disabilities. Now, with the working tax credit, we are taking the next step forward, extending the principle of in-work support through the wage packet to people without either children or a disability. The working tax credit not only extends the principle of in-work support, but improves the way in which support is delivered.

The Government have listened to disability groups. The working tax credit will provide a single work-focused credit, so that the extra barriers to work that disabled people can face are addressed within this single system of mainstream support. We have also listened to parents. We will make sure that help with child care costs, provided through the working tax credit, is paid directly to the main carer, alongside the child tax credit. Couples can decide themselves how to share responsibility for looking after their children, and we will allow couples with children to add their hours together to qualify for the 30-hour element within this credit.

We are responding to the point that was made forcefully by my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar by ensuring that there is always a recognition that money in the purse does make a difference. We need to have the transfer of money from the wallet to the purse in order best to meet the particular needs that children have. We know that child poverty is best addressed by the work of women in the home and in the workplace. If we do not get the framework right, all that we seek to do in this area is likely to come to nothing.

I said at the outset of my remarks—as did my hon. Friend the Paymaster General—that we have to ensure that we build on the progress that has been made. The working tax credit is just one of several measures introduced by this Government to tackle the unemployment and poverty traps and to deliver our long-term goal on employment so that, by the end of the decade, there will be a higher proportion of people in work than ever before.

The Bill has to be seen in the context of the national minimum wage—a national minimum wage that was opposed by the Conservative party. We still have not heard any recognition in the remarks of the Opposition spokesmen who bothered to address the House how they view the national minimum wage. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about the Bill?"] Opposition Members want to hear about the Bill. While we were discussing it, there were two of them in the Chamber. Two of them were sitting on the Front Bench, while the Back Benches were bare—denuded. Not one Conservative Back Bencher was prepared to engage in the debate or to suggest that they have learned the lessons that we have been teaching them these four and a half years about how to move people from poverty into work and how to begin to give people the sense that they can, through their own actions, reach a point where they benefit from what work has to offer.

These reforms are supported by the new deal, which provides tailored packages of help and support to enable people to make that transition back into work. It enables them, through contact with personal advisers, access to job search support and help in addressing basic skills gaps, to get into the world of work. In that way, they and their children will benefit from their activity.

During the debate, we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell about the importance of ensuring that small businesses feel, as those responsible for the payroll, that their needs and concerns have been taken into account. That is why my hon. Friend the Paymaster General has introduced a measure that is structured in such a way as to reduce compliance costs. That is why the measure is friendly to small businesses.

It would have been helpful if Conservative Members had given just a hint that they understood that the Government have listened to small businesses with regard to the structure of this measure. However, there did not come from them one spark of recognition that that was the case. That is recognised by employers' groups. The Confederation of British Industry says that it supports and welcomes

> "the attempts made by the government to simplify the rules for tax credits."

The Institute of Payroll and Pensions Management stated that it welcomed the beneficial changes from an employers' perspective. In its detailed response, it recognised

> "all the positive changes to the administration of tax credits that will benefit employers".

That is what business says. However, we must have balance, and the Institute of Directors remains, as one would expect, firmly opposed to the measure although, to be fair, it says that it warmly welcomes the ending of the requirement for certificates of payment and strongly supports automatic increases in funding when new employees become entitled to tax credits. Even in the heart of the Institute of Directors there is a beginning of an understanding that the measure has some positive benefits. If only that same warm glow of recognition had been present in the hearts and minds of Conservative Members, but look at them—not a sign. The milk of human kindness does not, I fear, flow in very many of those veins.

During the last Parliament, we embarked on a wide-ranging programme of reform of the tax and benefits system. The Bill sees us continue that to the point of success, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

TAX CREDITS BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Tax Credits Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Programming of proceedings

(2) All proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) shall be programmed.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

(3) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 24th January 2002.

(4) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

(5) Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Six o'clock on that day.

(6) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.

(7) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

The House divided: Ayes 314, Noes 155.

Division No. 104] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai
Healey, John

Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan

Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George

Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*

Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Mr. John Heppell.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick

Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam

Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

Question accordingly agreed to.

TAX CREDITS BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52 (1) (a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Tax Credits Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the deduction of payments for or in respect of tax credits from the gross revenues of the department of the Commissioners of Inland Revenue,

(2) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure of a Minister of the Crown or that department under or by virtue of the Act, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in sums payable out of money provided by Parliament under any other Act, and

(3) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Angela Smith.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

ROAD TRAFFIC

That the draft Driving Licences (Disqualification until Test Passed) (Prescribed Offence) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 15th November, be approved.—*[Angela Smith.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CIVIL AVIATION

That the draft Transport Act 2000 (Consequential Amendments) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 15th November, be approved.—*[Angela Smith.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

ELECTRICITY

That the draft Electricity and Gas (Energy Efficiency Obligations) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 14th November, be approved.—*[Angela Smith.]*

Question agreed to.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Mr. Andrew Hunter be discharged from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and Mr. Keith Simpson be added to the Committee.—*[Keith Hill, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

PETITION

Police Officers

10.16 pm

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): I am presenting a petition from the residents of the Billericay and district constituency regarding their concern about the lack of police officers patrolling our streets and responding to reported crime in the constituency. The petition urges the Home Secretary to commit more resources to Essex police so that we can benefit from more police officers. More than 5,400 signatures were collected in two weeks.

The petition declares:

That there is a shortage of beat and response police officers in the Billericay and District constituency, and that a number of recent reported incidents demonstrate that the police service in the area is overstretched.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for the Home Department to increase the resources available to Essex Police.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Yoko Sibthorp

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Angela Smith.]*

10.17 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): According to the House of Commons Library, there have, over the last four and a half years, been four Adjournment debates on specific aspects of immigration cases and a further 12 Adjournment debates on immigration policy more generally. I refer to those statistics for the benefit of the House and to underline the fact that right hon. and hon. Members do not lightly raise particular immigration cases in the House. I do so, I think, for good reason tonight.

Yoko Sibthorp, on whose behalf I speak, was born on 31 July 1969. Andrew Sibthorp, to whom, until her divorce, she remains married, was born on 21 May 1973. Mr. Andrew Sibthorp is the son of my constituents, David and Angela Sibthorp of Blakes cottage, Horn street, Winslow, in the Buckingham constituency. Yoko first met Andrew in May 1992, so they have now known each other for approximately nine and a half years. They went out together for some time and eventually, on 27 February 1995, their marriage was registered in Japan. There they lived as man and wife for over five years. They then decided, early in 2000, to come to the United Kingdom, with the specific purpose of settling here and starting a family. They came to Britain on 17 April 2000, Andrew on the basis that he was a British citizen and Yoko on the strength of a 12-month permit to stay in this country. At that point, she was already pregnant.

After a couple of false starts, in July 2000 Andrew managed to secure a job at the Japan centre, in London's Piccadilly. In September, they got their own property in South Norwood, and on 29 October 2000 came the happy news for both of them of the birth of their first child, Nesta. Yoko testifies, and I have no reason to doubt her veracity, that Andrew had always given the impression in all the time they knew one each other that he would be a willing father, that on no account would he be separated from his son, and that he looked forward to the joys and responsibilities of fatherhood.

For the first few days, Yoko testifies, as do her parents-in-law, Andrew enthusiastically changed nappies and partook of other domestic responsibilities. Sadly, however, all went badly wrong and turned sour, to the great detriment of the family, and to Yoko and her son Nesta in particular. Twenty days after the birth of the child, on 18 November 2000, Andrew, after a row with his wife, suddenly left the family home—for ever, as it later transpired. He said that he wanted to lead a Rastafarian existence and conceded that he had returned to the use of drugs, which had bedevilled him in his youth, but which he now felt were useful to him and made him feel better. He left the home; occasionally he came back unannounced for short periods, but he never returned permanently.

The day after Andrew left Yoko, in understandable shock and trauma at the most ghastly experience that could be visited on anyone, she asked her parents-in-law, David and Angela Sibthorp, whether, for a period, she could come and live with them in Horn street in Winslow, to which they readily agreed. On 17 April 2001 Yoko, conscious that her marriage had not survived for the 12 months in this country required under immigration law, applied for indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom. She did so, aware of the strength of article 8 of the European convention on human rights, which has been transposed into British law in the form of the Human Rights Act 1998. As you will undoubtedly be aware, Mr. Speaker, article 8 underlines the important right of every individual to have his or her private and family life respected. At the end of April, Yoko managed to secure a job at Fujitsu, in Hayes. Only four months ago, in August, her estranged husband sadly lost his job in Piccadilly. In September, in what proved to be his final communication to his father, he said that he wished to have no further contact whatsoever with his parents, whom he had known for 27 years, or with his wife and his child, who was born on 29 October 2000. Sadly, the ghastly and unimaginably appalling sequence of events that has afflicted Yoko Sibthorp culminated on 31 October 2001—in the Home Office's refusal of her application for indefinite leave to remain in the UK.

Following that refusal, Lord Rooker of Perry Barr, for whom I have a high regard, wrote to me on 13 November to say:

> "The application was refused on 31st October as we were not satisfied that the variation of leave to remain was being sought for a purpose covered by the immigration rules."

He went on:

> "The case was also considered exceptionally outside the rules but we were not prepared to exercise our discretion in her favour."

That seemed a dismal and lamentable state of affairs, and has certainly caused great heartache, as I am sure the Minister will understand, to Yoko and her devoted parents-in-law.

It is relevant at this point to refer to the views of Yoko and of her parents-in-law as regards the changed character and behaviour of Andrew Sibthorp. All three of the individuals concerned—Yoko and her parents-in-law, David and Angela—have good reason to feel affection and love for Andrew, for they are all inextricably bound up with his life.

Yoko concluded that there had been a dramatic and unaccountable change in her husband's behaviour. Previously devoted, unselfish, loving and willing to partake of domestic and family responsibilities, he had, she concluded, started to behave oddly. She has recounted a particular case in which Andrew Sibthorp, for reasons unknown to her, to me and to the House, broke the back window of a car by bashing his head repeatedly against it. David Sibthorp, devoted father of Andrew for 27 years, testifies with sadness that his son has undergone an extraordinary personality change. He tells me that the man has become self-centred, unpredictable and paranoid.

I emphasise that that is the account that has been given to me. I have every faith in the integrity of the individuals concerned. I have not spoken to Andrew Sibthorp; I am not interested in besmirching his name. I am seeking to give an account of events as they have been related to me, and as they pertain to the attempt of Yoko Sibthorp to secure indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom.

Yoko decided that she would appeal against the rejection of her application. She is doing so, as the hon. Lady is aware, under section 61 of the Immigration and

Asylum Act 1999. Specifically, she is doing so with an emphasis and reliance on article 8 of the human rights convention, which states:

> "Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence."

The article continues:

> "There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.".

In that context, because I feel passionately about the case, I want to make a simple but—as it seems to me, and I hope it might strike the Minister as—a compelling point. The presence in this country of Yoko and her son Nesta does not threaten national security. Their presence does not threaten public safety. Their presence does not threaten the economic well-being of the country. Their presence does not threaten the prevention of disorder and crime. Their presence does not threaten the protection of health or morals. Their presence assuredly does not threaten the rights or freedoms of others.

I have attended closely, as the hon. Lady no doubt has done, to the wording of the article upon which Yoko is reliant in her appeal against the initial judgment of the Home Office. That seems to me to be one ground on which she can credibly base a humanitarian plea to be granted indefinite leave to remain in this country, but there are others, to which I shall briefly refer.

First, it ought to be understood and it will be readily apparent from the facts, that the marriage was not one of convenience. It was not undertaken for an ulterior purpose which, once achieved, caused the marriage to be dissolved or to wither on the vine. It was a loving relationship that was conducted over a period of several years. Yoko and her husband were married happily for five and a half years. It is a pure technicality that the marriage did not subsist in this country for the requisite period of 12 months to qualify Yoko for success in her application for indefinite leave to remain in the UK.

I consider the case compelling, but I am determined to persuade others, including your good self, Mr. Speaker, at this late hour, that there is an additional argument in Yoko's support—that is, that she enjoys the love, devotion and support, both emotional and financial, of her parents-in-law. They have been absolute bricks in a ghastly situation. They love their son, of course, but they are horrified by what has happened, by the extraordinary metamorphosis in his character and behaviour that appears to have taken place, and by the residual but massive damage that has been done to her life, which could impact upon that of her son and their beloved grandson.

In communications to me in October and November this year, David Sibthorp stated:

> "Nesta continues to grow into a super little boy and gives much pleasure to my wife and me as grandparents. All I can say is that he is the light in this sorry mess and compensates a lot for the hurt and anger our son has inflicted on everybody."

Significantly, and worryingly from the point of view of the integrity and repute of the democratic process, he adds:

> "As British citizens, we believed that this country was just and fair; that it could not and would not treat Yoko like this. It makes us both ashamed to be British."

I know these two parents-in-law. They are decent, reasonable and level headed. They are model citizens, well respected in their community. They are not hotheads and are not excitable or extremist in any way, but that is how they feel. Even if the Minister cannot give me the news that I seek, I ask her to empathise with their plight. I think that she will do so as a humanitarian.

There is a final argument in Yoko's support: she is not dependent on public funds. She has a good job, works hard and is industrious. She wants to succeed and is conscious of her responsibilities and willing to fulfil them. She is also fortunate in having superb parents-in-law who are willing to do everything that they can—emotionally, practically and financially. I think that I am right in saying—the Minister will tell me if I am wrong—that the Home Office refers to or has consciously in mind no fewer than seven forms of public funding that someone could be receiving and that might count against an individual in pursuit of an application for indefinite leave to remain, on the grounds of their being a drain on the public purse: child benefit, disability allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit, housing or homelessness assistance, income support and jobseeker's allowance, social fund payments or the working families tax credit. To the best of my knowledge and belief, Yoko does not receive and currently has no intention of receiving any of those payments. She wants to be self-supporting and wants the wonderful relationship with her parents-in-law to continue. She wishes to bring up her lad, her little boy Nesta, as she and her husband had always intended: as a British boy who speaks English and is integrated into our society and who understands, accepts and enjoys the mores of this community. She does not want to have to take him back to Japan, which is not quite the melting pot that she judges this society to be and where she fears that he may be subject to teasing, ridicule or possibly even discrimination.

I think that Yoko has a compelling case. Of course, there must be rules and there has to be a public policy, and the general principle must be of compliance with those rules and that policy. However, there must also be exceptions to every rule. I say to the Minister—I repeat that I believe that she is a humanitarian—that Yoko is not a statistic but a human being. Nesta, too, is not a statistic, but a human being. David and Angela Sibthorp, Yoko's parents-in-law and my constituents, are not statistics, but human beings. They are genuinely shaken by their first experience of immigration law and what they believe to be a defiance and violation of the rights of their daughter-in-law and the grandson whom they love so dearly. They want him and Yoko to stay here. They want that relationship to develop and become more fruitful, and to see the boy grow up into an adult citizen of this country.

I appeal to the Minister further to reflect on this matter. She and I have jousted many a time and oft in this House and doubtless we shall do so in future.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): I hope so.

Mr. Bercow: Indeed, I certainly hope that we shall. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her sedentary confirmation of that point.

I emphasise that, because I feel so strongly about this case, I have not the slightest intention, now or at any time in the foreseeable future, of letting it drop. Indeed, to coin

[Mr. Bercow]

a phrase, I intend to go on and on and on about it, because I believe that denying the rights of Yoko and her child would be callous, cruel and contemptible.

I appeal to the Minister to offer me some hope in her reply.

10.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): I congratulate the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on securing the Adjournment debate and setting out the issues that pertain to the case. I understand, sympathise and empathise with the distressing circumstances that he has outlined and the emotional effects on all those involved. I agree that no immigration case is a mere statistic; all have emotional and difficult aspects, and all involve human responses and circumstances. All those with whom we deal are human beings. I am conscious of that, as are the caseworkers who apply the rules, although sometimes that may not seem to be the case.

The hon. Gentleman set out the way in which Mrs. Sibthorp came to the United Kingdom in April 2000 with her husband, Andrew. The couple have known each other since 1992; they met while Mrs. Sibthorp was studying. They spent some time together in Japan before marrying there in 1995. In April last year, they returned to this country to settle and await the birth of their child. In accordance with the immigration rules, Mrs. Sibthorp was granted 12 months leave to enter the United Kingdom because of that marriage.

Upon his return to the UK, Mr. Sibthorp got a job in Scotland but, unfortunately, the firm that employed him went into liquidation. Following that, he and his wife lived with his parents for a short while. As the hon. Gentleman said, Mr. Sibthorp successfully obtained a job in London and the couple bought a flat in south London. Shortly after moving into their flat, Mrs. Sibthorp gave birth to their son, Nesta. As the hon. Gentleman explained, two weeks after Nesta's birth the marriage broke down.

In April, shortly before her leave to remain expired, Mrs. Sibthorp applied for indefinite leave to remain here. Her representatives asked for consideration to be given to the application outside the immigration rules on compassionate grounds, so that Mrs. Sibthorp can bring up her son in this country and maintain the undoubtedly close family ties that she has formed with Mr. Sibthorp's family.

The immigration rules provide that a person may be granted indefinite leave to remain here if he or she has completed 12 months leave to remain on the basis of marriage, provided that the marriage subsists and the couple intend to live together permanently. Unfortunately, in the case that we are considering, the marriage has not subsisted and indefinite leave to remain on the basis of marriage cannot be granted to Mrs. Sibthorp.

Mrs. Sibthorp's application for indefinite leave to remain was therefore refused on 31 October. She has exercised her right of appeal against the decision. The next step in the process is the preparation of an explanatory statement, which sets out the Home Office's position and the reasons for the refusal. It will be sent to the appellate authorities, and the appeal will be heard before an independent adjudicator. Mrs. Sibthorp and her parents-in-law will have the opportunity to put forward their views fully at the hearing and the adjudicator will, of course, fully consider them before he makes his decision.

I cannot intervene in cases when appeals are outstanding unless there are "exceptional compelling" reasons for doing so. That is the phrase in the rules. It does not appear to me that there are exceptional compassionate circumstances. We must take account of the word "exceptional". I am not saying that there are no compassionate circumstances or that there is not a great deal of emotion and anxiety about the case. However, there have to be exceptional circumstances for a Minister to intervene.

Mr. Bercow: I understand the Minister's vantage point, but can she tell me of another case of which she is aware whereby a couple have been married for more than five years, a child is born and one partner leaves the other less than three weeks afterwards?

Angela Eagle: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. I assure him that there are similar cases. They are not all in my head, but such circumstances are unfortunately not as rare as he may think.

I would like to take this opportunity to draw to the hon. Gentleman's attention that it is open to Mrs. Sibthorp's employers to apply for a work permit on her behalf. If the application were approved by Work Permits (UK), Mrs. Sibthorp would normally be granted five years' leave to remain in the United Kingdom, at the end of which she would be eligible for permanent settlement.

Under normal conditions, a person wishing to remain in the UK in approved employment must hold the necessary work permit before entering the country, but, in certain circumstances, Work Permits (UK) will issue a permit to a person already here if the criteria are satisfied. The immigration and nationality directorate would then consider whether to permit the person to remain here.

The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I cannot speculate tonight on the outcome of any work permit application by Mrs. Sibthorp's employers in advance of it being made; nor, in the light of what I have said, can any guarantees be provided at the Dispatch Box tonight that Mrs. Sibthorp would be allowed to remain in the UK by the immigration and nationality directorate, even if a work permit were granted. However, that may be a course of action that she wishes to consider.

I am sorry not to be more helpful on this delicate issue at this stage but, with an appeal outstanding, it would be inappropriate for me to intervene. I am sorry that I have to give the hon. Gentleman this reply tonight. I am aware of the case, and I will keep an eye on it for him. I hope that he will understand that that is all that I can say at this juncture.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 11 December 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

The Secretary of State was asked—

Hospital Star Ratings

1. **Dr. Brian Iddon** (Bolton, South-East): If he will make a statement about the hospital star ratings. [19655]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): Performance ratings for acute hospital national health service trusts were published on 25 September. This is the first time that hospital trusts have been publicly classified according to their performance, with more freedom and rewards for the best performers and more help for the poorest.

Dr. Iddon: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, but will the same performance rating criteria, especially the nine key criteria, be used to assess hospitals in the current year as were used in the first exercise? Will they be modified in view of the lessons that we have learned from it?

Mr. Milburn: I expect some modification in the criteria. As my hon. Friend knows, it is the first year that they were used and that each hospital's performance was assessed. As we have said, the criteria and the star ratings are *far* from perfect. However, it is important for patients to know how well their hospitals are performing. After all, they belong to the patients and no one else.

As my hon. Friend knows, the House is considering a measure that proposes that the Commission for Health Improvement rather than the Department should publish the star ratings and, I hope, provide proper, objective and independent assessments of performance in all parts of the NHS.

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): How can the Secretary of State justify a crackpot scheme under which one hospital received a zero rating but came top in clinical services? Will he explain to my constituents how giving Southend hospital a one-star rating helps the recruitment and retention crisis? This rotten Government are to blame for the state of the health service.

Mr. Milburn: Sometimes I wish that the hon. Gentleman was more straightforward in expressing his views.

The sense that no one in authority—in government or elsewhere—cared about hospitals that received a lower star rating or was prepared to do anything about it would be the most demoralising thing for staff at Southend hospital or any other hospital that got such a rating. The point of assessing performance and taking action on it is to try to get incentives right so that the good performers have more freedom and the poor performers receive help, support and, when necessary, intervention to enable them to improve.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Does my right hon. Friend agree that if we want to improve clinical practice, it is as important to have information on the clinical outcomes of individual doctors as on individual hospitals? Will he consider the feasibility of publishing information so that the public know which doctors achieve the best outcomes?

Mr. Milburn: It is important for the public to have as much information as possible about the performance of organisations and clinical teams in the NHS. As my hon. Friend knows, the medical profession has moved a great deal on that in recent years. For example, I met the Society of Cardiothoracic Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland before the Bristol statement. It has done impeccable work in considering the performance of individual clinical teams. I hope that, in time, and provided that it has clinical credibility, we can publish more and more information about not only organisational performance but clinical outcomes. In the end, we must all answer a simple question: does the patient have a right to know how well the clinical team, doctor and hospital are performing? The answer must be yes.

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): Does the Secretary of State agree with one of the conclusions of the Whipps Cross inquiry report, that, to comply with hospital ratings,

> "The imperative to avoid a 12-hour wait for a bed is an over-riding driver behind bed management to the detriment of good clinical care"?

Mr. Milburn: No, I do not agree. The hon. Gentleman knows from his constituency experience that one of the greatest anxieties about the NHS is not so much the quality of treatment when patients get to hospital, or even to the general practitioner's surgery, but the wait to get there. Waiting is detrimental to patient and public confidence. It is right to continue to decrease waiting times as we improve quality. If the hon. Gentleman considers the star ratings, he will find a variety of measures that consider matters from the patient's perspective and assess the standards of care. It is important that we always get the balance right.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Is the Secretary of State happy with a ratings system under which one hospital bumped up its star rating for waiting times by keeping patients waiting in ambulances outside rather than on trolleys inside, and another earned zero stars but received a glowing report from the Commission for Health Improvement? Is this not merely another gimmick to allow the Secretary of State to shift the finger of blame away from the Department? In any case, what real choice does the scheme create for patients whose local hospitals have received zero stars? What does it give them besides the knowledge that they are now officially forced to attend a failing hospital?

Mr. Milburn: If I may say so, the Opposition always urge on us greater devolution to front-line services. That is where the responsibility should lie. Quite rightly, it should be for local managers, doctors and nurses to make the decisions. For the first time, the star ratings show that the national health service is a less monolithic organisation than it used to be. As every patient and member of staff knows, the NHS—an enormous and complex organisation—is characterised by some outstandingly good performance and, sadly, by some rather poorer performance. It is about time that we came clean to patients about where the performance is good, poor or indifferent. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would be persuaded of the case for more openness and devolution.

Smoking Cessation Services

2. **Mr. Gwyn Prosser** (Dover): What recent progress has been made on improving smoking cessation services. [19656]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I am pleased to announce today that we will allocate £20 million in 2002–03 to NHS smoking cessation services in England. That reflects our commitment to the future of the services, which have proved to be highly successful. In 2000–01, they helped 64,600 smokers to succeed in quitting smoking after four weeks. In the first quarter of this year, they helped nearly 29,000 more smokers to succeed in quitting at the four-week stage.

Mr. Prosser: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, and for her encouraging remarks. Is she aware of the excellent work of the smoking cessation unit in my area of east Kent, and especially in Dover and Deal? Will she assure me that the units do not represent the end of the programme to help people to quit smoking, and that other and better means to do so will be introduced? In particular, does she agree that it is vital that young people should be prevented from taking up smoking in the first place?

Ms Blears: I am aware of the excellent work being done in my hon. Friend's constituency. I think that £175,000 is being spent on smoking cessation services there. Their success means that we are providing funding to allow them to continue. I am pleased to say that nicotine replacement therapies are available on prescription, as is Zyban. Clinics are available for people, offering real help in giving up smoking, especially to young people. However, as my hon. Friend says, the best advice is that people should not take up smoking in the first place.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): What percentage of the £20 million has been earmarked for hypnotherapists and homeopaths, who make such a valuable contribution to helping people stop smoking? Will the Minister accept that 80 per cent. of the costs of conventional medicine could be saved by using homeopathic medicine? Does she agree that homeopathy should be available in many more than just five hospitals in this country?

Ms Blears: The hon. Gentleman raises yet again the matter of alternative therapies. He displays remarkable persistence and resilience, on which I congratulate him.

Acupuncture and hypnosis can help in smoking cessation. As I have said previously, we are interested in whatever works and helps people to give up smoking. Therapies that are proved to have an effect should be supported by local health authorities. I am pleased to be able to tell the hon. Gentleman that his own health authority has received a cash increase of £46 million as a result of the health allocations. I am sure that he will want that money to be spent wisely and well.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): My hon. Friend will no doubt be aware of a recent report from the North West Lancashire health authority that welcomed the smoking cessation services. However, it expressed concern about their future, given the restructuring of the health service. Will she reassure me and my constituents about the role of the primary care trusts and the strategic health authority in developing further these much needed services?

Ms Blears: I am happy to give my hon. Friend that reassurance. We want the services to continue, and that is why we are announcing today that £20 million has been made available for next year. However, it will be crucial for PCTs to commission services that will benefit their local communities. We are especially keen that the services should be targeted on people in manual-worker occupations who need extra help to quit smoking. Something like 36 per cent. of the free prescriptions for Zyban and nicotine replacement therapy are being taken up by people in those especially hard-to-reach groups. We must make sure, as a key issue in tackling health inequality, that many more people from poorer communities can access smoking cessation services.

Agency Nurses

3. **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): If he will make a statement on the use of agency nurses within the NHS. [19657]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): We are taking action to ensure that the use of agency nurses represents good value for money and the highest possible standards of patient care. NHS Professionals will, by April 2003, provide a comprehensive and cost-effective service for all NHS trusts. The London agency project will also offer a better value for money service for the NHS in London.

Tom Brake: The Minister will be aware that, in 2000–01, 574 per cent. more was spent on agency nurses than had been budgeted for, which works out at £6 million per trust. Will he explain how many more permanent nursing staff he expects to be recruited and retained as a result of his initiative? Permanent staff are needed for continuity, and that is what patients want.

Mr. Hutton: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's point. London has historically had a very high dependency on agency nursing, and we need to tackle that problem. We can do so in two ways. First, we can increase the number of whole-time equivalent nurses working in the NHS in London. We are making good progress on that. In fact, there are more whole-time equivalent nurses working in the Croydon health authority and in the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority this year than there were in September 1996. That is progress, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman welcomes it.

Secondly, we can tackle the problem in the way that I have outlined through the development of NHS Professionals. Three trusts in London use the NHS Professionals service now, but by April 2003, it will cover them all. The London agency project will also ensure better value for money and offer the possibility of significant savings. We now have 29 commercial agencies contracting with the NHS in areas of shortage such as accident and emergency, operating theatres and critical care. The hon. Gentleman is right that we need to tackle this problem, and this is the right way to go about it. I think that the means that I have described will provide the solution.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): What measures are in hand to ensure the tracking and recording of agency staff, bearing it in mind that recent police investigations have been hampered by the fact that some trusts have been unable to demonstrate who they employed, when and in what circumstances? Is this not indicative of the nonsense of using agency staff? What is being done to contain, control and record them, and to provide a historical record to enable us to see who has been hired in the past?

Mr. Hutton: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend on that point. Again, there are two ways for us to make progress on the problem. From next April, for the first time, the National Care Standards Commission will set new national minimum standards for nursing agencies, which will cover precisely the issue that he raised. There is also the possibility of dealing with these issues through NHS Professionals, which will be the in-house agency that deals with temporary staffing solutions, and which will tackle precisely this issue. Many concerns have been raised about inappropriately trained staff working in environments in which they clearly should not be working, and we will not tolerate that.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): Does the Minister accept that until the Labour Government make working in the national health service an attractive proposition, there will continue to be a shortage of nurses? Will he kindly tell the House how many nurses are expected to retire in the next five years, and how many are expected to be recruited from United Kingdom training courses?

Mr. Hutton: The hon. Lady is perfectly right that we need to make the NHS a more attractive place for people to work in, and that is precisely what we are doing. That is why 17,000 more nurses are working in the NHS this year than in the last year of the Conservative Government. We are making progress in all those areas. Clearly, nurses will retire from the service, but our commitment to recruit an extra 20,000 nurses will compensate for those who are leaving. We are talking about increasing the number of nurses available to people in the NHS, not cutting it. The hon. Lady would benefit from reflecting on the record of her party. One of its parting bequests was to cut the number of nurses in training for the NHS.

HIV

4. **Lynne Jones** (Birmingham, Selly Oak): If he will make a statement on how specialist HIV work will be protected and monitored under primary care trust commissioning. [19658]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): For the year ahead primary care trusts must honour existing agreements, financial and otherwise, negotiated by regional specialised commissioning groups and current specialised service commissioners. Implementation of the sexual health and HIV strategy will include effective performance management through the use of, for example, information collected under the AIDS (Control) Act 1987.

Lynne Jones: As my hon. Friend will know, last year saw the greatest number of AIDS cases—or HIV infection cases—ever recorded. Many organisations, including the Birmingham-based charity Freshwinds, have said that the mainstreaming of HIV prevention work is premature. I know that health authorities will be commissioning the work for next year, but is there not a case for postponing the new arrangements at least until a review of the AIDS (Control) Act reports has been conducted, and robust measures are in place to identify instances in which primary care trusts are not taking their responsibilities seriously enough and are not catering for the needs of vulnerable groups such as gay men and asylum seekers?

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend is right to mention the large number of new HIV infections identified in the past year. One reason may well be the increase in antenatal testing, which I am sure we all agree is very important. The reflection of that in higher figures for infection enables us subsequently to treat the women involved to make it less likely that the infection is passed to their children.

My hon. Friend underlined the need to monitor what is produced in the system. We should aim for a system in which more services are commissioned at PCT level, because that will allow more flexibility and responsiveness in decisions about the delivery of local treatment and care. We need to ensure that the targets identified in, for example, the sexual health and HIV strategy—which include a 25 per cent. reduction in new HIV infections by 2007—are monitored. As we move to a locally responsive system, it must be ensured that we deliver on those targets.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Can it really be true that, as stated in a parliamentary answer to me, the national health service is recruiting HIV-positive nurses from sub-Saharan Africa, and that that poses no health hazard?

Jacqui Smith: I do not know of the specific case to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but if he writes to me I will certainly respond. It is important for us to recruit people, from this country or from overseas, who both meet the necessary health requirements and can contribute to the national health service.

Careful controls apply to those employed in our health service who may be HIV-positive. I do not think that raising particular cases is helpful in ensuring that we recruit the numbers that we require, or in avoiding stigmatising people with HIV while making certain that NHS patients have the necessary protection.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): As the Minister knows, the AIDS (Control) Act requires health authorities to report on the use of the ring-fenced budget. Does she accept that, given that health authorities in their present form will disappear—along with that ring-fenced budget—we need to get on with reviewing the Act, so that when the budgets go to primary care trusts there will be a mechanism to track what they are doing and establish whether they are spending effectively?

Jacqui Smith: It is true that the Act currently requires health authorities to report annually not just on the spending of their money but on the number of new infections, treatment provided and investment in HIV prevention work. In April 2002, the requirement will pass from health authorities to PCTs, so we can go on monitoring that activity.

My hon. Friend is also right that we should review the operation of the Act to ensure that we have information, not just locally but nationally, to enable us to measure the outcomes of investment in the tackling of HIV, and our success in lowering levels of infection.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): Traditionally, health authorities have been allocated money for prevention and money for treatment and cure. Everybody must get the prevention message across when the budget effectively goes into the primary care trust pot, but the incidence of HIV varies around the country. It is low in my area, but extremely high in parts of London. Will areas with a high incidence be vired more money to cope with the larger problem or will they be expected to manage on the existing budget?

Jacqui Smith: No, a revised allocation formula was developed to ensure that PCTs receive a share of funds in line with the number of residents with HIV receiving treatment in their boundaries. That will be incorporated as a component of the unified formula to ensure that money is distributed to the areas that need it for treatment.

Flu Immunisation

5. **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton): If he will make statement on progress with this year's flu immunisation campaign. [19659]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): The most recent monitoring figures from health authorities across England indicate that at 31 October, the average uptake was 52 per cent. among people aged 65 and over. That compares with 46 per cent. for the same time last year—a 6 per cent. improvement, which indicates good progress towards achieving the minimum 65 per cent. uptake figure set at the start of the campaign.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, but it shows that there is still a long way to go in ensuring that the majority of vulnerable people receive immunisation. Will she consider the fact that some doctors' practices are rigid in making arrangements for flu immunisation? We require more flexibility from them, so that people can attend when they are available, which would ensure that that percentage increases. Will she take action to ensure that practices consider the matter and develop more flexibility in offering immunisation?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend is right that it is important that as many people as possible take up the offer of immunisation. I understand that about 12,000 people die of flu each winter and that the excess deaths every winter closely follow flu patterns, so people should take their vaccination opportunities. Many doctors now undertake more flexible and imaginative schemes that provide immunisation as and when people want it. They also provide immunisation not only to over-65s, but to those with chronic heart disease, asthma, chronic renal disease and diabetes and to people in long-stay residential care. Flu immunisations can reduce hospital admissions by up to 60 per cent., so we want to promote them as much as we can.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I declare an interest in the issue and welcome the comparative increase in flu vaccination, but will the 53 per cent. turn out to be 65 per cent., as this is relatively late in the year? In any case, is not 65 per cent. a rather low minimum standard to accept? I congratulate the Minister on the progress that the Government have made, but will she bear those points in mind, because the issue is vital? If all over-65s in particular could have a flu jab, the problems that our hospitals face in winter could be overcome.

Ms Blears: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman wants us not only to set targets, but to make them higher every year. Last year, we were 6 per cent. behind where we are this year, although we still reached our 60 per cent. target, so we are more than likely to reach 65 per cent. over the winter. We have provided an extra 1.3 million doses of vaccine this year, so there is no question of any shortage.

We want staff who work in social care and local authority residential homes to have access to vaccine. That is also the case for NHS staff, because if we can ensure that they are immunised, they will be less likely to take time off work, making them available to care for people in areas of peak pressure during the winter months. I am confident that we shall reach and exceed our target, and I am delighted to have the hon. Gentleman's support.

Liz Blackman (Erewash): Staff are key players in tackling winter pressures, for the reasons that my hon. Friend outlined. Does the Department hold current figures for the take-up of flu vaccination by health professionals?

Ms Blears: This is the first year that we are properly monitoring the take-up among staff. In October, when the campaign was in its early stages, the figure was about

9 per cent. I anticipate that the figure will increase during the coming months, but immunisation of staff is relatively new, so we need to ensure that immunisation is available at times that suit staff rather than expecting them to take time off from the wards to go to be immunised. Making sure that we bring immunisation to the wards so that staff can be immunised at a convenient time—so that times are flexible—is important to the success of the campaign.

Hospital Patients (Discharges)

6. **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): If he will make a statement about the discharge of patients from hospital into nursing home care in Gloucestershire. [19660]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): The Gloucestershire health community has been working closely with Gloucestershire county council social services to reduce the number of patients who, although fit to be discharged from hospital, are still occupying an acute bed. Between July and November the average number of patients waiting for discharge has declined from 109 to 57. The NHS regional office and social care region are closely monitoring the action being taken in Gloucestershire to reduce delayed discharges.

Mr. Robertson: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply, but a recent report for the East Gloucestershire NHS trust contradicts those figures. It suggests that in October there were 180 delayed discharges, which resulted in 23 people being left on trolleys for up to 12 hours. Will she investigate the discrepancy between those figures and the ones that she cited?

Jacqui Smith: I shall certainly look at the figures that the hon. Gentleman is talking about. However, perhaps more important, we shall also continue the investment that we started with the £300 million announced in October, from which Gloucestershire county council benefited to the tune of £1.46 million. That money is now being used to reduce delays, prevent admissions to hospital and improve community support. That is why the council believes that it will be able to reduce delayed discharges by a further 40 per cent. by March 2002.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): When my hon. Friend investigates those matters in Gloucestershire, will she ensure that the council learns from best and worst practice elsewhere? In particular, will she make sure that Gloucestershire social services department does not do what was done in my constituency? There, the Conservative-controlled county council block-booked 12 nursing home beds in a local nursing home, yet at the height of the crisis last year six of those paid-for beds were empty. Will my hon. Friend also ensure that Gloucestershire county council does not fire 16 care home managers—the people responsible for the transition from hospital to nursing home beds—while finding enough money to keep on 16 press officers?

Jacqui Smith: I know that my hon. Friend and Labour Members who represent Kent constituencies have been active in ensuring that the extra amount of more than £2.5 million that has been made available to Kent to tackle bed blocking has been used effectively. I am sure that the £1.46 million allocated to Gloucestershire will also be used effectively. My hon. Friend makes an important point, whether about Gloucestershire or anywhere else. We have evidence of authorities that have successfully reduced bed blocking and we shall ensure that those messages are consistently spread throughout the country and that all councils—even recalcitrant ones—are made to put the interests of their older people at the head of their policies.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The Minister's reply is somewhat complacent. My hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) has given me the figures for Gloucestershire: 180 people are in hospital who have no clinical need to be there. That is bad for the patients and bad for the taxpayer. When the Minister investigates the circumstances in Gloucestershire, will she undertake to consider how health and social services can work more seamlessly together so that people can leave hospital when they are clinically able to do so? It is cheaper to find a home care package or a residential or nursing home package than it is to keep people in hospital when they do not need to be there.

Jacqui Smith: That is precisely why the Government have announced the extra £300 million, of which Gloucestershire has £1.46 million. In challenging the Government on the issue, the hon. Gentleman has a responsibility to explain to his constituents whether a Conservative Government, were there to be another one, would match that type of sum. He is right, however, that a seamless join between health and social services is very important. The provision that the Government have made available for closer partnership working between health and social services, which has been taken up in many parts of the country, may well be an opportunity that Gloucestershire needs to consider. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman—whose concern about delayed discharges I share—will be ensuring that the extra money being provided to the social services department and the health authority in Gloucestershire is spent in the most effective manner.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Is the Minister aware that, according to her own figures in a written answer, 9 per cent. of acute beds in Gloucestershire are occupied by delayed discharge patients? Does she accept that, on average, there are currently 680,000 bed blockers per annum? Given that the average cost of a week in hospital is £1,630, but only £319 in a residential home, is that not a gross waste of money? Is it not also halting patient care and preventing operations? Is the Minister proud of the fact that, after four and a half years, this Labour Government have created not only a waiting list to get into hospital, but a waiting list to get out of hospital?

Jacqui Smith: This Government are concerned to ensure that people receive the right treatment at the right time and in the right place. This Government have therefore invested extra money to ensure that we cut delayed discharge. I doubt, as we have heard, that that money would be matched by the Opposition. Because of that investment, between July and November 2001, there has already been a 47.7 per cent. decrease in the number of delayed discharges in Gloucestershire. Because of that investment, Gloucestershire now feels able to set itself a tough target to reduce delayed discharges even further. We shall continue to ensure that we invest and reorganise and promote joint working between health and social services, to ensure that the extra investment we are providing translates into better treatment and faster access to community and residential care for older people.

Doctor Recruitment

7. **Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): What recent progress has been made in the recruitment of doctors in the NHS. [19661]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): The Government are committed to delivering an additional 10,000 doctors by September 2005, over a September 2000 baseline. Good progress is being made towards meeting that target. Almost 7,000 more doctors are working in the NHS now than in 1997.

Mr. Cunningham: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. However, has he read recent reports in the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* that the Walsgrave university hospital trust has had difficulties in recruiting doctors and trainee doctors? Will he look into the matter and report back to the House on the outcome?

Mr. Hutton: I shall certainly look into the matter on behalf of my hon. Friend. I am sure that he will welcome the fact that the Coventry and Walsgrave trust was very recently able to announce the go-ahead for the new medical school to be built on the site of the Coventry and Walsgrave hospital. I hope that, like me, he will regard that as a very positive investment in the future, to ensure that the NHS has the doctors and surgeons that it needs for the new century.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): As the previous question indicated, it is no good just recruiting doctors if we cannot retain them. In addition to the demoralisation that is caused by the naming and shaming of doctors as a result of star ratings that are based on no meaningful outcomes, will the Minister look into the issue of female junior doctors who, because of the new pay deal, when seeking to train flexibly, are paid less than those who are in full-time work? Will he also look into the issue of black and Asian doctors who are still not allowed to become consultants although they have the skills to do so? The majority of them are to be found languishing in non-regular trust-grade posts, the terms and conditions of which are often poorer than those for the mainly white junior doctors whose posts they are mirroring.

Mr. Hutton: I agree strongly with the hon. Gentleman that we need to improve the recruitment and retention of doctors, which is what we are doing. We recently announced measures that will add appreciably to our endeavours, such as the new flexible career scheme for hospital doctors, and we have a similar package in place for general practice. Golden hellos are being introduced for people entering general practice. We are making good progress in all those areas.

The hon. Gentleman raised a number of very fair points. He will be aware of some of the measures that we have proposed that will help move those issues forward. I simply ask him to reflect on this fact. We are committed to the growth of the national health service and to recruiting more doctors, and we have the resources in place to do so properly and effectively. The choice, as always in these matters, is between a Labour Government committed to the growth of the NHS and a Tory Government that would cut the national health service.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): What progress are the Government making in persuading NHS consultants who work part time in the private sector to work full time in the NHS instead? We were given figures last week indicating that under the concordat with the private sector, some 70,000 patients have been treated in the private sector by these doctors. How many more patients would have been treated instead in the NHS if those doctors had been working full time in the health service?

Mr. Hutton: It makes no sense to have spare capacity in the private sector which can be used by NHS patients if it is being denied to them. If, as a result, NHS patients have to wait longer for their care and treatment under the NHS, that needs a solution, and the Government have provided a way forward. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health made an announcement last week about expanded choice and a greater use of the private sector, and we will be treating NHS patients in that context. The money will ensure that that happens. That is a sensible result, and a good result for the NHS.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am sure that the Minister accepts that all hon. Members want to see more doctors in the national health service, whether in hospital or in general practice. Does he agree that if he can achieve the Government's target, it will mean that doctors will be able to spend more time with their patients, that those in general practice will be able to make more home visits—which I believe to be essential—and that, as a result of more time being spent by doctors with their patients in hospital and in general practice, there could be better outcomes which could produce a better health service and better health?

Mr. Hutton: I am able to agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman says. I do not want to embarrass him, but that is usually the case in Health questions. He is absolutely right. We will secure those results by recruiting more doctors in general practice, and more nurses and therapists as well. In that way, primary care—which is, after all, where 90 per cent. of all patient journeys begin and end—can provide a more flexible service and the health care professionals who work in primary care can spend more time with their patients. That is what the doctors and nurses want, and it is what the Government want.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Does the Minister recognise that a significant number of refugees in the United Kingdom are fully qualified and experienced doctors, but are unable to practice because they lack sufficient skills in English? Will he undertake to look at the possibility of setting up a cost-effective scheme to help these doctors improve their language skills so that they can contribute to the work of the national health service?

Mr. Hutton: I agree strongly with my hon. Friend. That is precisely what we are doing: we have asked the Royal College of General Practitioners to lead a specific project dealing with the recruitment into the NHS of more refugee and asylum-seeking doctors. That makes sense for the NHS and will help towards meeting the wider targets that we set for improving the service.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Today's Royal College of Surgeons report highlights the current alarming shortage of hundreds of key surgeons and the future shortage of thousands. A few days ago, Sir Peter Morris, president of the college, described surgeons as depressed and frustrated. The British Medical Association is today calling for swift action to unblock the training bottlenecks, and highlights the need to recruit overseas consultants. Does the Minister think that he has any chance of meeting his target for 2004, contrary to what the report says? If so, where will these surgeons come from?

Mr. Hutton: I am confident that we shall meet those targets. The hon. Gentleman referred to Sir Peter Morris's comments, and I am sure that he will be aware of what Sir Peter Morris had to say about the Conservatives; he is certainly talking about shortages. We are trying to address the shortages. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the NHS has been historically under-doctored for decades, and I am afraid that his party failed to address that. Sir Peter said:

> "Whether the Conservatives would come up with any alternatives, I doubt."

That is absolutely right, because we should not lose sight of—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister should not concern himself with the Conservatives. That is something for the Opposition to worry about.

Health Inequalities

8. **Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone): What progress has been made on tackling health inequalities. [19662]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): Good progress has been made, not least by targeting resources on the areas of greatest health need.

Mr. Clapham: I thank the Secretary of State for his reply, but may I draw his attention to the Government's chief medical officer's report this year, which states that, although progress has been made in health overall, there are growing gaps in health between socially disadvantaged groups and more affluent groups. When does he expect the primary care trusts to have completed their equity reports in relation to targeting inequalities? As he well knows, we in Barnsley have just one PCT, which has now been put together and is continuing its work. When the equity audit is complete, will we have more resources to deal with some of our inequalities?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend raises an extremely important issue. For many decades, health inequalities in this country have been widening, rather than narrowing. Indeed, the chief medical officer's report, which was published yesterday, makes that glaringly obvious. There is a big commitment to deal with those problems. Obviously, they are not straightforward because we are dealing with some of the wider economic and social determinants of ill health, as well as ill health itself, but it is important to get the resources into the right place, as I said in an earlier answer. My hon. Friend will be aware from the announcement that I made last Thursday that, in the next financial year, we will invest about £150 million-worth of extra resources, specifically to recognise the greater demands that are made on health services in poorer parts of the country, such as his constituency, where we will invest, I think, an extra £2 million.

The primary care trusts will have an important role to play in that regard, and the fact that the resources and responsibilities are being devolved down to very local communities, with the PCTs in charge, will help to foster better partnerships between local government, the voluntary sector, the private sector and the NHS, not just to provide better health and social care services, but to deal with some of the root causes of ill health, of which my hon. Friend and other hon. Members are painfully aware.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the big inequalities is the fact that people in constituencies such as mine have to wait far too long for the routine operations that they need to get out of pain, unlike in some other parts of the country? What would he say to my constituent Mr. Levy, who read in the paper that the Government had lost a court case and that he could now go abroad and get his operation charged to the health service? He then read a couple of statements, purporting to come from the Secretary of State, saying that he is launching a policy to allow people to go abroad to get their operations done more quickly to get out of pain, only for me to receive from two junior Ministers in the Department of Health a strong no to my constituent, saying that there was no way that he was allowed to have his operation done elsewhere to get out of pain and that this was all a tissue of lies. What has the Secretary of State got to say about that?

Mr. Milburn: A tissue of lies it is not, but the right hon. Gentleman, or indeed any other right hon. or hon. Member, would not forgive us if we got the policy wrong with regard to offering patients the choice of being treated abroad. That has not been the case under Conservative or Labour Governments, but it is what we are advancing towards, and we will ensure that we get it right. There are obvious concerns about travel arrangements, clinical standards and ensuring that patients are fit to travel, but that is precisely what we are trying to do in three parts of the country, including the south-east—precisely the area about which the right hon. Gentleman expresses concern—and I hope that we can make progress before too long.

As the right hon. Gentleman rightly says, it is also important that, as we expand the NHS, we also extend choice to more patients. He will be aware that I was able to say last week that that is precisely what we want to do, starting with those patients who have the most severe clinical conditions. I cannot think of anyone who faces a greater dilemma than the heart patient who has the choice between paying for treatment or waiting for treatment. We want to solve that dilemma not by forcing people out of the NHS, as the Conservative party increasingly seeks to do, but by offering them choice in the NHS.

Homelessness

9. **Ms Karen Buck** (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): What recent assessment he has made of the health care needs associated with homelessness. [19663]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): The NHS is fully committed to providing access to health care on the basis of need. The health care requirements of homeless people are being addressed through local health improvement plans, personal medical services pilots focusing specifically on the homeless, and general medical services development schemes. In addition, the Department has provided additional funding to support the needs of homeless people with mental health problems in London.

Ms Buck: Is my hon. Friend aware of the significant contribution that has been made by Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster health authority to the work of the rough sleepers unit, especially in the provision of much needed mental health services? That has come at a considerable cost to the health authority, which has sustained the bill for mental health services, sometimes at the cost of displacing local people from those services. Will he undertake to give sympathetic consideration to the bid that the health authority is putting together to provide a long-term answer to mental health services, partly to relieve the strain on my local health authority but also to guarantee the long-term sustainability of the action to tackle rough sleeping?

Mr. Hutton: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that we will look sympathetically at those proposals. The more work we do on homelessness and mental health, the more we uncover substantial unmet need. It is part and parcel of the work that the Government are doing to ensure that the resources are in place to respond to the need once it has been identified. My understanding is that the regional office is already in discussions with the trust to consider the question of how additional resources might be used to help to deal with the problem. I will take my hon. Friend's comments seriously and get in touch with her in the near future.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Is the Minister aware that one of the problems that homeless people face is the time it takes to get a CT scan in hospital? I have had many letters from constituents who complain about how long it has taken to get a scan in the Queen Elizabeth hospital in King's Lynn. What will the right hon. Gentleman do about it?

Mr. Hutton: It will be a combination of things, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman understands, including more investment, more staff and more training. We are making significant resources available to improve the range of diagnostic equipment that supports the needs of his and all our constituents.

NHS Appointments Commission

10. **Mr. Kevan Jones** (North Durham): If he will make a statement on the work of the NHS Appointments Commission in relation to appointments in the north-east. [19664]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): Since it became operational on 2 July 2001, the NHS Appointments Commission has announced 613 appointments, of which 37 were to posts in the north-east. All those appointments were made in accordance with the commission's procedures, which have been endorsed by the Commissioner for Public Appointments, Dame Rennie Fritchie.

Mr. Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. In the recent appointment of the chair of North Durham NHS trust, a method of selecting candidates was used that was not in the published procedure. I have also raised concerns about the method of consultation of Members of Parliament in the appointment of NHS board members. In her reply to my Adjournment debate last week, my hon. Friend gave assurances that she would look into those matters and ask the NHS Appointments Commission to update its published procedures. What progress has been made in that, so that the people of North Durham can have confidence that the process is open and transparent?

Ms Blears: I have, indeed, had the pleasure of discussing the issues at some length with my hon. Friend at some late hour last week, and I did undertake to consider whether all the steps in the appointments process would be made transparent on the website and in the written documentation. I have asked Sir William Wells, the NHS Appointments Commissioner, to ensure that that happens. I have also expressed the concern that Members of Parliament should be properly notified when appointments are made that are relevant to their constituencies. That procedure has not been as tight as it might have been, but we are all entitled to have the best up-to-date information on the people who will lead our trusts and authorities and provide leadership for the NHS. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the matter and I am sure that he will go on to support the people who have been appointed in his area to do an excellent job in providing high quality services for local people.

NHS Private Provision

11. **Dr. Andrew Murrison** (Westbury): If he will make a statement on his plans for expanding the role played by private health care providers in the NHS. [19665]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): Next year, the national health service is expected to double the number of operations carried out in the private sector on NHS patients.

Dr. Murrison: I thank the Secretary of State for that reply. Last year, NHS Estates and the Community Hospitals Association began work on a joint investigation styled "Models of Ownership for Community Hospitals". Will the right hon. Gentleman comment on that work and will he undertake to put it in the public domain?

Mr. Milburn: I am not aware of the particular report or research that the hon. Gentleman mentions, but I shall be happy to examine it if he would care to send me the details.

On community hospitals and community ownership, it is important that, as we move towards a more decentralised and more devolved NHS, we strengthen the relationships between local communities and the local hospitals and the local health service that are there to serve.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): My patients who have been treated for cataracts on the NHS but in a local private clinic are grateful that that capacity has been used. However, there are concerns about potential conflicts of interest arising when consultants operate in one place on both private sector and NHS patients and when consultants refer patients to one sector or the other. Will the Secretary of State assure me that such conflicts of interest will be investigated and that they will not be allowed to arise?

Mr. Milburn: If my hon. Friend's constituents have raised specific concerns, I shall be very happy to consider them. It is important that such conflicts of interest do not arise and that the appropriate safeguards are in place. However, if we can use the additional spare capacity available in private sector hospitals for the benefit of NHS patients—whether to provide cataract or cardiac operations—it is sensible to take the position that that is precisely what we should do provided that safeguards are in place, that we have the appropriate clinical standards and and that we obtain good value for money for the taxpayer.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Given that the BUPA hospital in Redhill is negotiating with the NHS to set up a dedicated surgical centre to provide for an anticipated 5,000 hip and knee replacement operations, will the Secretary of State tell us whether the medical staff carrying out those operations will be employed by BUPA or by the NHS?

Mr. Milburn: I think that the hon. Gentleman will be aware that negotiations are currently taking place and that they are going extremely well. I hope that we can resolve them satisfactorily from both points of view before too long. The arrangement that we have in mind is for BUPA to continue to employ its own staff. It may have a limited number of medical staff on its books and it will certainly have some nursing staff. The intention is for NHS doctors, nurses and other staff to work in the current private hospital on NHS terms and conditions, but they will be managed by BUPA.

Today, the hospital almost exclusively treats patients according to their ability to pay. If negotiations go well, in a year's time, it will be exclusively treating patients, not according to the size of their wallets, but according to the scale of their needs.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the Secretary of State set in place a monitoring system that will ensure that the patients treated in the private sector receive clinical care of a standard that they expect at the time of their operations? Many of them are subsequently readmitted to NHS hospital beds thus costing the service a great deal of money.

Mr. Milburn: We will continue to monitor all those issues. As I said, it is important that both patients and taxpayers receive a good deal. I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that not only will we seek to drive a good financial bargain for the taxpayer but, even more important, we shall want to ensure that, if people are treated in a private hospital or a NHS hospital, they will be provided with the highest clinical standards possible.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): It is only a matter of weeks since the Secretary of State told us at Health questions that, by and large, in our country

> "we thankfully have one monopoly provider and that is the NHS. As a long as a Labour Government are in power that will remain the position."—[*Official Report*, 26 June 2001; Vol. 370, c. 500.]

Given that, this week, he does not want a monopoly NHS and that he has been specific about doubling the number of operations carried out for the NHS in the private sector, will he tell us how much that will cost? What will he say to the patients who, for the past five years, have therefore needlessly be denied wider access to care because of his pointless dogma?

Mr. Milburn: In terms of cost, the hon. Gentleman is well aware that I told the Select Committee on Health about a month ago that we would make about £40 million available precisely to fund more operations, using the spare capacity of private sector hospitals to treat NHS patients. That is double the level provided last year. If local primary care trusts want to contract for more operations from private sector providers, that is a matter for them. The great divide between the Labour party and the Conservative party is not whether the NHS patient is treated in an NHS hospital or a private sector hospital; it is whether we provide them with more choices, which is what we want to do, or impose more charges on them, which is what the hon. Gentleman wants to do.

Dr. Fox: The great division is not between our parties; it is between members of the Government. The Secretary of State said that he wanted a hypothecated health tax, and the Chancellor said no way. The Prime Minister wanted European Union spending levels, and the Chancellor said forget it. The Secretary of State wanted an NHS monopoly, the Prime Minister wanted no barriers to delivery, but the Chancellor simply wants to get closer to Downing street. When the Secretary of State is not consulted about announcements and called useless and sidelined, who in the Government—if anyone—is making health policy?

Mr. Milburn: I am not sure how the hon. Gentleman's question is relevant to use of the private sector. If we can take advantage of spare private sector capacity in BUPA hospitals, General Healthcare Group hospitals and BMI Healthcare hospitals for the benefit of NHS patients, that is precisely what we will do. At the same time, we will continue to invest extra resources in NHS hospitals. The great divide is between the Labour Government saying that there should be more investment and the hon. Gentleman's party saying that there should be less.

Local Government White Paper

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the local government White Paper that we are publishing today.

The White Paper sets out a new vision for local government at the beginning of the 21st century. It seeks to establish a partnership between central and local government, reflecting the critical importance of local authorities, both as a tier of democratic government and as a body with the responsibility to deliver high-quality public services to local people.

Democratically elected councils should be part of the fabric of our communities. The services that they provide have a vital part to play in sustaining and enhancing social and economic prospects and the environmental quality of our towns, cities and countryside. They can have a profound effect on the opportunities and quality of life of the people who live and work there. They are responsible for educating children, providing care for the vulnerable, making places safer and cleaner to live in and providing reliable local transport.

People therefore expect a great deal from their council, and those expectations are rising. To meet them, councils have constantly to seek new and more effective ways to deliver customer-focused services and to lead their communities. The proposals in the White Paper will provide a framework in which all can do so, through the application of the Government's four principles of public service reform.

The first principle is to establish a national framework for the delivery of high-quality services and effective community leadership. For example, people everywhere want high-quality education for their children. Secondly, within that framework, we intend to free up local councils to meet their communities' particular needs, recognising that those will be different in a London borough and, say, in a shire district council area. The third principle is to ensure that councillors and council staff have the skills and money to do their jobs well. Finally, we intend to provide more choice for people in the services that they want to use.

I want to tackle the trend towards excessive central prescription and interference, which dominated central-local relations in the 1980s and 1990s. The White Paper reverses that approach: it marks a pronounced step away from centralisation. It is about increased freedoms, better incentives and a significant reduction in the number of controls, consent requirements, plans and over-elaborate guidance, which have all too often characterised the top-down approach to local government that we saw in recent years.

The White Paper is truly about local government, and it is a fundamental shift away from local administration. It is based on a belief that we do not need to control everything and on a recognition that local authorities are often in the best position to respond to local needs and aspirations.

I hope that this approach will encourage local political and civic leadership. Today's reports into this summer's disturbances in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford show how important it is to have a leadership with a democratic mandate who are prepared to take the often sensitive and always difficult decisions necessary to ensure social cohesion. The White Paper has at its heart community leadership and the democratic renewal of local government.

We want to reduce the bureaucratic burden for all councils and give them the freedom to innovate and focus on driving up standards. We therefore intend to cut the number of plans and strategies that councils are required to produce, to scale back the number of area-based initiatives and to give greater scope to rationalise partnerships. We shall remove many of the present requirements to obtain Government consent before acting. More than 50 will be abolished, and another 30 are under review. We shall also provide councils with wider powers to provide services to others.

With these new freedoms come responsibilities. For the first time, we will produce a clear performance profile for each and every council. The Audit Commission will compile a scorecard and will identify each council as either high performing, striving, coasting or poorly performing. It is our intention that further freedoms over and above those for all councils will be given to high-performing authorities. We will also intervene decisively where councils are failing their local people. Where councils are not collecting their council tax or providing high-quality public services, for example, that will not be acceptable, and we will take the appropriate action.

The Government agree with the Local Government Association that there should be joint ownership of the service priorities for local government. It is therefore our intention that, through negotiation and dialogue, we will agree with local authorities a single list of priorities for local government.

The White Paper also sets out our specific proposals for the reform of local government finance. Last week, I announced to the House that next year will be the final year in which the grant to local authorities will be based on the present standard spending assessment formula. We will be bringing forward our detailed proposals for a new system of grant distribution next year, but I can inform the House that I have decided to abolish the standard spending assessment mechanism and replace it with a system that is easier to understand and better reflects the real cost of services and the needs of the local area.

We also intend to give local authorities greater flexibility to undertake capital investment. We shall scrap the system of credit approvals; instead, authorities will be free to borrow for capital investment without consent, provided they can afford to service the debt. Where a council sees a need, for example, for a new library or leisure centre, it will no longer need central Government permission to go ahead with such a project.

As a consequence of that approach, we shall abolish the "receipts taken into account" mechanism, which has acted as a disincentive for local authorities to dispose of surplus assets. I know that there has been concern about the growth of ring-fenced funding and the way it limits local discretion. We shall therefore restrict ring-fenced funding to areas that are genuine high priorities for the Government, and where we cannot achieve our policy objectives by specifying outcome targets.

The setting of council tax itself is very much a local decision, but we also recognise that the risk of high council tax increases affects local taxpayers. We have already ended pre-announced universal capping. Our long-term goal is to dispense with the reserve capping powers altogether, but we intend to proceed with caution. However, we feel that we should take the first step towards ending capping, so I can announce today that the power to cap will not be used in respect of high-performing authorities. A large number of authorities and hon. Members have raised with me the difficulties created for councils by the council tax benefit subsidy limitation scheme. The principles underlying the scheme are sensible, but in practice its application has proved complex. Some have proposed that we should simplify the scheme or find ways of reducing its impact. Having considered all the options, I have decided to abolish it altogether.

The proposals in the White Paper form part of the Government's agenda for modernisation and reform. For many, they will be challenging; they are meant to be. We proposed the changes not for their own sake, but because local people will benefit from the requirement that all services should be delivered to an acceptable standard; from the fact that the changes that we all want to see—better schools and social care, improved local environments, better transport and other vital local services—will get the priority that they deserve; and from effective community leadership by councils that are in touch with local people and working to meet their aspirations.

The proposals will put the "local" back into local government, allowing local councillors to make a difference to their communities. That is vital if we are to re-engage people and, as a result, achieve an increased turn-out at local elections. The White Paper outlines a new and lasting basis for effective local government. I want central and local government to work together in a constructive partnership to deliver the high-quality public services that local people have the right to expect. In a practical and tangible way, the White Paper shows how we can achieve that and I commend it to the House.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I should like to thank the Secretary State for giving me prior sight of the statement. I was interested to hear on the Radio 4 "Today" programme this morning an item saying that the Prime Minister had agreed that policy should always be announced first to Parliament—which was immediately followed by an item announcing the contents of this White Paper.

Strong, independent and effective local government is essential for our democracy and for people's quality of life. We want councils to be better able to understand and meet local needs, deliver high-quality services, and respond to and stand up for local interests. Local government has traditionally been an engine of change in this country; many policy innovations have come up from local government. Today, Conservative councils throughout the country are responding to local needs, providing the public services that people want and finding new ways to deliver effective local services. To the extent that the White Paper heralds a change in the attitude of central Government and a genuine move to freedom for local councils to respond to the needs of their communities, we welcome it. However, to the extent that it merely pays lip service to the ideas of freedom and deregulation, we challenge it.

I must tell the Secretary of State that Members of Parliament now know not to take at face value what he tells the House. Following the fiddled figures of the local government settlement last week and our experience with Railtrack, Members know that with this Secretary of State more than any other, they simply cannot believe what he says. The devil is in the detail, and so it will be with the local government White Paper—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The language that the hon. Lady is using is sailing a bit close to the wind. Perhaps she should remember that we use temperate language in the House.

Mrs. May: I apologise for any intemperate language that I used, Mr. Speaker, and I trust that the rest of my language will be suitably temperate.

We have been promised by the Secretary of State that the White Paper

> "sets out a new vision for local government at the beginning of the 21st century."

We have been promised freedom for councils and deregulation, but, sadly, the statement and the White Paper do not deliver on that promise. In one of the early paragraphs in the statement, the Secretary of State says that he wants to

> "tackle the trend towards excessive central prescription".

I do not know whether the House noticed that the Secretary of State was not even able to keep it up for the whole of his statement—*[Laughter.]* I cannot think what hon. Members are laughing at.

Later in the statement, the Secretary of State goes on to say:

> "It is therefore our intention that . . . we will agree . . . a single list of priorities for local government."

There will not be any excessive central prescription, but the Government will decide the priorities for local government. Local government will not be able to decide those priorities itself.

The Secretary of State says that the White Paper

> "marks a pronounced step away from centralisation"

and that it is about increased freedoms, but it is not about increased freedoms for all councils; it is about freedoms for the chosen few. If councils do what the Government tell them, they will be given a little reward, but not all councils will get the opportunity to respond in the way that they believe is right to meet the needs of their local communities.

We have heard such language before. In the education White Paper published earlier this year, the Government promised that where schools were successful,

> "we want to free them from those conditions and regulatory requirements which they tell us stand in the way of higher standards and further innovation."

Yet in the Education Bill introduced in the House last week, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) said, we saw a Bill that

> "centralises power"

in the hands of the Secretary of State for Education

> "more completely than any previous education measure."—*[Official Report, 4 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 201.]*

We are likely to see the same in the case of local government reform.

[Mrs. May]

If the right hon. Gentleman is serious about freedom for councils, he will want to ensure that his Cabinet colleagues are serious about it too. Will he therefore give the House an undertaking today that the Government will remove those centralising measures from the Education Bill? Will he commit his Cabinet colleagues in all other Departments affecting local government not to introduce any more net regulation for local government?

What confidence can the House have that the rest of the Government are signed up to a freedom agenda for local councils, if we see them doing something very different? From the way the Secretary of State's Cabinet colleagues have been keeping away from him in recent weeks, we can have no confidence that his agenda will be driven through.

The Secretary of State says that the Government

> "want to reduce the bureaucratic burden"

and give councils

> "the freedom to innovate and focus on driving up standards."

The aim of reducing the bureaucratic burden is interesting. We are to have a joint study report next year on reducing the regulatory burden; then we are to have

> "the piloting of a new policy evaluation tool . . . which will seek to prevent the imposition of unnecessary burdens."

The right hon. Gentleman might like to explain to the House what that means. If it means that the Government will not introduce further regulation, why does he not say so? The best way of ensuring that local councils have freedom from regulation is abstention by politicians from imposing new regulations on councils. Will the Secretary of State tell us what his target is for reducing the number of new regulations to be introduced for local government each year?

Then we come to the clear performance profile for each council—the scorecard—and more mechanistic targets and league tables that will be set by the Government. Most voters, when they vote in local government elections, assume that they are making decisions about the performance of their local council. They do not expect their council to be told what to do by central Government.

That is what is sad about the statement from the Secretary of State. If he is really interested in local democracy and in increasing voter turnout at local government elections, he will want to restore to local government true democracy and true autonomy for all councils, so that when people vote they know that their vote will make a real difference and that they are not merely electing people to be agents of central Government.

We are told that there should be

> "joint ownership of the service priorities for local government."

That will lead to unitarisation by creep. Will the Secretary of State confirm to the House that it is Government policy to abolish county councils or to see county councils removed from local government through the imposition of regional assemblies and regional government? With regard to the league tables, will he set out to the House how the performance of each council will be determined? How will it be determined when a council's performance is high in one area of service but not others?

Then came an amazing statement. The Secretary of State announced with a flourish that he had decided to abolish the standard spending assessment mechanism. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members seem to think that that is some great new announcement, but I must tell them that their Government announced in 1997 that they were going to reform the standard spending assessment. Obviously, they were not listening to the right hon. Gentleman last week, as he made the announcement then as well. Again, all that we have this week is a promise of details in future. When will those details be published and what opportunity will hon. Members have to question him about them?

One of the main ways in which the Government control local authorities is through ring-fenced funding. They claim that they are going to reduce the amount of such funding. What is the Secretary of State's target for the amount of budget that will be ring-fenced in future? It has increased under this Government from just over 4 per cent. in 1997 to 15 per cent. next year. If the right hon. Gentleman is so interested in reducing the proportion of budget that is ring fenced, why did he not make the announcement last week in respect of the local government settlement, and why did he increase the proportion of ring fencing in that settlement?

The Secretary of State has announced four bands or performance levels for local government. He has gone from being the blue-eyed boy striving to do his master's bidding, through being a coasting Minister, to being a poor performer. He had the opportunity today to take radical measures to restore local government and local democracy and to bring forward a programme of decentralisation and deregulation to all councils. Frankly, he has flunked it. He has run scared from that challenge and local democracy will be the poorer for it.

Mr. Byers: Of course, the Conservatives have one fundamental problem with local government: they do not have any time for it at all. That is not only my view. There are Opposition Members who served in local government while a Conservative Government were in power. Indeed, the hon. Lady did so, as did I and some of my Labour colleagues. We know full well that the Conservative Governments of the 1980s and 1990s destroyed local government because they had no time for it. Local councils that were prepared to stand up for jobs and services were denigrated by Conservative Governments. They were attacked by the Conservatives and funding was cut, and when the local electorate continued to return Labour councils, what did the Tories do? They abolished them. That was their response to local democracy.

The White Paper represents a fundamental shift in the way in which central Government relates to local government. The hon. Lady said that the centralising tendencies are still there. She prayed in aid the fact that there is to be a single list of priorities and suggested that it was somehow being imposed from the centre. When she has time to read the White Paper, she will see that that list of priorities will be agreed between Government and the LGA. This proposal, which she criticises as centralising and as not taking into account the views of local government, was suggested by the LGA itself, including Conservative members as well as Labour ones, and Liberal Democrat members as well as independent ones. We can see where the divisions are. The hon. Lady does not speak for Conservatives in local government, because the proposal was theirs and we were prepared to sign up to it—but there we go.

The hon. Lady spoke about the bureaucratic burden on local councils. Plans are to be cut by more than a third and we will abolish 50 consents—changes that will make a real difference. We are reviewing the best value regime because we believe that it has become bureaucratic and can be improved. I remind the House that we created best value so that we could abolish compulsory competitive tendering, which was another Conservative party creation. It had nothing to do with quality of service; the cheapest provider and privatisation drove the policy. We removed it and put best value in its place because we believe that the quality of the services count.

The hon. Lady disapproves of the fact that we will have four categories of council. She would prefer it if local electorates could not compare their council with neighbouring councils. It is time for effective quality assurance. It is important to have a balanced scorecard and to examine a range of performance indicators for local councils. However, the Audit Commission, not politicians, will have that responsibility.

The hon. Lady asked about funding for schools. The White Paper makes it clear that schools are in a special position and that we need to safeguard their funding. There is no Government policy to abolish county councils or to impose regional government on parts of the country. That is for local people to decide.

The hon. Lady did not even provide a hint about Conservative party thinking on local government. That is no surprise, because she knows that her policy does not celebrate local government but denigrates it. Conservative Members have no time for local government. Consequently, thousands of Conservative councillors throughout the country have lost their seats.

The White Paper marks a fundamental shift in direction. It celebrates local councils. When Opposition Members have had a chance to digest the proposals, they will realise that they mean a new beginning—a renaissance—for local government. I hope that when they have the opportunity of discussing it with their local government friends, they will be able to support it.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement and on starting on the long road back from local administration to proper local government. What is the timetable for the proposals? Will there be a bonfire of regulations in the next few weeks and a pause until legislation can be introduced? How soon does my right hon. Friend believe that we can revert to the position whereby local government has the same sort of powers that he enjoyed when he was first elected to a local authority on Tyneside?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes an important point in not perceiving the White Paper as the one and only act to change the relationship between central Government and local government. It is the beginning of celebrating all that is good in local government, and much is good. However, we also need to ensure that we are prepared to intervene to help people who live in areas that have poorly performing councils.

We can introduce some of the White Paper proposals immediately. They include the reduction in the numbers of plans and consents. We do not need to delay the abolition of the council tax benefit subsidy limitation, which can be introduced from April next year. Other changes require primary legislation, and we shall make them as soon as parliamentary time is available.

My hon. Friend made another important point. When I took up my post in June this year, I realised that the constraints on the powers and responsibilities of local councils are dramatic now compared with 1980, when I was first elected as a local councillor. Local councils do not have the opportunity to respond to the needs and demands of local people. I hope that the White Paper will contribute significantly towards changing that. As my hon. Friend said, we are at the start of the process, not the end.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Taken at face value, the White Paper represents a sea change in the Government's attitude towards local government. That is welcome, if long overdue. I also welcome the clear commitment to change the obscure, out-of-date and unfair funding system for local government. I especially welcome the announcement on the abolition of the council tax benefit subsidy limitation, which was a backdoor capping scheme.

However, given that this is a Government White Paper, will the Secretary of State assure the House that all Ministers support it? In particular, does the Secretary of State for Education and Skills back it? On 4 December, she announced very clearly that she was tightening the strings on local education authorities. She said that the Government were putting even more pressure on local authorities to delegate more money to schools. In addition, the right hon. Lady recently introduced a new Education Bill that will strip more powers away from LEAs.

I welcome the commitment to reduce the number of ring-fenced grants, but the Secretary of State proposes to do so in part by introducing targeted grants, which the White Paper states may have eligibility conditions attached. Is not that simply another form of ring fencing?

I also welcome the long-overdue proposals to reform the capital funding regime. However, many people will be disappointed that the White Paper contains only one sentence about the abolition of the standard spending assessment. That states:

> "We shall announce in due course the principles we are applying in conducting this formula grant review."

When will we hear what those principles will be?

More generally, [illegible] not the right hon. Gentleman accept that, unless local councils themselves are able to raise more of the money spent locally, the Government will still control local government purse strings? Has the time not come for local government to be able to put its own money where its mouth is?

The Secretary of State was right to speak in his statement about giving further powers to local councils, but I fail to understand why he continues to say that they must earn their additional freedoms. Should not local councils' autonomy be theirs as of right, and not something that they must earn?

Why does not the White Paper mention proportional representation in local government elections? The Secretary of State would be disappointed if I did not ask that question.

Finally, we all know that crude targets have led to the distortion of clinical priorities in the NHS, and that the Department for Education and Skills has acknowledged serious deficiencies in school league tables. Why, then, does the Secretary of State feel that the time is now right to introduce crude league tables for local government?

[Mr. Don Foster]

The White Paper contains some welcome measures. However, actions speak louder than words, and we look forward to the actions.

Mr. Byers: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support for certain parts of the White Paper. I can assure him that it is a Government White Paper, and that it is supported by all Ministers, including my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. When he has had time to look at both the White Paper and the Education Bill, the hon. Gentleman will see that there is no contradiction between them.

The hon. Gentleman asked about ring fencing. The House will know that the Government have just begun our spending review for 2002, the outcome of which will be announced later next year. In that context, the question of ring-fenced grants to local authorities will be one of the matters for consideration. Our objective, during the process of the review, is to have an outcome that will reduce the amount of ring-fenced grants going to local authorities. It would be a mistake to try to move more quickly, as that would have a detrimental impact on services that are provided at present.

The proposals regarding targeted grants and eligibility are not the same as ring fencing. I shall give an example of what would amount to a targeted grant. Recently, my Department and the Department of Health have provided an extra £100 million to support local government initiatives on bed blocking. That money has been targeted on certain authorities facing particular pressures in the sense that those authorities become eligible for those grants.

I welcome what the hon. Member for Bath said with regard to capital. We want to move as quickly as we can, but the changes are so fundamental that they will require primary legislation, and will have to wait until a suitable slot is available.

It is not true that I announced last week that we would abolish the standard spending assessment. What I said was that we would change the formula, although I did not give an indication of the sort of changes that we would introduce. Today, I am able to say that the new formula will not be based on a standard spending assessment. Relatively early in the new year—I cannot give a precise time yet—I would like to find ways of sharing with hon. Members the various options that we are considering in relation to that new formula.

There is an issue about the balance of funding between central and local government, to which the Government are giving close consideration. All authorities will benefit from the deregulation and the cutting back of bureaucracy proposed in the White Paper, but we felt it appropriate that there should be greater freedoms and flexibility for high-performing authorities. I do not think that people will see the four categories that we are proposing as crude league tables. This is a scorecard for individual authorities, and I think that most people will see it that way.

The hon. Gentleman asked why there was no mention in the White Paper of proportional representation for local government elections. It is not in there because it is a daft idea.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It was pretty good, that last remark. We, on this Bench, have spent the last few minutes assessing the Secretary of State's performance indicators, and they have come out reasonably high for the last month. I think we have been in a Byers market. He gets pretty high marks for taking Railtrack back into public ownership. The same applies to his abandoning the public-private partnership on the London underground—I think that is what he said last week. He was also pretty good to take power from the quangos and hand it back to democratically elected local authorities. Very good! We will measure him on that later, and if he comes up with more money for Derbyshire and Bolsover than Westminster, his rating will be 10 out of 10.

Mr. Byers: In everything we do, we will be fair in ensuring that finances are allocated on a needs-based approach, which may well benefit Bolsover and Derbyshire. Decisions will be taken over the next few days in relation to the single capital pot that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government will announce later this week, and also in relation to the local transport plans, which will be published, I think, on Thursday or Friday. Many authorities will benefit from those proposals.

I hope that, when the House has had the opportunity to look at the White Paper, it will see that what we are trying to do is to get a settled position with regard to central-local government relations. Local government does not want constant chopping and changing, and it is important to establish a system that all political parties feel is, on balance, right. I happen to believe that the White Paper achieves that. It proposes a shift in direction, and recognises that many issues are best dealt with not in Westminster or Whitehall but locally, by people who are elected locally and who know the demands and priorities of local people. I hope that that is reflected in the White Paper.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Will the Secretary of State expand on the issue of performance profiles that he mentioned in his statement? He said that he would classify councils into the categories of

> "high performing, striving, coasting and poor performing".

He then said that he would "intervene decisively". What precisely did he mean by that? How will he intervene? Will he intervene both on coasting councils and on poor-performing councils? Will that involve putting them into administration?

Mr. Byers: When the hon. Gentleman has the chance, he will see that, of the four categories, coasting councils are those that are

> "not at the top of the performance spectrum and with limited or no proven capacity to improve",

while poor-performing councils are those

> "consistently near the bottom of the performance spectrum and with limited or no proven capacity to improve."

In the latter category, there may well be grounds on which intervention is appropriate. However, that intervention would not be unilaterally decided by Ministers. Such action would be taken in the light of recommendations by the Audit Commission, which is the appropriate way to ensure that there is no question of party political manipulation or of certain types of council being attacked because of some political prejudice. It will be the Audit Commission that makes those recommendations.

An intervention could take a variety of forms. It could involve a new provider coming in, or it could involve taking a council into administration, then taking it out again, perhaps with a different form of leadership. That is certainly one of the options in the White Paper.

As for coasting authorities, there will be opportunities to try and help them improve their performance—less through intervention than by working with them by means of local agreements. It is a question not of standing aside, but of working co-operatively through local government itself to support authorities with particular difficulties.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to changing the capital control rules. The present rules are nonsense: they are completely out of step with arrangements in the rest of the European Union. Some of us with backgrounds in local government have been fighting for this for many years.

My right hon. Friend did not mention one issue that I regard as a real problem for local government. Until we change the current system whereby 75 per cent. of its funds come from central Government and only 25 per cent. from voters, have we any chance of achieving true local accountability and reinvigorating local democracy—and local government itself? Does my right hon. Friend envisage a solution in the longer term, involving returning more responsibility for raising money to local authorities?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes an important point about capital controls, which do not fit in with any prudential regime of local authority spending. The present arrangement, in which credit approvals in minute detail are given by central Government is unacceptable: it restricts the innovation that we, certainly, would like to see.

As my hon. Friend says, 75 per cent. of funds currently come from central Government while 25 per cent. is raised locally. It is worth reminding the House how we ended up with that balance. In a rather shoddy, sordid quick fix to escape the difficulties caused by the poll tax, the Conservative Government shifted money into increasing VAT.

The Government are considering the issue seriously. A review of the balance of funding is currently under way to establish whether changes should be made, and what sort of changes would be appropriate. It would be premature to forecast the outcome, but the fact that we have set up a group to look at the matter carefully is an indication of the Government's concern about the balance between central and local contributions.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): If, as the Secretary of State just asserted, his White Paper marks a step away from centralisation and is truly about local government, can he assure us that no services currently provided by county councils will be transferred to more remote regional assemblies?

Mr. Byers: That is not an issue for the White Paper. As the right hon. Gentleman probably knows, a White Paper on the question of regional government will be produced in the new year. No doubt it will consider, among other issues, functions and responsibilities that might apply at regional level. Without giving away too much of its content, let me reassure the right hon. Gentleman by reiterating that there will be no imposition of elected regional government on regions. It will be for local people to vote for it if they want to: this will be a local decision.

Most important, the effectiveness of regional government is not about taking powers from local authorities—county, district or unitary. It must be about Secretaries of State and others in Westminster and Whitehall giving up their powers. It is about devolving down, not taking up powers from any kind of local authority.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Does my right hon. Friend agree that all that was missing from the comments of the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) was a candid recognition that the need to restore local government is due entirely to the damage done to it by her party during its too many years in office?

I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, and his commitment to re-empower local authorities. I look forward to further debate on the detail in due course. Does my right hon. Friend accept that there are many examples of good local government throughout the country, not least on Tyneside? The Gateshead and Newcastle authorities have jointly launched a Newcastle-Gateshead initiative, which will work for the revitalisation of the area to the benefit—and with the support—of local people. Following the completion of his duties here, will my right hon. Friend join me downstairs in Terrace Dining Room B, where the two authorities are launching their joint bid to become European capital of culture in 2008?

Mr. Byers: I receive a number of attractive invitations from my hon. Friend, of which that is one, but I cannot say too much about the European capital of culture, as I will be involved in deciding who might be successful. My hon. Friend makes an important point. We have spoken about local councils' limited freedoms, but Members should consider what has been achieved not only on Tyneside, particularly in Gateshead, but by Gateshead and Newcastle working closely together.

The massive improvements along the river have been achieved because we have a good example of local authorities supporting innovation, being adventurous and being ambitious for their communities. What has been achieved on the banks of the Tyne, particularly, if I may say so, in recent times on the south bank and in Gateshead, has made a real difference, and the authorities are to be congratulated on what they have been able to do.

Through the White Paper, I want greater freedoms to be given to good local councils such as Newcastle, Gateshead and many others up and down the country, so that the improvements taking place on Tyneside can be reflected in many other parts of the country.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): The Secretary of State is aware that Wealden district council runs the most effective waste recycling scheme in the country, which involves up to 48 per cent. of waste collected in the district. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members should be aware that the Secretary of State has a personal interest in recycling rubbish, given the way his career is going.

[Mr. Charles Hendry]

Is the Secretary of State aware that that scheme is on hold because of the settlement announced last week? Figures from his Department show that council tax in Wealden will have to rise by 8 per cent. simply to stand still. He says that the burden of a high council tax increase falls on the councils, but is he not aware that his Department's decisions force them to choose between delivering good services and imposing whacking great council tax increases?

Mr. Byers: I do not accept that position, but we are in a consultation period, which will last six weeks or so, and if Wealden council has particular concerns—I know that those exist among some district councils—they can be considered. We shall do precisely that, because the consultation is genuine. This period always throws up difficulties—it was the same under the Conservative Government—but we shall use it genuinely to reflect on the consequences of individual decisions by authorities. There is the possibility of change in the final outcome.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement, particularly his long-term commitment to abolish capping. Parish and town councils are not subject to the cap, so I wonder what place they have in his White Paper. On Monday, I was at Swanage town council, which costs the local council tax payer £50 a year, although it has a budget of more than £500,000. It is clearly an important part of local government, yet my right hon. Friend's Department has no jurisdiction over town and parish councils. How do they fit into the statement?

Mr. Byers: When my hon. Friend has the opportunity to study the White Paper, he will see that the role of parish and town councils is genuinely valued, probably for the first time in a Government document. We shall provide about £30,000 for each parish and town council to support democracy and any proposals that they might have to develop best value in their area. That is a good initiative. The document identifies how real improvements and benefits for each tier of authority will flow from the proposals, and no tier, whether it be the county or the parish or town council, has been left out of the proposals.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): What assistance can the Secretary of State offer this year to local authorities such as the London borough of Havering, which receive a perversely low settlement under the current system? What help can he offer the council tax payers who suffered the third highest increase in the country last year—12.5 per cent.—and who face a possible increase this year of more than 20 per cent? Why is he not receiving any delegations this year?

Mr. Byers: As for Havering, on any judgment the settlement announced last week is obviously generous. The local council in Havering will have to explain why it is even considering a council tax increase at the suggested level. Given the funding that is being made available and, indeed, the additional funds that may be made available as a result of the abolition of the council tax benefit subsidy limitation scheme—which will benefit a number of local councils—the council needs to consider the level of council tax increase that it should be setting. There is no good reason for that proposed increase, as we have made clear.

On receiving representations, we are adopting the same policies as successive Governments—Conservative as well as Labour.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and the White Paper. My right hon. Friend is aware that, back in 1990 with the introduction of the poll tax, my local authority was one of those that were capped—mainly owing to the standard spending assessments. Can he confirm that a new formula will be in place for next year to do away with the SSAs, which have been the blight of local government since 1990? Can he also give some indication of what will be in the new formula to take into account the needs of local authorities?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend has been a powerful advocate for change in the SSA regime. From his experience in his local authority, he knows of the regime's detrimental effect. The mechanism was not designed to reflect the needs of local communities or the degree of service being provided; it had nothing whatever to do with those objectives.

I can confirm that the SSA regime will be abolished—this will be the final year in which it will be used. A new formula will be in place to take effect from April 2003. It will be my intention that the new grant mechanism will reflect service needs and also the level of provision in local authority areas. I hope that, as a result of pressure from authorities such as that of my hon. Friend, there will be real benefits from the changes that might be introduced.

However, I have to give a few words of caution. My worry is that everybody seems to believe that their local authority will be a winner as a result of the formula changes. That will not be the case. The nature of any change of system means that some people will gain while some do not. We shall have to wait to see what the position is for individual authorities, but I am sure that we shall be able to target funds to areas that need them most.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I doubt that the Secretary of State has yet had an opportunity to read yesterday's *Leicester Mercury*. If he had done so, he would have read in the political commentary, under the headline "An idea that's best forgotten":

> "There may be lots of brilliant reasons for regional government but the public has not heard of any. Perhaps, like that old fondue set from the 1970s, the Government should put regional assemblies back in the cupboard."

Will the Secretary of State clarify the answer that he gave my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young)? What is the Government's policy on regional assemblies, which were so proudly trumpeted four years ago in a White Paper issued in 1997?

Mr. Byers: I am afraid that I shall have to repeat the comment that I made earlier: there will be a White Paper in the new year on the whole question of elected regional assemblies. I reaffirm the point that there will be no imposition of regional assemblies on any region that does not want them—it will be left for local people to decide.

We are giving local people the choice as to whether they want an elected regional assembly. That will be welcomed by many people.

We should not be scared to hold the debate about elected regional assemblies. Certainly, there may be people in the east midlands—including those on the *Leicester Mercury*—who do not support such assemblies. Good, let us hold the debate. In most parts of the world, there is strong regional government and we should think about whether that is right for England. At least let us hold the debate—we should not be scared of that—and let local people decide. That is how it should be done. There will be a White Paper in the new year, and people can then make up their own minds.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his extraordinary announcement this afternoon. However, it is difficult to engage our constituents in debate about local democracy when they are trying to unpick the funding formula—never a debating point on the doorstep. When my right hon. Friend replaces the SSAs and is looking for areas of genuine need, will he ensure that his assessment is open, transparent and fair, and that it measures poverty according to genuine poverty indicators—unlike some of the nonsense that we experienced during the 18 Tory years? Will he also ensure that it is fluid enough for genuine local democracy to reflect the needs of rural areas where there are isolated pockets of poverty, so that we can really address those needs? Perhaps then people will have some confidence in the outcomes of local government.

Mr. Byers: We all know the way in which the SSA formula was manipulated by Conservative Members when they were in government to reward some of their favourite councils—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] We all know that that is what happened; the figures are there for everyone to see. Conservative Members know that that is the case. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we have to ensure that the replacement for the SSA regime is fair, open, just and transparent. We shall do precisely that. Most important, the replacement will need to reflect the demands that are made on a local authority service. If there are high levels of poverty and unemployment, or sparsity issues in rural areas, those matters will have to be taken into account when we consider the new formula that will take effect from April 2003.

I assure the House that we shall consult widely on the replacement formula. Above everything else, we shall ensure that people can understand it, and that they know that the system is not fixed in any way, but responds to the needs of a local authority area and reflects the service level being provided.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): As one of those on the Conservative Benches who spent some time in local government before being elected to this place, I ask the Secretary of State to accept that many Opposition Members appreciate the valuable democratic role played by local government whether it is at the parish, town, district or county level. Local government, to be successful, needs to be local. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, to meet the criteria that he has rightly set out in his statement today, funding will—as the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) said—have to be fair? Although the Government did not expect it, my own Macclesfield borough council has been disadvantaged because of the formula change. Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore be prepared to meet me and the chief executive of my council to discuss the problem? Funding is clearly critical to local government's success in meeting the Government standards that he has rightly announced today.

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that a fair funding regime is the crux of the matter. As I said earlier in relation to Wealden, the settlement raises a particular issue in relation to district councils. We are aware of that issue, and I should be more than happy to receive the information on Macclesfield.

Mr. Winterton: At a meeting?

Mr. Byers: I think that the issue goes wider than just Macclesfield, but—

Mr. Winterton: Indeed, it affects a number of other councils.

Mr. Byers: The point that I am trying to make, if I may do so without being interrupted, is that there is a specific issue to do with Macclesfield. I should of course be more than willing to receive that detailed information. However, there is also a wider issue to do with borough councils which we have to address and we are considering it. I hope that we shall be able to give the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) some reassurance about our intentions on that matter.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Having spent my adult life in local government, I ask the Secretary of State to forgive me for not waving my Order Paper when he finished his statement. Does he acknowledge that, behind the smokescreen of past bonfires of controls, previous Governments were frantically fabricating further controls on local authorities? Is he confident that this is indeed a bright new dawn for local government? Will he consider the position in shire districts—particularly as that position is spelled out in my own early-day motion 351—whose funding regimes, as announced last week, have actually experienced a move backwards? Is he confident that the new scheme will, as the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) questioned, provide more generously? I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the need to be eternally vigilant on controls. We have to do that. Today's announcement will make possible a big improvement by reducing the number of plans by more than a third, reducing the number of consents by more than 50 and reviewing another 30 of the consents. However, there will always be further pressure to add new plans and new regulations. As I said, we have to be vigilant to ensure that we do not give in to those particular pressures.

As I acknowledged, we are aware from the consultation process that an issue has arisen from the settlement. We are considering how we can overcome the difficulties that have been caused to a number of shire districts. I am confident that, as a result of consultation and current discussions, we shall be able to make proposals that will ensure that councils do not go backwards, but benefit from the improvements.

David Taylor: Some have gone backwards.

Mr. Byers: Let us be clear that we are now in consultation. The announcement last week was not the final one but part of the consultation process, and many people are expressing their views. If consultation exposes difficulties, we can reflect on them and have a different outcome if we feel it appropriate to do so. In this case, we are likely to be able to respond positively to the concerns expressed.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Does the right hon. Gentleman appreciate that there will be a warm welcome for the removal of capital controls, but some disappointment that he cannot be more explicit about what he intends to do to replace the standard spending assessment? In that respect, can he give a commitment that the iniquitous area cost adjustment is as dead as the standard spending assessment?

Secondly, will he reduce the gross disparities in funding between areas? For example, the funding per pupil in our schools cannot be based on any sensible assessment at the moment.

Finally, can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the new system, whatever it may be, will reflect the real expenditure within local authorities, and take into account the fact that some, like my own in Somerset, have spent massively above the education and social services SSA year after year because of their belief that those services are important and need adequate funding?

Mr. Byers: It would be foolish to rule out particular aspects of the formula. It is too soon to say whether there will be something like the area cost adjustment. There is a genuine issue about levels of pupil funding. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills is looking carefully at how we can improve the position. There has been a dramatic increase in the amount of funding per pupil that we have put in over recent years, and I have no doubt that she will want to continue that.

In terms of the new formula, it is important to consider the level of service provided by the local authority. I do not like the sort of system that we have at present, under which the standard spending assessment bears no relation to the level of spend on particular services in an individual authority such as Somerset. If we are allocating money, we should do so on the basis of the level of service provided by an individual local authority. I am confident that that will be part of the make-up of the new grant regime.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is crucial that the locally raised portion of local government finance is seen to be fair and adequate? Will he look again at whether the business rate should be determined locally rather than nationally? Does he agree that, in the absence of regular revaluations, the council tax will be seen as increasingly unfair and that, because of the multiplier, many people see it as unfair in any case? There are not enough bands to ensure that people in very low-value properties feel that they are paying a fair whack through the council tax. Will my right hon. Friend consider that issue as well?

Mr. Byers: We have no proposals to change the existing business rate arrangements. The White Paper outlines the proposition of business improvement districts, which the House has been informed of before, and goes into some detail about how we want to carry forward that initiative.

We have announced that there will be a revaluation, and the aim is to introduce it with effect from 2007. There is a genuine issue about low-value properties and the extent to which the system is seen as unfair. We indicate in the White Paper that there may be opportunities to look in detail at ways of dealing with that. As my hon. Friend knows, there are a number of properties of lower value in the north-west of England. People believe that it is unfair that there is no distinction between the levels in band A, and we may wish to consider that. I accept my hon. Friend's points; we need to ensure that people regard the council tax as fair, and I know that there are reservations about that.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): May I tell the Secretary of State that today's announcement of the reform of local government financing will be welcome in Worcestershire, so long as he takes into account the statements about fairness, about which we have heard so much this afternoon? He will be aware that last week's local government settlement did not go down well in Worcestershire because, once again, the gap between the funding for children in Worcestershire's schools and the English local authority average increased even further. At the moment, about £250 less is spent on the schooling of children in Worcestershire than the average for all English local authorities, and that gap grew again by £17 in the secondary school sector. The right hon. Gentleman will also be aware that the head teachers forum is proposing to take the Government to the European court on the issue of fairness, so can I take a message back to the forum to the effect that, far from growing wider, the gap will at the very least start to diminish under his new arrangements?

Mr. Byers: The local government settlement announced last week shows that Worcestershire received an increase well above the rate of inflation. Many people would regard that as a reasonable settlement in the circumstances, but, obviously, the head teachers there will need to take whatever steps they feel are appropriate. I hope that, beyond 2003, the new funding formula will be fair, just and transparent and that the head teachers and parents of Worcestershire will be able to see that such a scheme is put in place. I have to tell the hon. Lady that one of the reasons why they have been discriminated against over the years is that the Conservative funding formula in place since 1990 has led to an appalling settlement for Worcestershire. I am pleased that Worcestershire has had an increase well above the rate of inflation this year.

Mr. Neil Turner (Wigan): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and the whole team on this afternoon's statement, which represents a fundamental shift in the relationship between local and central Government, dismantling the command system that the Conservative party built up, year on year, during its time in office. It does not simply represent a bonfire of regulations; it represents a bonfire of the vanities—the vanity which says that Westminster knows best and that Whitehall can devise one system that fits all. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the White Paper builds on the Local Government Act 2000, under which local authorities are allowed to serve their communities better? I particularly welcome the abolition of the council tax benefit subsidy limitation scheme, which hits poorer communities such as mine disproportionately. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that that scheme will be abolished in 2002–03?

Mr. Byers: The White Paper builds on the steps that were taken in the previous Parliament, during which we considered the constitution of local authorities. In the current White Paper, we consider the level of service and the relationship between local and central Government, and we shall try to put it on a totally new footing which respects the important role that local government can play. I knew that my proposals on the abolition of the council tax benefit subsidy limitation scheme would be welcomed in Wigan, because I attended a meeting there about six weeks ago at which I was told in the clearest possible terms that one of the positive things that we could do in the White Paper was to propose the abolition of the scheme. My hon. Friend strongly supported that proposal. I am delighted that we have been able to deliver on the Wigan recommendations. Yes, I can confirm that that proposal will be introduced with effect from April 2002.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): The Secretary of State mentioned that there were particular problems and issues relating to shire district councils, and he was certainly correct in that respect. He also prayed the Local Government Association in aid in support of his proposals. Will he therefore explain to the House why the LGA is in serious dispute with his Department about the way in which it expressed the funding increases for shire district councils in his related statement only last week?

Mr. Byers: The position is very clear. I was specifically referring to the joint partnership approach whereby the priorities for local government are identified jointly between central and local government. There is no big dispute about the presentation of the figures in the settlement announced last week. An issue has arisen through the consultation process and, as I have mentioned before, the situation is clear. We are considering the issue in the light of representations that have been made and I hope to be able to respond positively. That is what happens during consultation. There would have been a real issue if we had just announced the final settlement last week, but we did not do that. We said, "Here are the figures, and now we will consult." An issue has arisen in relation to the districts and it is one to which I hope to be able to respond positively.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement, especially the reforms that he is introducing to capital funding. Will he confirm that under the changes he has announced local authorities such as the London borough of Merton will be better placed to examine the contribution they can make to the financing of major community projects, such as the search in my constituency for a new home for Wimbledon football club or the need to rebuild the civic hall? That hall had to be sold off when the Tories were in office; Merton had a Tory council and the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), who leads for the Opposition on this issue, was a Tory councillor in Wimbledon Park ward.

Mr. Byers: Most of us know that the approach that the Conservatives took to local councils, as in many other areas, was to sell everything off. I was not aware that the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) was a member of Merton council at the time when it sold off its assets, but that is the nature of Conservatives in local as well as central government. Many of our crucial utilities were similarly sold off. Local councils will now have the scope to support community projects. The new capital freedoms that we intend to give will allow Merton to develop a site, perhaps in partnership with Wimbledon football club, or to make provision for a civic hall. Those flexibilities and freedoms will be available as a result of the changes that we have introduced, which did not exist under the Conservatives in government.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must move on.

Points of Order

4.42 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My point of order concerns motion 9 on the Order Paper, which was placed there only this morning. Is it in accordance with the rules of the House for the Government to place on the Order Paper a proposal that we should give them the authority, without debate or discussion, to participate in the drafting of a European arrest warrant that would entitle any other member state to arrest in the UK a citizen of our nation whom it believes to have voiced an opinion contrary to its laws? That is an important and significant undermining of our rights and freedoms, in that it would deprive our Government and courts of the right to object to extradition even if they believed it to be unfair and unreasonable.

Do you consider it is right to place on the Order Paper a proposal of that sort in a way that makes no provision for debate? If by chance it is in order, can you give me an assurance that, if the order is objected to at 10 o'clock tonight, its approval will be delayed until the House has the opportunity to vote on it tomorrow under the deferred voting procedure? I am sorry to take up the time of the House, but it is a very important point.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I want to answer the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), and my answer may assist the right hon. Gentleman. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. I am satisfied that everything that has been done conforms with the rules relating to the consideration of such documents. I understand that the document was debated in European Standing Committee B yesterday and reported to the House in the usual manner. I can confirm that, if the motion is objected to after 10 o'clock tonight, it could give rise to a deferred Division tomorrow afternoon.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. In your ruling, you referred to a document that was debated yesterday in European Standing Committee B, which I attended. Unfortunately, that document is not the final text that will be agreed at the European Council meeting to take place shortly. Therefore, the House has not scrutinised the final form of the instrument in question. I believe that that is in breach of Standing Orders and the resolution of the House of 1998 that insists that nothing of a European legislative nature shall be agreed or passed without full scrutiny taking place first. Because we did not have the up-to-date document, such scrutiny did not take place.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman raises a new issue. I shall consider it and get back to him and, if necessary, to the House.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it on the same matter?

Mr. Wilkinson: Yes, I serve on the Committee.

May I point out that not only was the document that we were discussing out of date—it related to a Council meeting that took place on 31 October—but a French document exists that relates to an interim discussion that took place at the Justice and Home Affairs Council. French is a working language of the Community and, had a translation of that document been produced, it would have been entirely germane to our proceedings. It was not produced, so our proceedings essentially considered a document that was out of date. Will you bear that point in mind?

Mr. Speaker: I will bear that point in mind. I give the same assurance that I gave earlier. I will look into the matter and come back to the hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) and, if necessary, to the House.

Norman Baker (Lewes): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek to raise a point of which I have given you prior notice. It relates to the guidance that you helpfully gave the House recently on parliamentary answers. You indicated that Ministers should be as open and as helpful as possible in response to Members' queries.

As an example, I draw your attention to an answer that I received from the Leader of the House yesterday when I asked him if he could list the orders made through the Privy Council under the royal prerogative in each year from 1997 to date. He said that the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost, but an answer to an identical question tabled on 3 March 1993 at column 203 listed all the orders in full detail.

I tabled another question to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions about flights carrying radioactive material, and that was met with the answer:

> "This Department does not hold statistical information of this nature."—[*Official Report*, 4 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 286W.]

However, when I tabled an almost identical question in 1997, it elicited facts about how many flights had occurred and about the nature of the radioactive material involved—high, low or intermediate grade.

Sadly, it seems that Ministers are not paying attention to your guidance and are being less helpful. I will, of course, draw the matter to the attention of the Public Administration Committee, but would be grateful if you would issue further advice to Ministers to inform them that they should listen to what you have said and ensure that questions are properly answered.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has answered his question himself. He can go to the Public Administration Committee if he so wishes. He referred to individual questions and replies, but I cannot give a ruling on them. He can pursue the matter and, if he studies my rulings, he will see that I have provided more than one piece of advice on the subject.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. There is a great deal of confusion about the possibility of further troop deployments to Afghanistan. This morning's *Washington Post* reported:

> "Britain has agreed to lead an international peacekeeping force in Afghanistan for up to six months".

That fact seems to have been confirmed by the Prime Minister who said this afternoon:

> "We have indicated in principle a willingness to play a leading role in any UN-mandated force to provide stability in Afghanistan."

Have you, Mr. Speaker, received any indication that the Government are likely to make a statement on that matter in fulfilment of the Prime Minister's assurances that the House would be informed first about changes and developments in Government policy?

Mr. Speaker: I have not received such an indication, but the hon. Gentleman is right to say that news of this nature should come to the House first and I hope that it will.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You probably heard about this matter on the "Today" programme this morning. A BBC report says:

> "The Government has now"—

I stress now—

> "accepted a recommendation from the public administration select committee that ministers should tell Parliament first"

of any policy changes. But you will recall that you have said on numerous occasions that policy should be announced in this place first, and I was in the House when your predecessor Speaker Boothroyd made the same point.

Is it not extraordinary that the Prime Minister is now saying that the Government will carry out that policy, thus implying that that was not previously the case? Even though Ministers frequently said that this place received information first, it did not. Could you, Mr. Speaker, meet the Prime Minister or someone from the Cabinet Office to determine when the policy will be instigated?

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman is saying that the Prime Minister failed previously and has now made a statement to say that he has changed his mind, then a sinner has repented. We should all rejoice in that.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that during Health questions, my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) asked about the recruitment of HIV-positive people as nurses in the NHS. It was clear from the response of the Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), that she had no idea, which is understandable, that my hon. Friend had received a written answer confirming that that was happening. However, she went on to criticise my hon. Friend for raising what is a serious issue. She suggested that he was stigmatising people with AIDS and that it was unhelpful to raise the issue in the House. If hon. Members are not supposed to raise questions of such a serious nature in the House of Commons with Health Ministers, where are they supposed to raise them?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) was able to raise the matter with the Minister. I allowed him to do so. That will always be the case for hon. Members. The Minister's response is not, however, a matter for me.

Sex Discrimination (Amendment)

4.52 pm

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): I beg to move,

> That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Sex Discrimination Act 1975; to make provision with respect to discrimination concerning the provision of goods, facilities, services and access to governance by private member clubs; and to continue to permit wholly single-sex clubs and sporting events.

I welcome the opportunity to present another Bill to outlaw discrimination in private members' clubs. When I introduced a similar Bill two years ago, I did not foresee its far-reaching implications. I had personal experience of the injustice of a club that offered membership to both men and women, but which discriminated against women by offering them only inferior membership. They had second-class status with no access to the governance of that club.

My experience was of the Carlton club where I had been part of a campaign to remedy that injustice. On two separate occasions, the club narrowly missed the opportunity to move itself into the modern world. In the summer of 1999, I raised the issue again at the club's annual meeting. I was greeted with derision. After the meeting, otherwise intelligent men told me that I should have been asked to resign on the spot for having the audacity to ask the committee to reconsider its decision. I gave the club six months to re-address the issue, otherwise I could no long remain a member.

As a constituency Member of Parliament, I know that 52 per cent. of my electorate are women. As a Conservative Member of Parliament, whose party has been led by a woman and was home to the first woman MP to sit in the House, I find such discrimination intolerable.

Although others before and since have resigned from the Carlton, on this issue the club would not budge, so in November 1999 I resigned. In December that year, I drew No. 11 in the private Members' ballot. If I could not change the rules of the Carlton club, at least I could try to change the law. I was not in a high enough position to secure a decent Second Reading, but I was close enough to give my Bill an airing, if only for 32 seconds. It was, of course, blocked through the good offices of the Government Whip, but not before the full magnitude of the issue had been revealed.

It was not only the gentlemen's clubs of St. James's that practised this outdated form of discrimination. They were small fry; there were bigger offenders among the working men's clubs of the north, mostly Labour clubs, but some Conservative clubs too. However, their prejudice was generally born out of ignorance. The real villains of the piece were the golf clubs. Here a strict commercial logic prevailed, but one that was based in a bygone age and on a pattern of life that had last existed in the 1950s.

Here the ladies were obliged to play golf on weekdays, before the man of the house was home from the office. The gentlemen could not be expected to give way to the ladies on Saturdays and Sundays: the attitude was, "Goddam it man, any self-respecting gel should be at home cooking lunch or looking after the children on a Saturday morning." Those clubs honestly believed that while men had work to do during the week, women were at leisure or shopping. It was as if no working woman, with a career or business interests, would be the sort of

[Mr. Robert Walter]

woman they wanted in their club, on their greens or in their bar. Oh, how the world has changed! It appears that when the Sex Discrimination Act was passed in 1975, those arguments could still be justified. A quarter of a century later, they are totally unacceptable.

I am grateful for the support that I received when I last rehearsed these arguments in support of my first Sex Discrimination (Amendment) Bill, and for my wife's sterling work in drafting and in corralling support. I am grateful to the Fawcett Society for its support, and most particularly, to colleagues in all parties and in both Houses for their encouragement. A number of my colleagues have followed me and resigned from the Carlton club, but this issue goes so much further than a parochial spat. It is no longer acceptable that an institution can offer its membership and facilities to men and women and then say that one sex can be admitted only on inferior terms. We would be outraged if they did so on the grounds of race, religion or disability.

I have no argument with single-sex clubs. I see little attraction in them, but they seem to do no one any harm. I acknowledge the physical difference between men and women, and therefore have no problem with sporting events confined to either sex. The purpose of this Bill is to right the omissions of an earlier Act, introduced in another era. It is no longer right nor just for a woman to be offered inferior membership and facilities by any club, merely on the grounds of her gender. It is plainly wrong, offensive and outdated, and I ask the House to permit the Bill to be read a Second time.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Robert Walter, Mr. Anthony Steen, Joan Ruddock, Mr. John Burnett, Mr. David Curry and Mr. Derek Wyatt.

SEX DISCRIMINATION (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Robert Walter accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Sex Discrimination Act 1975; to make provision with respect to discrimination concerning the provision of goods, facilities, services and access to governance by private member clubs; and to continue to permit wholly single-sex clubs and sporting events: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 15 March, and to be printed [Bill 66].

ESTIMATES DAY

[1st Allotted Day]

VOTE ON ACCOUNT 2002-03

World Athletics Championships

[Relevant documents: First Report from the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Session 2001–02, on Unpicking the Lock: the World Athletics Championships in the UK, HC 264; and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport: Annual Report 2001, Cm 5114.]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That resources, not exceeding £1,489,011,000, be authorised, on account, for use during the year ending on 31st March 2003, and that a sum, not exceeding £1,488,290,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for the year ending on 31st March 2003 for expenditure by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.—*[Mr. Caborn]*

5 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I thank the House for the opportunity to debate so soon after its presentation to the House the first report produced by the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport in this Parliament. I thank all my hon. Friends on the Select Committee, meaning Members on both sides of the House who are Committee members, for their work on the report and the fact that it was unanimous, as has been the case with almost all our reports. I should like to take the opportunity to pay tribute to a former Select Committee member, David Faber, the former Member for Westbury, whom we miss on the Committee and who contributed remarkable knowledge and expertise, particularly to our consideration of the subject that we are debating this afternoon.

The report, "Unpicking the Lock: the World Athletics Championships in the UK", is the fourth in a series of reports published by the Select Committee in the past three years. Our first report was published in May 1999; the second in March 2000; the third in March 2001; and the most recent, which we are looking at this afternoon, was published last month. As we said at the start of the report, it threads its way through a "sorry and convoluted" saga and assigns responsibility for what it calls a "mess". I wish to make it clear that both the main parties in the House of Commons have responsibility for that. Under the previous Government, the English Sports Council which, for a reason that escapes me, now calls itself Sport England, launched a competition and assigned £120,000 in lottery money, with which we deal in detail in our report.

The process and the mistakes began under the previous Government and, to the Committee's regret, continued under the present Government. We assign responsibility for the mistakes to a number of participants in the saga, including the Department for Culture, Media and Sport which, in the Committee's view, involved itself beyond its locus and vires in decisions, first, on the national stadium, then in attempted decisions on an athletics stadium that the Government were never going to finance and for the building of which they had no responsibility. The Department then involved itself in a compensation deal—the repayment of £20 million of the £120 million advanced under the lottery funding agreement—which was in no way the Government's business, then championed a new stadium at Picketts Lock, without saying where the funding would come from or how the infrastructure would be provided.

Our report assigns responsibility to Sport England, which handed out £120 million to the Football Association for a stadium which, purportedly, was to be built at Wembley. However, planning permission for that stadium had not even been sought. Today, I have received a 40-page document from a well known member of the dramatis personae in these events, Mr. Ken Bates. He has provided me with a document entitled "Wembley National Stadium: A Project Overview 1998-July 2001", which was compiled by Mr. Bob Stubbs, the former chief executive of Wembley National Stadium Ltd.

I shall not quote from the document at length, as I do not believe that it would be fair to do so. Mr. Bates makes a robust case, but it is conceivable, on past experience, that that case might be challenged by others. However, the document is important, and what is clear from it and, I believe, cannot be challenged is what Mr. Bates or Mr. Stubbs states at the beginning, under the heading "Project Genesis":

> "The project arose directly from the establishment of the National Lottery."

Sport England was therefore the organisation primarily responsible for the initiation of the national stadium project.

On page 11 of the document, Mr. Bates or Mr. Stubbs states:

> "Up to July 2001 progress had not been in line with the conditions of the lottery funding agreement. Sport England had, on a regular basis, varied the agreed timetable to ensure default did not occur.
>
> It is entirely at Sport England's discretion whether an extension of time should be granted. Should an extension not be granted, default would occur and if the default was not rectified, the only real remedy available to Sport England would be to seek recovery of the grant, leading to the project aborting."

Sport England therefore has considerable responsibility in the matter, which I do not believe it would deny, although it might well argue about the nature of its responsibility. Indeed, I received a two-page letter—private and confidential—from Mr. Trevor Brooking which, as might have been expected, absolved Sport England of all culpability in the episode.

It is indisputable that after the money had been assigned to Wembley stadium, Sport England watched supinely as the then Secretary of State came to a deal with the Football Association for the repayment of £20 million of the lottery money—a deal which violated the lottery funding agreement. The details of the lottery funding agreement are examined in our report and in the new document provided by Mr. Bates. Sport England made no public protest of any kind and no objection to the deal, which invaded its own responsibilities. It watched the FA flout the deal and the lottery funding agreement, and did nothing whatever about it.

Although the report that we have published is, in general, supportive of the actions of the current Secretary of State, it must be said that with regard to the refunding of the £20 million, Mr. Patrick Carter is apparently involved in negotiations, although he has no legal vires to be involved in the matter, either.

The Football Association took the £120 million. It made no positive move to build the stadium, which had become its responsibility. It did not tell the Secretary of

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

State that building the stadium or cancelling the stadium was its responsibility in consequence of the lottery funding agreement, and was not within the remit of the Secretary of State. However, what the FA has done and shows every sign of continuing to do is to hold on to the £120 million lottery grant, as if it were stuck to it like flypaper.

Buzzing around the mess like flies was a host of bodies, hardly any of which had any money, power or responsibility, but all of which demanded to be listened to and, heaven help us, were listened to. That added to the complications and contributed to what I do not like to call, but what can only be called, the fiasco that we are examining this afternoon. In addition to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Sport England, the FA and its offshoot, Wembley National Stadium Ltd., we know that the British Olympic Association, UK Athletics, Ellerbe Becket architects, UK Sport, the Lee Valley regional park authority, the council of the London borough of Enfield, the Government Office for London, the Greater London Authority, Transport for London, London 2005 and the Wembley taskforce were involved in this series of bizarre events. Uncle Tom Cobbleigh may have been absent, but Fred Karno was definitely on parade.

The process of building the stadium—or, as it turns out, the process of not building it—if it can be dignified with the epithet "process", was aimed at providing either one stadium that would house football and athletics, or two stadiums, one for football and the other for athletics. The objective for one or both was to stage the world cup and the world athletics championships of 2005, and potentially the Olympic games if a bid was made. However, we have ended up with no stadium, rather than one or perhaps two, no world cup and no world athletics championships in this country. To date, according to criteria advanced by the British Olympic Association, from which I received a visit only a few days ago, there is no basis for making an Olympic bid. Meanwhile, the city of Paris has a stadium that staged the 1998 world cup final and was the venue for the 1999 rugby union world cup. It will also be the venue for the 2003 world athletics championships and is suitable for staging the Olympic games.

With regard to our not hosting the world athletics championships, I should mention a statement published today in the *Financial Times*. It was made by Lamine Diack, president of the International Association of Athletics Federations. The accuracy of the statement may be challenged, but whether it is accurate or not, it displays the view of that association on the miasma with which it was faced in considering the allocation of the games. Mr. Diack said that it was faced with the prospect of hosting the world championships

> "in Wembley in 2001, then Wembley in 2003 and 2005, then Twickenham or Crystal Palace in 2005, then Pickett's Lock in 2005 and finally Sheffield in 2005."

What unites all those venues is that the world athletics championships are to be held in none of them. Our international reputation cannot have prospered as a result of that confusion.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the situation is even worse than that? Wembley stadium was rejected because the sightlines were thought inappropriate for Olympic athletics events. Is he aware, however, that the very same platform that was to be provided for Wembley stadium is now being purchased in the United States, and that the International Olympic Committee has said that the sightlines are ideal and that there will be no bar on holding any Olympic event in the American stadiums?

Mr. Kaufman: I am only too aware of what the hon. Gentleman says. The world-class expert on sightlines is Mr. David Faber, who enlightened the Culture, Media and Sport Committee a great deal during our discussions.

The Select Committee has the right to hold firm views on these matters. There is no point in being modest about the fact that we have been right on the main issues from the beginning. On the purported athletics stadium at Picketts Lock, the Committee gave detailed reasons against the project on the basis of six challenges, all of which were vindicated by Patrick Carter's report and have been accepted by the current Secretary of State. If we had been heeded, between our two reports, 15 months would not have been wasted on consideration of a venue to which only one person doggedly adheres today. All the reasons that we advanced have since been accepted as valid and accurate. As I said, they have been fully accepted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

On Wembley stadium, as the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) indicated, we recommended a convertible stadium capable of housing both football and athletics. That recommendation in our report was rejected instantly by the then Secretary of State, but is now recognised as an appropriate solution by all knowledgeable authorities.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Given that hosting athletics at Wembley has been rejected not once, but twice, by Wembley National Stadium Ltd., and if we agree with reports published in *The Observer* and other newspapers at the weekend stating that if the stadium now goes ahead, it is unlikely to include athletics, why do the Committee and its Chairman believe that athletics will occur there in future?

Mr. Kaufman: To say that I had confidence about anything that is related to this issue would be to exaggerate my strength of character. None the less, it must be accepted that many of the organisations that are now involved in the matter believe that a convertible Wembley is the solution. What must be said—my hon. Friend is certainly right on this point—is that there is no possibility whatever of it being available for the 2005 world athletics championships. Nobody would argue with that. As I said, the Committee recommended a convertible Wembley stadium and the proposal was rejected instantly by the then Secretary of State. It is now accepted by knowledgeable authorities. If we had been heeded and the project had proceeded, London would now be all set to host the 2005 world athletics championships, which have instead been lost to this country.

It would be easy but futile for the Committee simply to play the game of saying, "I told you so." All of us, in the Committee, the House and sporting organisations, must draw what lessons we can from this debacle. Lesson one is for the FA. It is to say, "Don't be greedy, but be efficient. If you want a stadium, raise the money and get planning permission. Don't hold out the begging bowl for public money; get on and build it. If politicians try to interfere, tell them to keep their prying noses out and their meddling hands off." If that sounds phantasmagoric, I advise hon. Members to look at today's newspapers and consider what happened yesterday with regard to the new Arsenal stadium. Arsenal decided that it wanted to build the stadium and found ways of raising money. It did not ask for a penny of public or lottery money. It got planning permission yesterday and will now go ahead with a project that will not only result in a shining new stadium, but be a factor in urban regeneration in the area. That is a model of what can be done and what the FA could have done if it had been so minded.

The second lesson is for Sport England. I say to that body, "The lottery money that you dispense is not your pocket money to spend on impulse purchases. It is a public trust, which you have violated by being, in the words of our report, 'slack and negligent', and by what we describe in restrained language as a 'cavalier and egregious use of public funds'."

Last week, in the Select Committee's current inquiry into swimming, Sport England stated that it had devoted £220 million of lottery funding to swimming throughout England in the five years from 1997 to September 2001. Swimming faces a funding crisis. Sport England provided it with an average of £45 million a year, compared with £120 million for a Wembley stadium, which is still on the drawing board according to the most optimistic assessment. I stress that point to my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love).

Sport England should have acted long ago to prise the money from the rich Football Association's greedy fingers. If the FA makes a new decision to build a Wembley stadium, it should have to undergo the whole process of bidding for lottery money again because the project would not be the same as that for which it received the money.

Lesson three is for the Government. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is present. However, I tell her that if she wants to build a national stadium, she should draw up the plans, determine its uses, decide on the site, obtain the money and get on with it. If she does not intend to do all that, I tell her with the utmost courtesy to keep out and shut up; it is none of her business. Governments of both parties have poor records as building contractors, from the British Library, which took 30 years to build, to the subject of today's debate. I should be happy if my hon. Friends on the Front Bench got on with work on the national health service, education and law and order and left building to contractors and project managers.

In the Select Committee's view, my right hon. Friend has made the right hands-off decisions so far. She has disentangled herself from the tar baby that constitutes the project. I hope that it is not true, but I read in the press that she may get involved in a new process and even launch a competition. She knows the regard in which I hold her, and I tell her that she would be crazy to do that. Having got out of one mess, it would be a serious error to get into another.

Lesson four is for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. This country has come to grief over a series of events. They include the millennium dome, for which both parties bear responsibility; the world cup bid; and the world athletics championships bid. There has never been a co-ordinated policy under Governments of either party, and there is no such policy on the Olympics. The only exception is the Commonwealth games because my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister acted on the recommendation of the Select Committee report in May 1999 to appoint a Minister to co-ordinate and progress them. Consequently, a structure exists that can make the Commonwealth games a success.

The May 1999 report recommended the same approach, including appointing a Minister of events for Wembley. However, we were ignored. We made the recommendation again in the report that we published in March 2000 on Wembley national stadium. Again, we were ignored, and the shambles that we are considering today ensued.

The new report also recommends that the Prime Minister appoint an events Minister. I hope that, in view of the series of sagas, he will listen and act. Otherwise, it would be sensible to abandon pretensions to staging complex events in this country. If we do not have the structure, we should not make the effort.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): My right hon. Friend and Chairman of the Select Committee has been a little coy in his remarks so far. I recall that the Select Committee and the report was somewhat more critical of the former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport over the decision to pull the rug from under a Wembley stadium that would have included athletics. If that fundamental decision had not been made, we would not be worried about £120 million and the refund, or the lack of venue for the world athletics championships. Perhaps my right hon. Friend will tell hon. Members a little more of what we said about that.

Mr. Kaufman: My hon. Friend is well aware of the report's contents because she participated in drafting it and the personal references that it makes. Perhaps if she catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, she can amplify her comments and quote from the report more fully. However, I am conscious that our time is limited and I do not want to take up too much of that of other hon. Members, who I am sure have useful and interesting comments to make.

Last week, representatives of international swimming, such as Anita Lonsborough, Sharon Davies and Duncan Goodhew, attended the Select Committee meeting. We have also met many other athletes during our inquiries. This country has the talent and our sports people have the commitment to make it an illustrious world centre. If the episode that the report considers means that a salutary lesson has been learned, it may not have been in vain.

5.26 pm

Nick Harvey (North Devon): I welcome the opportunity to debate such important matters this afternoon and to consider the Select Committee's excellent report, which was described in characteristic style by the Chairman.

The background to the debate is the failure of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to provide a long-term strategy for sport in this country. The Government's withdrawal of Picketts Lock as the venue for the world athletics championships should not have come as a surprise to anyone who has studied the Department's performance in recent years. It merely represents another missed opportunity for British sport.

[Nick Harvey]

The first aspect to note about the handling of the bid for the world athletics championships is the damage that it has done, not only to the Government and their Ministers, past and present, but to this country's sporting future. The United Kingdom's failure to recognise sport and make it an integral part of the country's culture, health and social fabric is laying waste all sorts of opportunities to promote sport and fitness in this country.

Our failure to provide a venue in London, thereby sacrificing the 2005 championships, was not only embarrassing for Ministers but harmful to many others. It has almost certainly jeopardised any bids that this country makes in the foreseeable future. The world athletics championships are the third biggest sporting event in the world. London would have hosted 3,000 athletes and officials, and the event would have been broadcast across the world to an audience of millions. We should make no mistake: London is more than capable of staging such an event, given the right planning and preparation. Manchester is successfully preparing for the Commonwealth games next year. The relatively small Canadian city of Edmonton held the last world athletics championships, and Kuala Lumpur hosted the last Commonwealth games.

London is larger and more populous than both Manchester and Edmonton, and more economically successful than Kuala Lumpur when it held the Commonwealth games. It can arguably harness a bigger and more enthusiastic sporting audience than any of those cities. If London's bid had been coherent and well thought through, I have no doubt that it could have been successful.

However, if we are now an international laughing stock, judged incapable of holding the world athletics championships—the third biggest event—we have surely lost any chance of hosting the Olympics or football's world cup finals. The Department's actions have not only injured the Department itself but flattened any hopes that the British Olympic Association or the Football Association might have had of hosting either tournament.

The withdrawal of Picketts Lock has also been damaging to the country's athletes. A home venue gives athletes a competitive advantage, and the world athletics championships would have brought significant financial benefits to our sports people. However, those unique sponsorship and training opportunities have been denied to them by inept organisation and, if the report is to be believed, by deals struck in smoky kitchens.

The most fundamental problem is that the loss of the championships has robbed the country of the chance to witness something spectacular and inspirational, and robbed us too of a generation of sporting heroes. School playing fields continue to be sold off, and the two-hour mandatory minimum for school physical education is missed in three age groups out of four. Our children lead more sedentary lives than ever before, yet the opportunity has been missed to present sport in its best light—as competitive and healthy and as an inspiration.

The failure to stage an event of such importance is indicative of a greater failure to provide an overarching sports strategy for the country as a whole. On the one hand, Ministers hope that this country will be able to support Olympic and football world cup bids. On the other hand, however, they do not believe it to be Government's responsibility to co-ordinate, back or underwrite them. As recently as last week, an answer from the Minister for Sport indicated that the responsibility for such matters resided with the governing bodies of the individual sports.

The message is therefore divided: we want the events, but it is down to individual cities, regions or sports bodies to take responsibility for organising them. Surely the lesson to be learned from this fiasco is that in the future it must be central Government's responsibility to take matters by the scruff of the neck. They should decide whether serious bids are to be made and, if so, to see them through.

We have been told that the money saved from the abortive bid—it is not really money saved at all, but money lost and time wasted—will be ploughed back into athletics. Yet we are also told that the demands on Sport England must now be met from an ever-decreasing pot of resources. Our ambitions for the future must be matched with greater resources, and they will probably have to come from Government.

A decision must also be made about our priorities. Do we want high-profile world events, or should we concentrate on grass roots development? With Sport England's pot declining from £325 million a couple of years ago to a projected £180 million in 2003, we cannot, at the current rate of progress, attempt to do both.

The Minister for Sport described last week how disappointed he was that the IAAF had rejected the offer to hold the championships in Sheffield, which he said would have provided an outstanding venue for the 2005 championships. However, that invites the following question: if Sheffield was such an ideal location, why did the Department throw its weight behind an expensive but seemingly superfluous facility in London? Either Sheffield was adequate as a venue, or Picketts Lock would have been another expensive white elephant. It would have followed other white elephants such as the millennium dome, which was also the Department's responsibility, so perhaps the Department should consider establishing a zoo.

The flawed bid to hold the championships at Picketts Lock was, we are told, likely to have cost between £90 million and £120 million. That was before Carter reported on problems with transport, location and accommodation.

The hastily prepared bid to hold the championships at Sheffield—where many of the facilities already exist, and where the greatest cost would have been increasing seating capacity to 43,000, compared to 60,000 at Edmonton—would have cost about £25 million. In either case, there is no doubt that such events cannot be solely supported or underwritten by Sport England.

The chairman of Sport England, Trevor Brooking, said last week that he saw no way this country could ever bid for an Olympics or a world cup without the Government being involved directly and financially. I agree that there is no way that the most recent Olympics in Sydney could have passed off so successfully without the backing of Australia's central Government.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): The stadium company is now bankrupt.

Nick Harvey: It is neither fair nor sensible that individual cities or regions—or individual sports governing bodies—should bear the sole and exclusive financial risks of hosting one of the three big multi-venue events. As the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) noted from a sedentary position, the high cost of the Olympics has affected the profitability of the stadium company, which is now bankrupt. However, no gains could have been made if the Australian Government had not been willing to accept the risk and the liability throughout the duration of the games. They will have to oversee the legacy, which—for now—is a bankrupt stadium.

It is true that some of the benefits that such tournaments bring—improved infrastructure and a wider range of facilities—accrue solely to the city that hosts the event, but there are many other aspects of holding big international events that benefit the profile and economy of the entire country. That is why it is right for central Government to adopt a hands-on approach and take responsibility for such ventures. However, what this Government have done is to make the Football Association a gift of £120 million, instead of investing the money in a national home for athletics.

That sum has gone to the country's richest sport, which reaps huge rewards and profits from television receipts. Moreover, if the report is to be believed, the terms of the deal were altered fundamentally at a private meeting in the house of the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), at which no appropriate civil servant was present.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, as he has referred directly and inaccurately to me. A meeting did indeed take place between Mr. Ken Bates and me. A civil servant was present and took a full minute of the meeting. The record rests in the Department.

Nick Harvey: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that clarification. I do not know whether he is specifically contradicting the report's account of where the meeting took place, but I am grateful to him for commenting.

There seems to have been no viable, credible or coherent business plan in place to support the Wembley project. At the very least, we can say that Sport England should have made that a precondition for agreeing to any grant. We are not yet privy to the Carter report on Wembley, which needs to be placed in the public domain before we can arrive at absolute conclusions about this saga.

In addition, it is clear that no further money has been invested in athletics, either at its grass roots or its apex; so football has £120 million of lottery players' money gathering interest in its coffers. That money was given on the basis of fulfilling criteria that were initially flawed, later changed and recently removed altogether.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I wish to clarify one point. The £120 million is not sitting in a bank account somewhere. The scandal is that the money has been used to buy the land, which has just been left unused. That is one of the important points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), the Chairman of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee.

Nick Harvey: The hon. Gentleman is right, and that is shameful.

The decision to remove athletics from Wembley was, in my view, disastrous and should never have been agreed. That flawed decision set in train the sequence of events that culminated in the sad, embarrassing but probably quite correct decision to pull the plug on Picketts Lock. While Carter's report remains in the hands of his team and the FA, this House has no idea how the £120 million of good causes cash is being accounted for at the moment.

Michael Fabricant: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has had the chance to read the transcript of the evidence given to the Select Committee, but is he aware of what the Secretary of State—who is in her place at present—told the Committee? She said that although she

"would not hold the IAAF to this",

her feeling was that

"the possibility of a non-London option was not one on which the door was firmly closed."

In other words, as late as 23 October, the Government still believed that the international athletics games would go to the Don Valley.

Nick Harvey: Had the Government had some disastrous reason to go to the IAAF in the months preceding a tournament that was supposed to have been held in London and said that, owing to an explosion or some unforeseen circumstance, they had to offer another city in London's stead, they could reasonably have expected a sympathetic hearing. However, it was over-optimistic in the extreme of them to make such an offer four years in advance of the tournament. One of the other lessons worth reflecting on is that the competition to hold the games was never exactly hot. That should have told the Government something.

As the saga has gone on, however, the goalposts have not only been moved but have been taken away along with the ball and the teams. If the FA is going to keep the £120 million of lottery money, it should also be bound to meet the terms on which the grant was originally based. If, on the other hand, the plans do not include provision for athletics—as seems to be the case—at the very least the £20 million that it seems to have been agreed should be returned must now be returned.

However, I suspect from the lack of clear answers to written parliamentary questions of late, and from looking at the weekend's press, that we can anticipate a Wembley rebuild being completed—if we are to believe what we read—by the summer of 2005, in time to hold either the FA charity shield, which normally takes place in early August, or even an England friendly game shortly before that. In other words, that would be only a month or so after the world athletics championships would have taken place in London.

The lesson that we have to draw from that is that if the Government had not spent three years dithering over what to do, who to get to do it, and how to change it all once it had been agreed, we could have had a stadium fit for athletics, football and rugby ready within the required time frame, as well as a lasting legacy for all those sports.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): A moment ago, the hon. Gentleman said that the decision to remove athletics from the Wembley proposal was wrong. Is he suggesting,

[Andy Burnham]

therefore, that the FA would have found it easier to raise the money through the City for a stadium combining athletics and football?

Nick Harvey: It is not possible to build a world-class athletics stadium that would be economically viable in its own right, because it simply would not generate sufficient gate receipts. The perfectly sensible proposal implicit in the original plan was that the FA would raise the bulk of the money for the football stadium, and that public money would be in place to graft athletics on to the project, which would be given its viability principally by having a regular football crowd in, as that is the only way to provide a sustainable revenue at the gate.

That was a perfectly viable option. Even now, it is estimated that the £14 million cost of putting in place an athletics platform and the £6 million for a warm-up track would not exceed the £20 million that was set aside to bring athletics into the equation. Now, the country has lost the world athletics championships, so we have the chance to draw breath and sort this out once and for all.

It is ironic that delay upon delay over the past three years has got us into the dreadful situation in which we now find ourselves. We have missed the boat for the 2005 championships, yet everyone suddenly wants to do everything in a great rush, even though there is no longer any time pressure on us.

Mr. Chris Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman tell us precisely where this £6 million warm-up facility at Wembley was going to be?

Nick Harvey: The proposition to buy the entire Wembley site would probably, originally, have made such a project feasible, although clearly not as a long-term fixture or fitting. It would, however, have been possible to create such a facility in reasonable proximity to the stadium as a one-off.

The questions that we must now address are whether the terms of the initial grant to the FA have been met, whether they can be met and, if not, whether that money should be given back and, as has been suggested, the issue of support from Sport England should be revisited from scratch. This country needs an economically viable facility for holding world-class athletics meetings that could be part of a future world athletics championships or Olympic bid. Even with full backing from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and underwriting from central Government, it is proving unlikely that two separate facilities could be built. It will be too late to consider plans for an integrated venue if we go ahead now with the football-only solution. If we do that, we shall miss the opportunity to pursue the possibility of a venue for both sports.

Since Carter has considered other venues as possibilities for siting a football stadium, he would almost certainly be the best placed person to consider the merits of those venues as sites for multi-purpose stadiums. The FA still has at least a £20 million stake in providing a multi-purpose venue—a not insubstantial sum, which would reduce the cost to itself and any other financiers.

Without a coherent plan for the provision of all sports, we will simply be talking about stadiums this time next year, at a time when the Government and their agencies should be getting on and building one.

5.45 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Perhaps it is worth starting by reminding ourselves why it is beneficial to the country to host a world athletics championship. In my view, it is beneficial in two ways. One is in relation to the international sporting profile that can come from such a major event. After the Olympic games and the football world cup, the world athletics championship is probably the third most important international sporting event. More than that, hosting a championship is important for the impact that it has on the thousands of young people who see an event taking place in their country and are inspired to take part in sport, and to become sportsmen and sportswomen themselves. That double effect of international sporting importance and of encouragement to grass-roots sport is an extremely important reason why it was right to seek to host the world athletics championship in the first place.

I regret the decision taken by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport not to proceed with the Picketts Lock scheme. I entirely respect the decision that she took, and I know that two issues in particular weighed in her mind. However, developments subsequent to the general election changed the picture on both those issues to a certain extent.

One was the transport link, relating to the enhancement of the rail link on the Stansted line from Liverpool Street to Picketts Lock, and to the proposed new station immediately beside the stadium. The second issue related to the Middlesex university campus accommodation that had been intended to form the athletes' accommodation. On both those issues, delays appeared to set in. My view was that those problems could have been solved. None the less, the decision was taken, and I respect that fact.

Let us remind ourselves what we could have gained if Picketts Lock had gone ahead. It would have been not only a stadium dedicated to athletics for the world championships, but a continuing facility for future athletics use, linked directly to a high-class indoor performance centre and a practice throwing field and track, all side by side and able to provide a long-term legacy for athletics, not only at championship level but for community and school use across the capital and the south-east.

Michael Fabricant: The right hon. Gentleman will have read this report. Before Picketts Lock was being considered, we were, of course, considering Wembley stadium. Will he tell us honestly, with the benefit of hindsight—although no one can possess that gift—whether he regrets moving the contest from Wembley stadium to Picketts Lock?

Mr. Smith: That was not the precise nature of my decision at the time. I do not regret the decision that I took, and I shall enlighten the hon. Gentleman as to why in a moment.

The long-term legacy, particularly for athletics, from the Picketts Lock stadium would have been a permanent facility for the future—something for which athletes such as Denise Lewis have argued passionately.

The Select Committee report drew attention to a number of issues and difficulties. I have responded to some of its colourful specifics in public on a number of occasions, but it may be worth putting one or two points on the record.

The Committee's Chairman, my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), described the range of organisations involved in any stadium project and, in particular, in the Wembley and Picketts Lock proposals—somewhat unflatteringly, I thought—as "Fred Karno's army". What such a designation ignores is the plain and simple fact that any large project of this kind inevitably involves a large range of organisations. It would have been ridiculous to try to create a stadium in London without involving, for instance, the Government Office for London, the Mayor and the London borough concerned—together with the Lee Valley authority, which happened to own the land and to be in the driving seat. My right hon. Friend's designation was, perhaps, a trifle unfair on organisations that were rightly involved.

The Select Committee report, and Members who have spoken today, suggest that the decision to recommend the removal of athletics from the original Wembley scheme—the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) raised this point in particular—was made because of the difficulty involving sightlines, and advice from, in particular, the British Olympic Association about the potential unsuitability of Wembley stadium for hosting the Olympic games. That was a consideration, but it was not the main consideration.

The decision was not made by the Secretary of State; it was urged on Wembley National Stadium Ltd., the Football Association and Sport England. It was made for two principal reasons. The first was based on practicality and value for money. It was proposed that, for the hosting of the world athletics championships, a concrete platform should be constructed in the middle of Wembley stadium. Construction would cost not £14 million but some £20 million, and would take six months. The platform would be used for a 10-day championship, and taking it down again would take another six months. There would be no permanent legacy for athletics, and in the meantime Wembley stadium would be unusable for 12 months. It was on grounds of practicality and value for money that I first had serious doubts about whether this was a sensible way of proceeding.

The second reason was the absence of warm-up facilities. I challenged the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) on that. The land that had been purchased, with the stadium on it, did not include land for such facilities. Any international athletics event must offer a warm-up facility as near as possible to the main stadium

Mr. Wyatt: It is scandalous that the land did not include a warm-up track, and we know that an earlier Government were involved; but does not the fact that the chief executive of Sport England made such a decision say a lot about what that organisation knows about international sport?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend makes his own point strongly. I was faced with a decision based on the facts as they confronted me then. The creation of a warm-up facility adjacent to the stadium would have meant the identification of land that was not then owned by Wembley stadium or the Football Association. It would almost certainly have required compulsory purchase procedures involving a number of owners, and it would have been extremely expensive.

The two major problems that we encountered were the lack of practicality of the concrete-platform solution, and the lack of any easy way of identifying a warm-up facility. In the circumstances, I thought it sensible to look at other possibilities for the hosting of athletics championships.

Mr. Love: With the benefit of hindsight, and given what he has already said about the reasons for not choosing Wembley, does my right hon. Friend think that any subsequent event would have been likely to change his mind?

Mr. Smith: Almost certainly not. I was coming on to my third point, which is that at the heart of any major stadium project of this kind lies the difficulty of marrying a stadium for football with a stadium for athletics. A really good football stadium requires seating close to the pitch. It requires the best possible atmosphere, with spectators crowded in on the action. In the best football grounds, that is precisely what happens. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton mentioned last night's decision by my local authority about the Arsenal stadium scheme. That desired atmosphere is precisely what Arsenal's project achieved.

Michael Fabricant: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: Not for the moment. This is an important point.

An athletics stadium, however, needs spectators to be further from the ground. A wider "footprint" is also needed, so that there can be a running track and space in the middle for throwing events, and spectators need to be placed in a rather different way so that at all stages they can see not just the athletes' heads but their feet as they go round the tracks.

It is possible to aim for a compromise. The Stade de France in Paris probably represents the best international attempt to achieve such a compromise: it has retractable seating at the lower levels. It is still not perfect for either sport, because the spectators are still some distance from a football game, while retracting the seating for athletics events produces a cliff around the athletics track before the seating starts. It is none the less a workable compromise. That was not on offer at Wembley: what was on offer there was a stadium that was tight around the pitch and therefore good for football, but with a concrete platform to transfer it to athletics mode.

Michael Fabricant: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the additional information he has given. Has he read the evidence given by Mr. Rod Sheard, to whom he spoke at the time? That evidence distinctly contradicts the information he has just given about the time it would take to remove the removable platform and restore it. Does he not now think—again with the benefit of hindsight, and given Mr. Sheard's evidence—that that would have been a workable compromise, and would not, in fact, have meant that Wembley could not be used for long periods between athletics and football events?

Mr. Smith: I understand that claims have been made that technology has moved on since December 1999, when the decision was taken, but that does not change the fundamentals of the picture. It would still take a

[Mr. Smith]

considerable time to construct and deconstruct the platform. It would still cost a substantial sum and there would still be no permanent facility left for athletics.

I hope that Wembley as a national stadium for football and rugby league can now proceed. The history, tradition and sentiment that surround it are much more powerful than that elsewhere.

Bob Russell (Colchester): The right hon. Gentleman's ministerial brief included culture. Is he aware of any other country that has demolished such an important monument to its sporting past as an Olympic stadium? Wembley is also the home of England's greatest sporting triumph, so surely the Wembley towers at least should remain.

Mr. Smith: The problem with the hon. Gentleman's argument is that the Foster design for the new Wembley, as proposed in 1999, meant that the twin towers would have ended up in the middle of the pitch, which did not necessarily make for the best possible stadium. We wait to see what emerges from the FA in the next few weeks in relation to any redesign it may be considering, but I suspect that the problem persists. The other beneficial aspect of Wembley is that there is a definite need for regeneration across north-west London, so siting the new national stadium there would make a strong and positive contribution to that task.

If Wembley is to proceed it should not be at the cost of additional sums from the public purse. Shortly before the general election, the FA asked the Government for an additional sum of some £150 million to enable the Wembley project to proceed, but I rejected the proposal. I believe that I was right to do so, and it is worth putting it on record that the £120 million of lottery funding made available to the FA for the Wembley stadium becomes legally repayable if it does not proceed. I hope that Sport England will stand firmly by that.

I remind the FA that there is an agreement, minuted and followed up in correspondence, to return £20 million to the lottery in recompense for removing athletics from the scheme. That money is outstanding, and the FA should think seriously about starting to pay it back. While we are at it, let us learn the lessons of the Cardiff Millennium stadium, which was built for £126 million, including the purchase of the land. It hosted the FA cup final earlier this year, and everyone who went said what a good game it was and how good the stadium was. The Cardiff stadium is one for which I can claim a little credit as chairman of the Millennium Commission, which made a substantial sum available for it.

I applaud the Government's continued emphasis on grass-roots sport, because sports policy needs a combination of the encouragement of that and the objective of international excellence. The hon. Member for North Devon failed to acknowledge that this year, next year and the year after, the sport budget from the Exchequer will double. I negotiated that money, and I was proud to put it in place. Also, 1,000 school sports co-ordinator posts will be created to facilitate, encourage and enable sport to take place in our schools and school playing field sales have already declined from an average of 40 a month under the previous Government to about three a month.

We have put major initiatives in place over the past four years and I am pleased that they are being carried forward by my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department to encourage and facilitate grass-roots sport. Of course, there will be no medal winners tomorrow without mass participation among young people today, and we will not generate enthusiasm for participation among those young people if they have no heroes to emulate or international success to aspire to. The two go hand in hand.

For all those reasons, let us hope that the Government take the Select Committee's entertaining, but somewhat flawed, report with a small pinch of salt and stick to their determination to promote excellence and foster community spirit.

6.7 pm

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): It may be worth reminding the House of some of the beginnings of the sad and sorry fiasco that leaves our country without a national stadium for football, rugby league and, in particular, athletics. I take hon. Members back to the fact that Wembley stadium was owned by a fairly shaky plc called Wembley plc. Advisers to the deal tell me that, originally, one idea was for the lottery to get the stadium free for 50 years while the plc moved from being an owner to being the operator of a vastly improved stadium.

The £120 million grant was to be matched by finance raised in the City and a new stadium built for about £250 million. Although it was always touted as a multi-sport venue, there was always a dominant partner—soccer. With respect to this debate, a better way to put it is that there was a much weaker partner—athletics.

A certain football club in north London, namely Arsenal, has been referred to. I remind the House that, back in 1997, rumours were floating around that the club was interested in buying Wembley, lock, stock and barrel, and was threatening to bid for Wembley plc. The upshot of that would have been the scuppering of the nascent plans to hold the world cup in this country, which appears to have completely spooked the Government, who panicked and exerted pressure on Sport England to abandon the original plan under which it agreed to allocate £120 million of funding.

To bid for the World cup, the Government needed a national stadium, and it appears that they went out and bought the stadium outright for about £100 million. With the benefit of hindsight, perhaps we can say that that is the slippery slope at the bottom of which we now find ourselves. Four years on, with the last game played there over a year ago, the decaying stadium and the surrounding area are worth nowhere near the £100 million paid for them; they are worth closer to £30 million. That is a real shame and a dreadful waste of public money.

How did that sorry state of affairs come about? It appears to have been because the Government could not keep their interfering paws off. The lure of being associated with the so-called venue of legends was just too much for a spin-obsessed Administration—they could not leave it alone. It seems that all the meddling was at the behest of the Prime Minister himself, who had, it was claimed, "thrown his weight behind it".

To bring matters up to date, a Football Association insider quoted in the *Financial Times* said:

> "We want Government to be supportive, but absent from the actual process. We need a pledge that the Government will not interfere!"

Sadly, the Secretary of State still fails to grasp that salient point. She told the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, on which I have the honour to sit:

> "I do not think it is the role of Government to build and manage big stadia, but to pretend that these big projects can be delivered with the Government holding back is naive".

Yet we have reached the end of 2001 with no national stadium and no athletics stadium—a litany of meddle, muddle and complete mismanagement. To put it another way: no world athletics championship, so no need for an athletics stadium.

That sorry state of affairs has arisen because the Government overstepped their own brief four years ago and, worryingly, seem intent on doing so again. In May, in their manifesto, the Government promised that they would host the 2005 world athletics championships with first-class facilities. That is no doubt a laudable aim. However, there was no mention in that document of Picketts Lock, Edmonton or even London—despite the fact that London was the city to which the championships had been given.

It appears that the Government never, ever asked themselves why we even need big stadiums in a televisual world when millions can watch events without having to stand on cold terraces. At the end of August when Patrick Carter, the Government's sports troubleshooter, issued his report, which sounded the death knell for Picketts Lock, he noted that he

> "remained unaware of any policy or strategy which set out why the United Kingdom ought to stage major sporting events".

However, the absence of such a strategy has not stopped the Government meddling.

There are good reasons for having a national stadium that are as true today as ever they were. The first is to secure home advantage for British sportsmen and the second is—as the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) pointed out—to act as a facilitator for wider sports policy and to achieve greater grass-roots involvement. The final reason is to enhance the way in which Britain is seen internationally.

None of those factors gives the Government or any Minister a reason to get involved and to abuse public money in the way that has happened. The problem appears to have started with the concept that there should be a national stadium for three sports—football, rugby league and athletics. That was downsized by the football-loving hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks). Suddenly, the "right type" of stadium for a world cup bid, rather than the previously agreed multi-use stadium, was all the rage.

Having undermined the three-sports stadium concept, the DCMS had to turn its attention to finding a home for its displaced athletics idea.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): May I correct the hon. Gentleman? The new Wembley stadium was in no way conditional on our winning the 2006 world cup bid. In fact, there was some surprise that the FA and Sport England, with the support of the Government, were actually going to demolish the old Wembley stadium in order to construct a new national stadium. Unlike Germany and other countries which were bidding and which planned to build a new national stadium if their bid was successful, we were already going to build one. There was no link of the kind suggested by the hon. Gentleman with the 2006 world cup bid.

Mr. Flook: Obviously, I did not have the benefit of being at the discussions. I could only read recent reports.

Of the original £120 million, it has been agreed that £20 million is to be repaid if the athletics track is never built at Wembley. Judging by the last few years, who knows whether that will ever happen? In short, the Government appear to have given £100 million to the richest sport in the kingdom for a ground that it could easily have afforded itself.

Mr. Bryant: The Government have not given a penny to anybody—Sport England gave the money.

Mr. Flook: I stand corrected. None the less, although it is not taxpayers' money, public money has been given to the richest sport in the kingdom.

In December 1999, athletics was eventually pulled from the venue of legends following a report written by some consultants who spent all of three weeks looking into the proposed design that kiboshed the suggested set-up. However, I remind the House that the Select Committee report, published on 30 March last year, disagreed and found the proposed solution of a three-sport stadium "commendable and innovative" and concluded that

> "the Government should go ahead with it".

Indeed, since then—to contradict the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury—major stadiums throughout the world have proposed the use of the same sort of construction for athletics. We noted in our report that New York is planning to adopt such a system. Yet, as the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) pointed out, the then Secretary of State rubbished the report within half an hour of its publication—hardly a considered opinion.

The report highlighted a number of challenges for Picketts Lock. There was no underwriter for the event. The stadium was not of the highest quality. There were transport and infrastructure issues. Time was short—that was in March 2000. What would happen to the stadium in the long term? There was a capital shortfall.

There was always a funding shortfall with the Picketts Lock proposal. The outline cost in March 2000 was for a stadium that was going to cost up to £120 million, when only £60 million had been earmarked as available from the lottery and £20 million of that was unlikely ever to be released. So, there were shortfalls for funding for the building as well for long-term revenue. In short, what does one do with an expensive building stuck in north-east London that has little use other than as an athletics stadium?

To quote another report from the Select Committee, the Government were following a "perverse and bizarre" course of action in promoting an economically unsustainable athletics stadium—having rejected their own earlier proposals, after taking into account a hastily written report that took all of three weeks to put together. After their meddling, the Government have lost this country the right to stage the world athletics championships in 2005. They have probably cost us much

[Mr. Flook]

more embarrassment than that, in that we are unlikely to be in a position to bid for any major sporting event for many years.

The Government's alternative proposal of Sheffield, charming city though it probably is, was not even discussed by the International Amateur Athletics Federation. That shows what the federation thought of the proposal.

The Government continue to meddle. They seem desperate to be munificent in this season of good will, and now appear to be offering £40 million of Sport England's money—public money, albeit not taxpayers' money—all over the place. When will they learn that the £40 million is lottery money, and not Government money to throw around?

The Select Committee's report may well have "castigated" the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, but several issues remain pertinent for the current crop of Ministers. We need assurances from the Government that they will heed the insider at the FA and leave the association to get on with it and build Wembley. What about the £20 million that seems to have gone missing? We are constantly given assurances, but where is the second annual instalment?

According to the *Evening Standard*, the FA is

> "now ready to build a National Stadium with £100 million of their own money and they only need tacit support from the Government to help them get funding from the City."

That seems to be rather a kick in the face for all those earlier but perhaps rather unhelpful efforts.

As the Secretary of State suggested when she appeared before the Committee, with a little luck, if a review of major events policy is undertaken and the subject is kicked into the long grass of the performance and innovation unit of No. 10, there is perhaps an outside chance that something might be able to happen at Wembley without Government interference.

There is no denying, however, that Britain's reputation abroad has been damaged. It is also likely that we will not have a mega-event for quite some time. More importantly, there is still no lasting legacy of athletics to help us do better in track and field events. Bearing in mind the fact that the original £120 million has been turned into an investment that now consists of a dilapidated building in north-west London that is worth about £30 million, and that the Government are scrabbling round to spend £48 million of public money, it worth asking once again what will become of the £20 million.

Last week, in an attempt to break the power and control of the so-called blazer brigade—although his statement more pertinently exposes the Government's handling of the national stadium—the Minister for Sport told *The Guardian* that

> "In this day and age, you need to have people with skills to run sport. Public money is given out and we do not even know what we get back."

That is absolutely correct. I could not have put it better myself.

6.20 pm

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and the Select Committee on two or three years of very hard, detailed work on what they themselves have rightly called a saga of events. Their detailed scrutiny has been very helpful indeed. I think that anyone who reads the report—even those who, like me, do not agree with all its recommendations—cannot fail to see the truth of its overall conclusion that the way we run sports and major sporting events and build national stadiums is a shambles. Without saying so, the report also expresses my view that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is a dysfunctional Department. That is what it has been from the beginning and that is what it continues to be. It is perhaps fortunate that we have a Select Committee that is not dysfunctional; if it were dysfunctional we would not have received this type of report.

Although I realise that the Select Committee is very busy doing a wide variety of reports, it might be a very useful exercise if it were to use its considerable background knowledge and expertise to consider the overall issue of the way in which we handle sport in this country. We have to examine issues such as the increasing number of quangos, the fact that no one can take decisions, and the fact that the Government immediately handed over all our money for sport to Sport England, which is a huge quango employing 500 people; whereas I think that, when I was Minister for Sport, I had 26 people working on sport.

It is clearly nonsensical when the Minister for Sport and even the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport do not truly have the power to take decisions. So many matters are handled by various quangos that drop the ball whenever difficulties arise.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Lady has made a very interesting and powerful point by saying that the Department is dysfunctional and inviting the Select Committee to investigate the Department's sports operation. I ask her, a former Minister, to tell us the point of a Select Committee's making recommendations to a Department when, in at least one example, the Secretary of State rejected the report within 30 minutes of its publication. There are many other examples in which Secretaries of State have rejected Select Committee recommendations that, as hindsight has shown, were subsequently proved correct.

Kate Hoey: The Government make their decisions on individual Select Committee reports. Although I do not want to go over old ground, I should make it clear now that I fundamentally disagree with the Select Committee recommendation to which the hon. Gentleman refers—to oppose removing athletics from Wembley. I believe that the original lottery money was provided for a national sports stadium. There is absolutely no doubt that, at some point in the early months of 1999, the national sports stadium project was hijacked by football. The FA and Wembley National Stadium Ltd. hijacked the project and ignored both athletics and the British Olympic Association.

Those bodies were able to do that because at that time we were making a world cup bid. As the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook) said, for the first six months to a year in which I was the Minister for Sport, and in the final year of the previous Minister's tenure, the world cup bid hung over everything that was happening in the Department. Absolutely nothing could stop, prevent or attack anything to do with our world cup bid. That was the most important sports issue as far as the Government were concerned.

One of my disappointments with the report is that the Select Committee never analysed what went wrong with Wembley. I agree with the Committee that the £120 million should not have been provided so quickly without planning permission. Like all hon. Members, I have sports clubs that have received no lottery grants or only small grants because they have not had planning permission. Nevertheless, Sport England gave £120 million for a plan that had not yet received planning permission. The request succeeded because the plan was about the world cup bid, making it crucial that it succeeded. I would therefore have liked it if the Select Committee had examined the issue.

I know that pressure was put on Sport England to deliver that £120 million, which had to be delivered in time to prepare and submit the bid. It is all very well blaming Sport England and its officials, but it is difficult for anyone when permanent secretaries are ringing up and asking when a lottery bid will go through.

Mr. Banks: May I remind my hon. Friend, who seems occasionally to forget it, that the 2000 World cup bid was dealt with in the Government's 1997 general election manifesto? Carrying out manifesto commitments is a worthwhile objective.

Kate Hoey: I absolutely agree that that was in our manifesto. However, our manifesto also contained many other things. I agree, too, that we want to fulfil our manifesto commitments so far as possible. However, I do not think that we should fulfil one manifesto commitment at the expense of other commitments. We should not override other commitments, take shortcuts or fail to monitor properly. We should not seek to do something very quickly indeed when it is not necessary.

The £120 million was provided for a multi-sports stadium such as the Stade de France, and that is what we should have been building. It then became a football-only stadium, designed to include a platform. We need not go through all the costs of the platform proposal, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has made it clear that it was nonsense to propose a platform that was a one-off arrangement that would leave no legacy for athletics. It was a sop to athletics and an attempt to get round the fact that WNSL had received £120 million.

We could not go back on that decision because Downing Street did not want it to happen. At that time, no one wanted to go back and say to Sport England, "You have mucked up. This scheme should be returned and you should be redesigning it as a proper national stadium, which is what the lottery grant was for." That could not happen because we could not sacrifice our world cup bid.

Mr. Bryant: I agree with my hon. Friend on her point about athletics being removed from Wembley stadium. However, does she think that the whole £120 million should be returned, or merely the £20 million?

Kate Hoey: I was coming to that. We do not know what the decision on Wembley will be, but the football authorities clearly know that if a national stadium is not built at Wembley they will definitely be legally bound to return the £120 million. My view, which I shall continue to proclaim, is that if Wembley ends up being a national football stadium—with some rugby league involvement, although rugby league is enjoying having its games at different places—the whole £120 million must be returned.

Great demands are already being placed on the sports lottery fund. Just recently, Sport England gave £30 million from the sports community lottery fund to ensure the success of the Commonwealth games. We want those games to be a success, but that was an extra £30 million which had not been budgeted for. The decision to give £30 million was split—it was not unanimous. However, £30 million of community funding has now gone to the Commonwealth games. I do not want there to be a football-only stadium without the need to pay back the £120 million. Twickenham was built without public lottery money. Cricket does not get £120 million, so why does football, which is the richest sport? If the stadium is football-only, the entire £120 million must be repaid.

Michael Fabricant: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way to me a second time. I take her point about the £120 million. However, what about the £20 million, which also needs to be repaid? She may be aware from the evidence given to the Select Committee that, on 19 January this year, the former Secretary of State said in a letter that the £20 million might be repaid if Wembley stadium went ahead, and that if the project did not proceed, it would not be repaid. Later, on 5 April, he said that the final payment of the £20 million would be made in December 2004. Later on, the present Secretary of State said that this was being discussed in camera. Can the hon. Lady shed any light on any timetable that might exist for the repayment of the £20 million?

Kate Hoey: I can shed no light on that, other than what is in the formal public documents. I was not involved in any meeting with Ken Bates over the £20 million, thank goodness. That sum should definitely be repaid because that was agreed by the then Secretary of State and Ken Bates, who was supposedly speaking on behalf of football. I am after the rest of the money because I do not see why football should get it.

Our reputation in international sport has been badly damaged by this decision. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury that Picketts Lock had problems, but it could have been made to happen. We gave a commitment, as a country, to host the world athletics championships. We gave that commitment not just at ministerial, Secretary of State or UK athletics level, but as a country, with a letter from the Prime Minister saying that we would provide a wonderful stadium in London for the world athletics championship in 2005. We reneged on that commitment and broke our promise. It has damaged us, because members of the International Amateur Athletics Federation are also involved with the International Olympic Committee.

I sat next to Istvan Gyulai, chief executive of the IAAF, just a few weeks ago at the athletics writers' dinner. I will not repeat the conversation, because it was private, but he told me exactly what had gone on in the meeting with the Minister for Sport and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. I would not repeat in the Chamber the words he used about what happened at that meeting.

[Kate Hoey]

We have let ourselves down badly, although there were problems. We must congratulate the Lee Valley and Enfield council, the local Member of Parliament and all who worked so hard on the basis of commitments and promises. The very least we can do is make sure that the Government reimburse the council for its costs. Despite all their good will, the Government reneged on the commitment.

Our reputation abroad has been badly damaged. It was made even worse by telling this international body that we would be hosting the event in London one minute and then saying the next minute, "No, we would like it to be Sheffield." I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport would not have dreamt of being patronising, but that is how it was taken. There was no understanding of how international sport worked. That has damaged us even more than if we had told the IAAF that we were really sorry but we had messed up and could not do Picketts Lock. In the event, we said that we could not do Picketts Lock, but offered Sheffield instead. Wonderful though Sheffield is, that was nonsense. We have a lot of hard work to do to mend our reputation. I will not go into detail about our bid for the world cup, because that would provoke the wrath of my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks).

I have a suggestion for my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton about future Select Committee reports. I am sure that he understands the difficulties regarding the way in which Sport England works. It might be useful to take a strategic look at how the Sports Council works and the lottery spend, taking into account value for money. Even with someone in the Cabinet who is responsible for events, unless we completely change how we run sport in this country, by restructuring and streamlining it, we will never punch at our true weight.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): The debate that the hon. Lady mentioned in her opening remarks and to which she has now returned is hardly new. It began in 1964 when Denis Howell was appointed the first Minister responsible for Sport. The question arose—it has never properly been resolved—as to whether the Minister for Sport should exercise executive responsibilities. If the hon. Lady is saying that, she will find a great deal of support for that view, not just in the House of Commons but throughout the sporting world in the United Kingdom.

Kate Hoey: I agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman. The people involved in sport will say that there is no real understanding of how sport works. There is no strategic authority and nobody to carry things through from the top. Sue Mott in *The Daily Telegraph* wrote eloquently about it recently. She talked about everyone holding a package, passing it to someone who takes a little out of it and passes it on to someone else who does the same; and when the going gets tough, everyone wants to drop it. That is how we run sport. We can never aspire to be an international power in sport or be in touch with the grass roots if we do not look at what we are doing.

This Mr. Carter seems to be running sport in this country. He was brought in just before I finished as Minister for Sport to look at the Commonwealth games. I did not meet him, although I think that my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury might have. The reports show that he has met some people and not others—he seems to have chosen whom to meet. Whenever anyone in authority in the Government talks about Wembley or Picketts Lock and is asked a difficult question, they refer to the Carter report. I wonder whether Patrick Carter actually exists, because I have not seen him anywhere.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I remind the hon. Lady that we are discussing the Select Committee report, not the Carter report.

Kate Hoey: I know, Madam Deputy Speaker, but the Select Committee report refers to Patrick Carter a number of times. I know that he exists, because he gave evidence.

In conclusion, the Select Committee has done sport a service by producing this detailed report, although it does not make very appetising reading. Indeed, it makes very sad reading, and we have many lessons to learn.

6.39 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): I have not met Mr. Carter either, so perhaps he does not exist. Who knows? Perhaps the Minister for Sport can enlighten us.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) said something that a number of people have mentioned in the debate. She referred to the rich sport of football. Well, that is true of one part of football—essentially, the premier league, where a lot of money is sloshing around, as we know. However, when we are talking about the development of the national football stadium, we are talking about the Football Association. Although richer than probably any other national sporting body, the FA should not be confused with the premier league. Let us not forget that the FA is responsible for something like 42,000 affiliated clubs, so there is not a vast amount of money sloshing around in the new building at Soho square. We need to differentiate between the FA and the premier league, even though it has a significant say in the FA.

I have just been told that I have five minutes, and I always want to try to obey the Whips. If they try to beat me up, I will definitely join the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Bryant: Is that a manifesto promise?

Mr. Banks: No. Nothing that I say in the next few minutes is said with the benefit of hindsight. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) on the Select Committee report. He is right to say that the Select Committee has been consistently right. I have given evidence to the Select Committee on several occasions, and it has been consistently right. We all want to put our own spin or interpretation on those events. When the national stadium was proposed for football, rugby league and athletics, it was clear that the British Olympics Association and UK Athletics would very much have liked a permanent running track there, visible all the time, but that simply was not on.

When I was Minister for Sport, I was not prepared to support that proposal. I tried to get funding for the proposal on retractible seating, as at the Stade de France.

I tell my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall that I was told that there would be no money for that from the Treasury, nor any additional money from the lottery. So in the end the deck solution was proposed. I thought that solution appropriate, given the money available. Let us be clear that when I was a Minister there was a lot of Government interference, but no Government money.

I sympathise with those who say, "Unless the Government put money in, the Government should stay out of it." That goes as much for Ministers now as when others were sitting in their places. I have enormous regard for my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), and I was always totally loyal to him when he was Secretary of State, but when the deck solution for the national stadium was launched in July 1999, he described it as a stunning design.

Mr. Chris Smith: In fact, at the time of the press conference at which I described the overall scheme as a stunning design, the deck solution was in no sense part of that scheme. The details of the deck solution became evident only subsequently, and I began to have serious doubts about it.

Mr. Banks: My right hon. Friend mentions the detail, but the overall proposal was there. There was no retractible seating or permanent running track, so what did he think we were talking about? What does he think the rest of the world thought when he called it a stunning design?

Kate Hoey: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Banks: No, hang on a second. I happen to think that the proposal was acceptable, simply because rugby was contributing nothing and athletics, which was also contributing nothing, would want to use the stadium only for the world athletics championships or for the Olympic games, and there was no guarantee that we could get either. So it seemed to me to be perfectly appropriate to bring in something on a temporary basis. There is an argument about how long that proposal would disable the stadium, but it was perfectly acceptable to football. I thought that it was acceptable to my right hon. Friend, and it seemed that that was the way forward, given that we would not have a permanent track or retractible seating there. I shall not keep going over why things have now changed, but we got into all sort of problems as soon as it was decided that the July 1999 design was not acceptable.

There is some confusion about the world athletics championships. I remember when the late Primo Nebiolo—one of the great barons of world sport—was offered the championships to London. When we were sitting in the Cabinet room in Downing Street, we described the construction of the new Wembley stadium, and he said, "Well, the first event that you can have in it will be the 2003 world athletics championships." I said, "Well, Mr. President, we'll discuss that later." When I discussed it with him later, I found out that he had made exactly the same offer to the French Minister for Sport, Madame Buffet, with the result that she and I had to reach a conclusion, and we decided that London would bid for 2005, rather than 2003 because two cities were going for the 2003 championships.

I wanted to make a few more points, but other hon. Members want to speak. The solution proposed would have fitted everyone. I feel that the role of the BOA needs to be criticised because it was clearly not happy with the deck proposal, but I warned Simon Clegg, the BOA's general secretary, that it was the best thing that it was likely to get. If the BOA did not go for that, it would end up with nothing. Well, nothing is precisely what it has ended up with, so it should have listened to that advice.

Michael Fabricant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Banks: No, I have got to sit down—I am very sorry. All I would say is that, if we are to learn something from what has happened, we need Governments to be involved, but Government involvement does not just mean interfering to tell sport what it should be doing. It means getting in there, paying for it and doing it ourselves, and I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall. As a Minister, the thing that frustrated me—clearly, it frustrated her, too—was the way that we were continually handing over decisions to fractured bodies all over the place, using the so-called arm's-length principle.

I stood at the Dispatch Box and said that I did not agree with the arm's-length principle. If we are to get involved in organising events or in reorganising sport, we have got to do it ourselves, in an executive fashion. In that way, I am more of a Stalinist than a socialist, and stand firmly by that view. If the Government are going to get involved, which they should, and the Select Committee has made several recommendations, the Government must pay. If the Government are not prepared to pay, as the Australian, French, Spanish, Japanese and South Korean Governments have done, they should stay out of it, because all they do is confuse sports.

6.46 pm

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): It appears to be my role to have three minutes at the end of every debate in which to try to summarise the 20 minutes-worth of notes that I have prepared, but I should like to endorse everything that my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) has said so passionately at the end of his contribution. I have lots of notes and wanted to talk about the decisions and some of the things in the Select Committee report, but we have heard lots of that rehearsed in this debate, and in the couple of minutes that I have available, I want to return to what my hon. Friend has just said—we as a nation have to decide how serious we are about sport.

I have been very lucky since being elected; not only have I been able to spectate at some of the world's great stadiums, but I have been able to play in some of them because of the parliamentary football and rugby teams that we run. Those of us who have been in the changing rooms at Wembley know that they are a disaster and that the stadium is a disgrace and needs replacing as quickly as possible. I have also seen stadiums in places such as Japan and Australia, and great finance has gone into them.

However, we always return to the point that my hon. Friend was just making—people are serious about sports. We have to make a decision in the next year or so, and if we are serious about sport we need to get it right at every level. We need to ensure that there are school sports for children to take part in for at least two hours. I would prefer that to be part of the curriculum, but I would be happy if children played sport for two hours. That would make a real start.

[Mr. Andy Reed]

We then need to make the link between schools and clubs. I play for a very junior rugby club. I have mistakenly called it on radio the worst club in the country—I actually meant that it was in one of the lowest leagues. It is not the worst club, but we have not had many wins this season. We struggle because there are no links between ourselves and the school. We are an old school club, yet rugby has not been played at that school for 15 years. Unfortunately, because we do not have the people to help to coach at the school to develop players, I am now one of the youngest players that we have, at 37. At 35, we technically become a veterans' side, but we still play in other leagues. That is an anecdote, but the Minister will know that that is a serious problem right across the country. If those links do not exist, people do not have places to play.

The next thing that we need to ensure is that, when we have achieved that mass participation, there are routes for people to find their way through. That includes not only coaching, but the UK Sports Institute, and I am proud that Loughborough is playing a key role in it. The swimming pool is coming along fine, as are the hockey pitches. We can provide the best sports science. In fact, with the UK Sports Institute up and running in the next couple of years, we will be able to find our elite athletes. However, if we do not get the mass participation right in schools, we will have no one to pick. That is why such decisions are crucial.

If I had a £100 million to spend on athletics, would I spend it on a national stadium, or would I spend it trying to give Charnwood athletic club some better facilities and allowing more people in my constituency to participate in sport? Ideally, I would like £200 million so that we could do both, but sport has not had the political kudos that it should have had. I am sure that all the hon. Members present believe that sport should have that priority, but we only have to look at the sparse attendance in the Chamber to realise that we need to convince many more hon. Members and the general public that sport has an important role to play. If I had to make the choice, I would prefer to see the £100 million spent on the grass roots and future athletes.

I have read the section of the report on the question of home advantage. Yes, we probably would win more gold medals, but in this television age it is even more important to ensure that the events are on terrestrial television. Children need sporting heroes, but the success that we had in Sydney is just as important as seeing those heroes perform in Lee Valley or Picketts Lock. These days, it is easy to develop sporting heroes and ensure that people want to watch them.

The debate has been a long-running sore and difficult decisions have had to be made. Twenty:twenty vision hindsight is a wonderful thing and it is great to see that the Select Committee has highlighted a few suggestions. It was slightly contradictory when it suggested that the Government needed to keep their hands off but at the same time to appoint a Minister responsible for events. We must decide which one of those suggestions we will follow.

Now is the time, following this debacle, to decide whether we are interested in running international events. If the Olympics would cost us £3 billion or £4 billion, do we really want those games or could we spend the money on developing first class sporting facilities? Hon. Members will have seen in their constituencies the crumbling tennis courts and sports halls. There is much more that could be done in our constituencies with the money rather than its being spent on the glory of a 10-day or two-week event.

6.52 pm

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): I have several sporting interests registered in the book, including being a trustee of Oxford University rugby club. It is 20 years to the day since I got my blue and I have just been paged to tell me that we have won three times in a row for the first time, and that my 1981 team is waiting to have dinner with me outside, so I am a happy man. I share the warmth expressed towards David Faber by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and it would be nice if we could see him in the other place as Lord Sightlines.

I remind the House yet again that there are more nations in the IOC and the IAAF than in the United Nations. We do not understand how important sport is. I say that each time I rise to my feet in the Chamber, but it is true. We just do not get it. The way sport is run in this country is a shambles. The Wembley and Picketts Lock affairs are indicative of that shambles. We are the people who can change that, and it is time that we did so.

We got the Wembley issue back to front. The infrastructure is terrible, so why did we not buy the thing first before we put the infrastructure in? It does not take a brain surgeon to work that out. It was a shocking decision to buy only that site. It took the Select Committee only 20 minutes to work out that we needed to buy the whole site if we were to hold world events there. If it took us that long, why did it take the chief executive of Sport England and the former sports Minister so long? The Picketts Lock affair took us even less time, but I shall not go into that.

I have several conclusions to offer. First, if we are serious about sport we have to have a Secretary of State for sport. I suggest that sport and health education are combined. We have to get school sports sorted out and it should not be separated from other sports matters. We now have a myriad more initiatives in schools and another set of administrators in the new opportunities fund for sport. That is crackers. We must bang some heads together to achieve a return to sanity. Secondly, and as important, we need to appoint an ambassador for sport at our French embassy. We need to be represented in IOC, FIFA and IAAF meetings by a permanent diplomat who will let us know what is going on. With our reputation in tatters, that is even more important. I know the man for the job, and he lives in Paris.

Thirdly, the Minister for Sport must chair UK Sport. We have heard from two former Ministers for Sport who say that that cannot be done, but we love sport and it is time that we took charge. Then we would be responsible and have the executive authority. We would go to the Treasury for more money, not some quango. Until we achieve that representation, sport will not grow up politically. Fourthly, we must evaluate the senior team at Sport England—I hope that the new chief executive has that on his agenda—especially those who made the original decision on Wembley. It was shocking that they made that decision without investigating the requirements for a world class event.

Fifthly, we need an audit of the international needs of our best sports, whether they are Olympic sports such as rowing, our best sport, and judo, which is outstanding, or international sports such as rugby, which is coming to the Olympics. Lastly, to pick up the comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed), we need a public service sports television channel, including coach education, philosophy and sports medicine, and the BBC should be made to pay for it.

6.56 pm

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester): I shall luxuriate in the four minutes left to me. It is fascinating that the Tories initially wanted a whole day's debate on this issue, because they have hardly bothered to take part in it at all. I am grateful to them for the time that I have. It gives me great pleasure to take part in the debate, not just as a Member of Parliament but as a big sports fan. Since entering the House, I have been lucky enough to be able to raise sporting issues on several occasions. Sport is a matter of great pride and importance to our constituents, and we certainly saw that during Euro 96 and a few weeks ago when Owen hit that great hat-trick in Munich—except for our Scottish colleagues, perhaps.

The situation is not all doom and gloom. We have a proud record of hosting sporting events in recent history, not least the reconstituted rugby league world cup, the FINA swimming world cup and the cycling world track championships, as well as the stuff that we do every year with great quality, such as Wimbledon, the six nations rugby and the British grand prix. It is only when events do not happen, such as when the Cheltenham gold cup was cancelled in my county last year, that we realise how important sport is. The effect of foot and mouth on sport and the local economy made us realise the contribution that sport makes.

To hold world-class events we need viable stadiums. In answer to a question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan), the Minister for Sport replied:

> "I have made no specific assessment of the viability of dual use stadiums."—[*Official Report*, 5 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 65W.]

Well, I was lucky enough to bump into that sporting institution, John Motson, at the weekend, and we talked about the dual-use stadium in Saint-Denis in Paris, which several hon. Members have mentioned. Much has been made of that stadium, its quality and the fact that it can host athletics and football. I asked Mr. Motson how good it is for football—he should know because he has commentated on a world cup final there. He said that it was poor for events such as rugby and football. However, in the technological age we live in, it should not be impossible to bring athletics and football into the same stadium.

The key is public perceptions. The public want gold medal performances from the likes of Denise Lewis and great free kicks from the likes of David Beckham, but they want to see those right here in this country. We have a choice of whether we wish to continue to invest in the grass roots or to invest in the grass roots and find the money for adequate sporting facilities. We must try to do both.

7 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I am delighted that the House is debating this timely and comprehensive report. It has been a high-quality debate. There is much expertise about sporting matters in the House and much of it has been on display. I pay particular tribute to the speeches of the two former Ministers for Sport, the hon. Members for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) and for West Ham (Mr. Banks). Even though they were not always in harmony, they made powerful contributions. The hon. Lady was also very frank.

I enjoyed the contribution of the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) although I much regret the news that he brought to the House about the third consecutive Oxford victory this afternoon. Looking at him, I find it difficult to believe that it was only 20 years since he represented the university. However, I consulted "Dod's Parliamentary Companion" and I discovered that he was a postgraduate student and already in his 30s at that time.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook), who is one of the newer members of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport. He made a thoughtful speech. In particular, however, I congratulate the Committee's Chairman, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who has led the Committee for four and a half years. It has produced a series of remarkable high-quality reports. Although I have had a long-term lay interest in the subject, I come fairly new to the issues and I have read the reports with great interest and found real insights into the sporting and broadcasting worlds.

I welcome the Minister for Sport to the debate. I am sorry that the Secretary of State did not stay for the remainder of the debate, but that is a creeping case of Byers syndrome in which a Secretary of State responsible for a Government policy attends part of the debate but does not wait for its conclusion. After all, the Secretary of State's decision 10 weeks ago put the final nail in the coffin of London's bid for the world athletics championships, the latest in a series of Government-sponsored sporting disasters. Labour's attempts to bring a major sporting event to Britain have been wrecked by a total lack of vision, an abject failure of leadership, grossly incompetent management and a pattern of broken promises.

In the past four years, Ministers have made Britain a laughing stock in international sporting circles. They have denied sports fans here the chance to see top athletes perform on British soil and they have effectively thrown away Britain's chances of hosting a major international event in the foreseeable future.

London's bid to host the world athletics championships degenerated steadily from the start in January 1999, although all appeared to go well to begin with. Launching the new Wembley stadium concept in July 1999, the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who has apologised for his absence from the Chamber for the winding-up speeches, said that the new stadium

> "will be a magnificent venue for athletics as well as for football".

I listened in vain to his speech today for any explanation of why only four months later he changed his mind about

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

something that he had thought so splendid in July 1999. His views had changed to such an extent that he said:

> "the stadium as designed—or in any similar configuration—cannot readily provide the central venue for an Olympic games bid for London. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that it could provide an appropriate venue for the world athletics championships."

That decision was rightly condemned in an earlier report of the Select Committee.

Andy Burnham *rose—*

Mr. Yeo: I have little time, so I regret that I cannot give way.

The Secretary of State has suddenly left London without a venue for the championships, but the Government's commitment had been confirmed at the very highest level. In a letter of January 2000, the Prime Minister said:

> "The Government is pleased to give its full support to this bid by UK Athletics to bring the World Athletics Championships to Britain . . . World Class facilities will be ready, our athletes will be ready and our people will be ready."

I draw the attention of the Minister for Sport to the particularly significant final sentence which reads:

> "We look forward to welcoming the world athletics family to London in 2005."

Perhaps the Minister will do his homework before he intervenes again.

By the time the IAAF council accepted London's bid, Picketts Lock had been identified as the venue for the championships. The bid was accepted on the condition that UK Athletics could demonstrate that clear progress had been made on the stadium by October this year. No Minister, then or subsequently, can have been in any doubt about what was needed if the Prime Minister's promises were to be honoured. Alas, no Minister, then or subsequently, did what was needed to honour those promises.

Despite Ministers' failure to act, however, they did not lose confidence. On 21 March 2001, the former Secretary of State said:

> "I am absolutely confident that we are properly on track."

The Prime Minister himself acknowledged that the Government had a responsibility for sporting decisions. When questioned in the House about the Wembley project, he said:

> "I regret the fact that it has fallen through, and we must now sit down and work out a way through it so that we have a proper national stadium."—[*Official Report*, 2 May 2001; Vol. 367, c. 841.]

It is worth noting that seven months later the current Secretary of State still seems to be dithering about the national stadium. The Government originally decided that there should be a national stadium at Wembley with athletics; then they decided that there should be a national stadium at Wembley without athletics; now they simply do not know whether there should be a national stadium at all, whether it should be at Wembley or whether athletics should be part of it. I hope that the Minister for Sport will shed a little light on the matter, because the only decision that the present set of Ministers has taken is not to publish the advice that they have received from Patrick Carter, who the hon. Member for Vauxhall has established actually exists. However, like her, I have not met him.

On the world athletics championships, this year's Labour party election manifesto stated:

> "We will maintain the elite funding we put in place for individual athletics with a first-class athletics stadium for the World Athletics Championships in 2005."

Despite that, doubts about Picketts Lock grew, and after the general election the Prime Minister sacked all the Ministers who had been trying to carry out his policy and to do his bidding. The new team faced a situation which, if it called for anything, required prompt and decisive action. However, the Secretary of State dithered. Instead of making a decision, she appointed a consultant—the ubiquitous Mr. Carter.

At this point, Sheffield suddenly appeared on the scene. The city has featured prominently in the Government's sporting policies before. In December 1997, the Government announced that a UK Sports Institute would be built there and, in the Government's mind, that project came to fruition splendidly. Their annual report for 2000 stated:

> "this year saw the opening of the UK Sports Institute, providing world-class facilities, coaching and support in Sheffield".

Kate Hoey: I wish to place on record the fact that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, of which I was a member, and the former Secretary of State asked for a formal change to be made to that document. When the draft came round, they saw that it was wrong. The fact that it was not corrected was not down to what I described as the dysfunctional DCMS but to someone, somewhere who produces these wonderful Government reports.

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making that clear. The fact that the spanking new facilities did not actually exist and were a figment of the imagination of the report's authors represents one of the most remarkable examples of unjoined-up government. The authors were not even aware that an announcement was made in 1999 to say that the Sports Institute would be situated in London. The only explanation for how the report turned from fact to fiction on sporting matters must be that the Prime Minister wrote the introduction.

The Prime Minister is known for his flights of fancy when it comes to sport. He claimed that, as a youngster, he sat watching Jackie Milburn at St James' park. The seats turned out not to exist and he was watching a player who had long ceased to play for Newcastle by the time the Prime Minister was a school boy.

While the Government waited for the consultant's report, the Minister for Sport went to Edmonton and to this year's world athletics championships. According to *The Standard*, he was still quite keen on London as a venue for 2005. On 8 August, it reported that he reaffirmed the Government's commitment to staging the world athletics championships in London in 2005. The article reported him as saying:

> "This is a commitment from the Prime Minister down and is not considered negotiable. We will meet all the deadlines set by the IAAF."

Four weeks after that report, Patrick Carter's recommendations were delivered to Ministers. Five more damaging weeks of dither followed before the Secretary of State finally bit the bullet and told UK Athletics that Picketts Lock was not viable, reneging on every promise given by the Government, from the Prime Minister down.

However, the curtain on this ministerial farce had still not come down. One act remained to be played. Ignoring the fact that the IAAF had awarded the world athletics championships to London, a city, and not to Britain, a country, Ministers took up the cause of Sheffield. A good case could have been made for that city had it been submitted at the proper time, two and a half years ago. Sheffield has a fine sporting tradition. The Don Valley stadium could have been helped to stage the championships, but the last-ditch attempt to divert attention away from the disastrous handling by Ministers of the London bid merely dragged Sheffield humiliatingly into the fiasco.

Among those who were not impressed was the president of the IAAF. The Select Committee Chairman, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, quoted the *Financial Times*. The president of the IAAF wrote to his council members after he met the Secretary of State and the Minister for Sport on 5 October. He said:

> "the IAAF had received numerous guarantees that London would host these championships and that the IAAF Council granted the event to the city—even though there was no actual stadium—in good faith. Since the first news that the rebuilt Wembley Stadium would become Britain's 'new' National Stadium capable of hosting major events in 1996, the IAAF had been approached to host its World Championships in Wembley in 2001, then Wembley in 2003 and 2005, then Twickenham or Crystal Palace in 2005, then Pickett's Lock in 2005 and, finally, Sheffield in 2005.
>
> I declared that this was not acceptable and explained that if London formally withdrew before the deadline of 26 November, the IAAF had no alternative but to open the bidding process again."

That letter was circulated to the IAAF council on 12 October, a week after the president's meeting with Ministers.

The extent to which Ministers were living in a fantasy world is demonstrated in the Secretary of State's press release, issued on 4 October. At the time of her meeting, she said that Labour had

> "acted decisively to put in place a first class alternative in Sheffield, which will deliver the Games . . . as a long term legacy for athletics in the UK."

The Minister for Sport told the Select Committee on 23 October:

> "Can I say that what was said by the Secretary General"

of the IAAF

> "when we came out was very important, bearing in mind I was with my officials. He said, he wanted the best for the Games and he wanted the best for London. We believe we have actually delivered that for the IAAF."

The effects of the U-turn by Ministers are far-reaching. The International Olympic Committee president, Jacques Rogge, said:

> "Of course the Picketts Lock situation was a very serious one. A country not being able to fulfil its pledge to host a major competition is not a trivial matter."

Simon Clegg, the chief executive of the British Olympic Association, said:

> "we will have deprived British athletes of competing in the world's third largest sporting event on home soil with all the competitive advantages that this entails . . . we will have lost the opportunity of demonstrating to the world that we have the ability to stage major sporting events. Coming so soon after the Wembley fiasco it further damages our . . . sporting reputation".

No new facts emerged to justify the U-turn. Every problem that arose from London's bid was well known to Ministers for many months before they made their decision. Their actions in relation to London and their absurd last-minute attempt to switch the championships to Sheffield—an attempt abandoned ignominiously less than two months after it was unveiled—could hardly have done more damage to Britain's reputation than if they had been designed to do so.

The report contains many recommendations that the Opposition strongly support and others that deserve further discussion, but it contains nothing to alter the basic conclusion that Labour has let down British sports fans and British sportsmen and women. No matter what excuses Ministers concoct to explain their actions, it will take years for our reputation to recover.

I recognise the Minister's predicament. He is the man entrusted by the Prime Minister with the task of persuading this country and the world that the Government are interested in sport and that they bring some passion to the pitch. Alas, he is also the Minister for Sport who went to Wimbledon to announce that he did not like tennis. If the Government accept the Select Committee's recommendation for a dedicated Minister for events, I invite him, in the interests of the country, not to apply for the job. I urge him to abandon his usual bluster and admit that the blame for the series of disasters lies fairly and squarely with the Government.

7.15 pm

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is in her place listening to the end of the debate. I do not know where the shadow Minister for Sport is, but I thought that he would be here to listen to this important debate.

I welcome the opportunity to debate the Select Committee's timely report. Our discussion went slightly wide of the report's contents and considered some serious flaws in the structures for sport. I acknowledge those, and they give much food for thought on which the Government will reflect.

I was disappointed that the IAAF did not accept the offer of Sheffield. Whatever has been said to my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), the offer was made in good faith, and I know that Sheffield would have put on a first-class championship, as good as, if not better than Edmonton. In 1991, the previous president of the IAAF, Primo Nebiolo, then president of the world student games, opened those games at Sheffield and commended it as a fine facility which would leave a lasting legacy for sport.

When we decided that there needed to be a review of Picketts Lock, my right hon. Friend Secretary of State informed the IAAF of the terms of reference before we released any information to the outside world. My officials and I followed that up with a one-hour meeting in Edmonton with UK Athletics officials, at which we discussed the difficulties with Picketts Lock.

We told the IAAF before we made the information available to the public that we were revisiting the whole idea of Picketts Lock and that we would have to find an alternative. That was a long time before the meeting at Heathrow airport, at which we explained in great detail why we had withdrawn from the project. We made it clear that we were very sorry and that what we were doing was

[Mr. Richard Caborn]

in the best interests of the IAAF and, indeed, of this country. Had the project gone ahead, knowing the situation with transport and accommodation, we could have been left with a disaster much closer to 2005, and that would have been a real embarrassment for the UK and the IAAF. That is reflected in the report. Our action was correct at the time, even though it created consternation.

Mr. Bryant: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Caborn: No, I must continue.

Given the IAAF's position, UK Athletics, Sport England, UK Sport, Sheffield city council and the BOA concluded that there was little prospect of a successful bid by the UK if we made one after the IAAF had made its decision. The Government agreed with them on that basis. I must tell the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) that it is not the Government who make the bid, but the governing bodies. It is then up to the Government whether they support it.

When I became Minister for Sport in June, it was my intention to ensure that the Government's priorities for sport placed proper emphasis on the need to invest in grass-roots sport, on which there seems to be universal agreement among hon. Members, to increase participation in sport in schools for young people and to ensure that there is lifelong participation among adults. I also wanted to place emphasis on the need to improve coaching and talent identification, to refurbish community facilities, to ensure that there is adequate maintenance of existing facilities, and to provide better support for our top athletes. I believe that we are making good progress in delivering those objectives by investing £130 million in primary schools for the space for sport and arts programme. Through the new opportunities fund, just under £600 million is now being invested in PE and sport facilities through schools and local education authorities.

The Exchequer has doubled its contribution to sport in this country. That means that, along with the lottery, there is now in excess of a third of a billion pounds being invested year on year. As hon. Members have said, there is also investment in people in sport through the school sports co-ordinators. We now have some 400 of those up and running, and working with 1,700 primary schools, and we aim to have 1,000 of them by 2003–04. We are also investing heavily in the volunteer programme.

We believe that major events have a role to play in our strategy. However, a fundamental flaw, not only under this Government but under previous Governments, is that we have been event led, not strategy led. We need to conduct a review of how we proceed, with governing bodies, to act on major events. The Select Committee report makes recommendations about that. The Committee, and its predecessor in the previous Parliament, has been focused on major sports events, and I make no criticism of that, but I genuinely welcome its recent work on the state of swimming facilities. We need to focus on those issues and make sure that we invest in existing, as well as new, facilities.

I suspect that some of the blame must be placed on the way in which the introduction of the lottery raised tremendous expectations about national stadiums, the World cup and the Commonwealth games, but those matters were discussed in a strategic vacuum. There was no discussion of their long-term delivery or of how they could add value to the sporting infrastructure.

It is interesting that nearly five years ago, on 17 December 1996, the then Sports Minister, Iain Sproat, said in a press release:

> "The decision to back Wembley as the venue for the English National Stadium and to invest heavily in facilities for the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester should be seen as an exciting prospect for sports fans all over the country. Both cities are winners".

He went on to say:

> "Never before have we seen so much progress in such a short space of time. These really are exciting times for sport."

The then Conservative Government were deeply involved in plans for the facilities which we are now bringing to fruition. With hindsight, the wrong focus was placed on a number of the developments of major facilities, and we want to revisit that. We indicated to the Select Committee that we will do that in the coming months through the performance and innovation unit.

As I said, sports governing bodies take the lead in these matters, and if they want a national showcase stadium to stage events, the Government can and should play a part in that, provided that the proposals are sound and have been demonstrated to be affordable, deliverable and capable of adding to the nation's sporting infrastructure. However, many mistakes have been made, and the world is littered with white elephants that stand as testimony to false expectations. Many are familiar with the stories of Montreal and Barcelona.

The Stade de France has been cited as an example that we ought to consider following, but I point out to the House the investment necessary for such a stadium. Some £580 million was invested, and the stadium now has a revenue cost of £7 million a year to keep it in operation. We must decide whether that is the right investment to come out of sport's budget. Stadium Australia has rightly been cited as the great feature of the Olympics, but even the president of the IOC said, on 7 August, that it is a white elephant and too big for any legacy use. He said that cities have to be protected from themselves when it comes to such ventures.

We need to define the roles of the Government, UK Sport, Sport England and governing bodies if we are to go ahead with the construction of stadiums. The governing bodies must lead the development plans for their sport, not only for stadiums, but for participation, talent development, elite sport and the facilities that they require. The Government's role is to facilitate the governing bodies' plans for sport. We are doing that in a positive way by engaging with the governing bodies.

I pay tribute to colleagues who are former Ministers for Sport and Secretaries of State, because we are now building up a significant infrastructure to deliver what many of the governing bodies want. That includes capacity building for sport at all levels, including within the governing body itself. The Government have invested some £7 million of Exchequer funding in UK Sport so that it can lead a modernisation programme for the governing bodies, which they welcome. We have invested the largest amount for many years in helping to modernise and develop sports facilities for the community and for elite athletes. Lottery-funded programmes are investing over £40 million a year in the development of elite sport through the world class performance programmes. We are demonstrating a real commitment, through governing bodies, to investment in sport.

Where a sport identifies a need for national facilities, whether for training or competing, the Government stand ready to play our part. We are creating the UK Sports Institute, which already has centres in Scotland and Wales. Despite the derision of the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), Sport England has committed £120 million from lottery funding to develop more than 80 built facilities, and to date almost £80 million of that has been allocated to specific projects. Over £60 million is being awarded to projects in Sheffield and at Loughborough university and the university of Bath.

I therefore welcome very much the Select Committee's suggestion that a more co-ordinated approach to major events is needed. That fits broadly with our approach, which will put a strategy first, rather than being event led. The PIU will put flesh on the bones of that approach, and we hope that we will be able to return to the House with proposals that respond positively to the points made in the Select Committee report. Whether that will include a Minister for events remains to be seen.

Turning quickly to other issues arising from the Select Committee's report, my right hon. Friend will make an announcement on a national stadium before the end of next week, bringing the position up to date. We are making it clear that the FA is in the lead, and there is no more public money for a stadium. We shall place Patrick Carter's report in the public domain before the House goes into recess. I hope that we will be able to have a thorough debate, as we did with Picketts Lock, because we put that information into the public domain and neither the Conservative nor the Liberal Democrat Opposition said that we should have proceeded with Picketts Lock in light of Patrick Carter's evidence. I promised to leave the last two minutes of debate for the Chairman of the Select Committee, so I conclude on that point.

7.28 pm

Mr. Kaufman: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, I should like to thank the House for an excellent debate. I hope that we can now leave behind both self-justification and recrimination, and concentrate on getting these things right for the future. I am encouraged by what the Minister for Sport said twice in his winding-up speech about the need for a structure for events. Our Select Committee has a full programme, and we hope that we will not have to return to these issues in the near future, but if we have to, we will. In that case, this show will run and run, even if, sadly, our athletes will not on home ground.

Debate concluded, pursuant to Resolution [26 November].

Question deferred, pursuant to Standing Order No. 54 (4) and (5) (Consideration of estimates).

Waste Management

[Relevant documents: Fifth Report from the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, Session 2000–01, on Delivering Sustainable Waste Management, HC 36–1; and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, Office of the Rail Regulator, the Office of Water Services and Ordnance Survey: Annual Report 2001, Cm 5105.]

Motion made and Question proposed,

That resources, not exceeding £955,500,000, be authorised, on account, for use during the year ending on 31st March 2003, and that a sum, not exceeding £993,621,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for the year ending on 31st March 2003 for expenditure by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

7.29 pm

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am grateful for this opportunity to debate the fifth report of what was, in the last Parliament, the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, on delivering sustainable waste management. Before I refer to the report itself, I should declare an interest: this autumn I have been chairing a Select Committee-style inquiry in Newcastle, organised by BAN Waste and supported by Newcastle city council, for which I am to receive a fee. That has been an interesting experience as I have had an opportunity to hear a lot of evidence on applying waste management to the locality of Newcastle. I have also had a chance to see how a local inquiry into such issues is conducted.

A lot of people have talked about how local authorities can organise Select Committee-style scrutiny and how people's panels and similar things can be established. I certainly learned a lot from trying to participate as the chair of an inquiry outside the parliamentary framework. One cannot, of course, compel witnesses, and one is dependent on the effort of individuals. I have been impressed with the effort that people from BAN Waste have put in and the support that Newcastle city council has provided. I look forward to the publication of the inquiry's report on 7 January.

As for the Select Committee report, I shall begin by placing on record our thanks to our two advisers, Dominic Hogg and David Mansell, and to all the Committee staff who as always worked hard to help us prepare the questions and the report. I also thank my colleagues on the Committee for their hard work during the course of the inquiry. I have a slight whinge about the Government. At the end of the process of producing a Select Committee report, we usually get a response from the Government. Sadly, on this occasion, we did not. The rules are supposed to be that we get a response within two months of the Select Committee reporting. I accept that the election intervened and it was perfectly reasonable for the response to be a bit late. However, we still have not had a response and it is getting very late. I suppose that the Government have the excuse that Select Committees in this Parliament are different from those in the last Parliament, but I still think that we should have had one. I hope that the new Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will pursue these issues, because a sustainable waste management policy is important for this country.

The world's present use of resources is not sustainable. The developed world—the richest 20 per cent.—uses 80 per cent. of the world's resources and creates a vast

[Andrew Bennett]

amount of pollution. The least developed parts of the world use 20 per cent. of those resources. That injustice cannot go on; I do not see how, if the less developed world raises its standards and spends as much on resources and creates as much pollution as the developed world, there can be sustainability for the whole world. We must look at other ways of dealing with the problem. A small number of people suggest that people in the developed world could accept lower standards of living so that there would be more resources for the less developed parts of the world. I do not accept that most of my constituents would volunteer for such a reduction in their standard of living. The developed world must try to find ways in which it can do the same things that it is doing now, but using far fewer resources.

People talk about factor 4 or factor 10—the idea that we should do what we are doing now, but using only 25 per cent. or 10 per cent. of resources. That would be a substantial challenge, but it is necessary if we are to manage waste in a sustainable world. People often say that it is impossible to achieve that sort of reduction in resources; I do not believe that that is true. There are cases in which, in a relatively short period, the developed world has suddenly started to use far fewer resources to achieve something. The best example of that is computers. When I was first elected to the House, I used to go on visits in my constituency and elsewhere and see people who were delighted to show me a big room of steel cabinets in which computers were operating. Someone would try to explain what was going on, but I half sensed that they did not have a clue. I certainly did not have a clue, but everyone made polite noises. Those computers used a huge amount of metal and other resources, but the same thing can now be contained in a machine on a desktop; in some cases, portable computers can operate with equivalent power.

It is therefore possible to achieve factor 10. When talking about a sustainable waste management policy, it is important to look at the use of resources to begin with. There is a moral imperative to make better use of our resources, but there is also a strong economic argument for doing so. If we can do something with fewer resources, we will have a considerable competitive edge in the world. The first thing that we should do in the waste hierarchy is minimise the resources that we use and the pollution that is created. We must then consider re-use, recycling and composting, recovering energy from waste and, finally, disposal. It is disappointing that the Government are not doing more on minimisation and are not giving a stronger lead to organisations like the regional development agencies in looking at ways in which we can minimise the waste that is created and the resources that are being used.

In their waste strategy for 2000, the Government set recycling targets. On the one hand, those targets were pretty feeble and were not at all challenging but, on the other, I must give credit to the Government because setting those targets has proved a substantial spur to an awful lot of local authorities that were not taking recycling seriously, encouraging them to start things like kerbside collections. The targets are minimal, but I credit the Government with encouraging some local authorities to get started. When the Minister for the Environment responds, will he explain how he is working on the question of markets for waste paper, glass and plastics? Now that the collection process has been kick-started, the price that local authorities can get for waste materials or, if you like, resources, is crucial. I understand that the Government are looking at giving a grant to encourage another waste paper mill to begin operating; I hope that the Minister will tell us exactly what is happening. Having kick-started many local authorities into getting on with recycling, I hope that the Minister will tell us that the Government will look hard at the question of markets, and that they are doing much more to buy recycled materials.

I hope that the Minister can give us a progress report on the waste and resource action programme or WRAP. When he appeared before the Select Committee, he placed great emphasis on the fact that WRAP would be one of the organisations that would start to make the Government's waste management programme sustainable. So far, it seems to have got some nice note paper and had one or two meetings, but few members of the general public have heard of it and I am not sure what it has achieved so far. I look forward to the Minister explaining what progress has been made.

Further down the hierarchy, the question of incineration arises. I am not someone who thinks that it is impossible to create an incinerator without emissions; I think that it is possible to create such an incinerator that will work, but poor management in recent years and the mixing of bottom ash and fly ash mean that few people can have confidence in incinerators.

My argument against incinerators—or combined heat and power, as the people who are in favour of it like to call it—is that to build an incinerator, one has to borrow the money over 15 to 20 years. That means ensuring the security of supply—committing the country or a locality to produce sufficient waste over the next 20 years to justify building the incinerator. That is a damning indictment of a CHP programme. If we are to have incinerators, the case must be made for a steadily diminishing supply of calorific material to burn in them. As a result, the economics become very doubtful.

Whatever one says about emissions, my impression is that no one wants an incinerator or a combined heat and power plant near their home. If the Government intend to encourage them, we need a demonstration combined heat and power plant located somewhere central—perhaps within half a mile of the Palace of Westminster. Such plants should be in town centres, where the hot water generated can be used. It is wrong to think that a CHP plant can be sited at the back of some depressed housing area where no one will make a fuss.

If we adopt a policy of building CHP plants, we should look for town centre locations and demonstrate that the plants need not be out of the way. However, the main question is the security of supply of rubbish. It will be an indictment of us as a nation if we are producing as much rubbish in 20 years' time as we are now.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): The biggest danger is that the location of incinerators is determined by the line of least resistance. That is both unfair and inefficient. We must make it clear to the Government that incinerators should not end up being built in areas where people are least likely to complain. I am sure that that point is made in the Select Committee report.

Andrew Bennett: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Government could issue a challenge to all communities that an incinerator will be built close by if they do not make serious efforts at waste minimisation and recycling. Perhaps the threat of a CHP plant will be enough and it will not be necessary to build any at all.

I shall deal now with composting, a subject on which I hoped for a lengthy reply from the Minister. There has been much talk of commercial composting, but because of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs waste meat regulations, many proposals for composting have been put on hold. That is unfortunate. When we undertook the inquiry, I was appalled at the amount of waste in the food chain. For a start, waste often occurs in agricultural areas, because crops do not quite meet the supermarkets' specifications. The crops are not even picked; they are destroyed where they were grown.

It has been suggested to me that at least 25 per cent. of the food that goes into supermarkets, especially vegetables and bread products, goes to waste. That is a huge amount. Most of the big supermarkets were considering composting as a means of dealing with some of that waste, but have had to put their plans on hold because of the meat regulations.

Even more worrying is the suggestion that most households buy 25 per cent. more food than they need and that the surplus goes to waste. To a certain extent, the supermarkets are again to blame. The one that I use repeatedly has offers of two items for the price of one. That is not economic for me if I am purchasing for the family, and for pensioners, two for the price of one is no good at all. One item is probably more than they want at a particular time, but most people take home the two items, one of which may well end up in the waste stream.

If we are considering ways of making society more sustainable, we must find ways of cutting down food waste. Food that is not saleable or eatable should be properly composted. I hope that the Minister will tell us that ways will be found to prevent meat getting into compost material, so that it can be made safe, with no possibility of foot and mouth or other problems occurring.

We in the UK still do very little about reprocessing batteries. They are usually small and end up in the waste stream, where they produce a high level of contamination. It would not be all that difficult for the Government to insist that shops that sell batteries take back used batteries. When people change a battery, it would be easy to take the new one and hand back the old one. If batteries are collected in large numbers, they can be reprocessed.

I have tweaked the Minister on one or two occasions on the subject of fluorescent tubes. Once, opening a plant in Manchester, he rashly promised that the Government could find more than 1 million fluorescent tubes a year for recycling to remove the mercury. I do not think that he has got anywhere near that target, but it is a small point.

The European Union has been a significant driver of reform—for example, the landfill directive. We welcome the EU end-use directive for cars. That has led people to start thinking about manufacturing cars whose parts can be re-used or reprocessed. I am a little puzzled about why the EU should start with an end-use directive applying to cars, when there was a well-developed scrap industry in this country.

The EU has not turned its attention to other products that are much harder to recycle. One of my pet hates is tetrapaks. They are a mixture of foil, plastic film and paper, and are extremely difficult to recycle. They can just about be burned, but they have little else going for them. Why not make the manufacturers of such cartons responsible for taking them back and looking after the end-use?

What about disposable nappies, which are said to constitute 4 per cent. of the waste stream in the UK? Why not make the manufacturers come up with some system to take them back for recycling? Looking in dustbins or wheelie bins, you notice that products such as pizza boxes bulk up the refuse. Why not have an end-use directive for those items? Perhaps the Minister can throw some light on what will happen with regard to fridges, in relation to which it appears that we are in a bit of a mess. The establishment of some proper end-use directives for such issues would demonstrate that the country has a sustainable waste policy. Can the Minister also tell us what encouragement is being given in relation to anaerobic digesters?

The Select Committee discussed this matter in 1996, 1998 and last year. It has been fairly disappointing that this country has not made much more progress on sustainable waste management. I hope that the Government will seriously consider signing the nation up to the concept of zero waste. That may be a fairly idealistic aim, but unless we can get the message across that resources are being used unsustainably in this country, that we are living in a throwaway society and that that cannot continue, we will find it very difficult to change people's habits.

7.49 pm

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I congratulate what was the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs and the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) on their excellent report, which considers in detail many aspects of the problem of waste management in this country. The hon. Gentleman dealt closely with many of those matters his speech, although the language of the report is rather more colourful and hard hitting than that which he chose to use.

The Government have a great deal to do if they are to convince anybody that we are anywhere near the frontiers of progress on waste management. Overall, the reality is that the UK is dragging its feet behind most of our continental competitors. On almost any indicator, we are neither achieving nor aiming to achieve the sort of recycling and waste reduction that our major continental competitors are and have been achieving. Indeed, they are the innovators. In truth, we are mostly implementing EU directives at the last possible moment, and sometimes not even then. The report states:

> "It is not good enough to shuffle along in a laggardly fashion behind European Union directives."

That is essentially what the Government have been doing. The Minister made a speech some time ago in which he catalogued a list of great environmental initiatives that the Government had introduced. However, one of my colleagues in the European Parliament analysed the speech and found that 70 per cent. of those great initiatives related simply to the legal requirements that had to be fulfilled if Britain was to meet directives passed by the European Parliament and the European Commission two to three years before. That is how we tend to proceed.

I should like to mention a concern that relates not only to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, but to the way in which this Government operate.

[Malcolm Bruce]

I thought that they had the problem only when they were in opposition. Understandably, they did not want to set out too much of their stall as an opposition party, but they have carried the problem through into government. I am all in favour of consultation, but my concern is that we have reached a point where the Government seem to be on an endless cycle of summits, taskforces, agencies, initiatives, challenge funds and bids, all of which are designed to try to implement policy, but the result is that everybody who is engaged in trying to deliver that policy becomes increasingly confused and mystified about exactly where the centre of decision making and leadership lie, and what will be done to achieve the aims.

Let me give an example. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish said that we needed a national recycling programme and a real objective, as did the Select Committee report. He referred to an ideal of zero waste, along with real and specific targets that can be achieved. The first proposed commitment—it was contained in the Liberal Democrat manifesto—was to a doorstep recycling service for every household in the country. We have estimated that such a service would cost about £200 million. As the rubbish and waste industry is worth about £5 billion, that does not seem an enormous amount. The money in WRAP, the waste and resources action programme, and Entrust, the environmental trust scheme regulatory body, adds up to about £200 million, but it is not being allocated in a way that enables local authorities, which must be the front line in providing a recycling service for households, to get on and deliver such a service. They simply need the money to enable them to do that. The Government should give incentives for the good performers, impose penalties for the bad performers and provide funding to ensure delivery.

I plead with the Minister to try to make the process more simple than it has been to date, as we have not reached a situation in which we have anything like a national plan or strategy. We have some very good local authorities that can be the model, while others are doing very little. I am saying not that the Government should deliver, but that they must take a lead and ensure that we get that delivery. We are currently talking about achieving a target of 30 per cent. recycling by 2010, but today Austria already has 60 per cent. recycling today. Indeed, even some local authorities in Britain have achieved better than 30 per cent. The 30 per cent. target therefore seems very unambitious, but on current strategies it is difficult to envisage that we will meet it, not least because the amount of waste that is being produced is increasing by several per cent. a year—and faster than we are introducing any recycling initiatives. We take the view not only that 60 per cent. is an achievable target, but that it would force the creation of more radical and imaginative policies.

We have encouraged the use of landfill, and there is a European Union landfill directive. The targets are distant, but they could become a problem for this country if we do not begin to take the necessary steps now. It is logical for local government to promote recycling household waste, but Governments must be responsible for recycling industrial waste. We need clear targets for that.

It has rightly been said that considering waste disposal quickly leads to examining how to reduce waste. Many of us have been debating the issue for years now, and it is extraordinary that most products appear to have as much packaging as ever. We have not created the climate or the culture of responsibility for reducing packaging and taking back any that is created by marketing and merchandising. The Government could tackle that.

There was a displacement factor in this country when Germany reduced its packaging legislation. However, that did much to ensure that Germany was prepared to recycle and that its marketing organisations tackled their responsibilities for the amount of packaging that they produced. We have not engaged seriously in that debate, either.

What we do with our waste lies at the heart of the problem. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish commented on that. I am sure that there is a campaigning issue connected to waste in every hon. Member's constituency. All of us have tips, landfill sites or other methods of disposal such as incinerators on or close to our boundaries. All are controversial. There must be engagement between the responsibility of Government and local authorities and that of individuals for the waste that society produces.

No one wants a landfill tip or an incinerator on the doorstep. It is reasonable to confront people with their responsibility for helping with waste management. It is not good enough simply to say that we tax landfill. That creates a revenue, but the idea is surely to reduce landfill and encourage waste reduction so that the pressure on landfill decreases. It would be better to use all the money to that end.

The Select Committee has expressed clear views on incineration—views that my party wholly supports. Indeed, the Committee has inadvertently supported Liberal Democrat policy. A Committee that approaches the facts objectively is likely to come up with Liberal Democrat policy, because it is common sense. As the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish said, encouraging the provision of new incinerators is becoming a soft option. If we transfer from landfill to incineration, we simply reduce the pressure for waste reduction in general.

A quote on waste strategy from the Select Committee report should go on record:

> "One example of the problem with the strategy is provided by incineration. We believe that incineration will never play a major role in truly sustainable waste management and cannot, and should not, be classified as producing renewable energy. Yet the strategy fails to set out what role the Government believes waste incineration should play whilst also leaving the door open to a big expansion of large-scale incineration of household waste."

The final phrase is crucial. If we go down that road, we destroy our waste reduction strategy.

If the Government need any proof of the potency of incineration as a political issue, it is provided by my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty). Guildford has a Liberal Democrat Member mainly because of the strength of feeling against the incinerator that is being proposed for the area. My hon. Friend can make her own speech on that subject, and I am sure that she will.

This is a potent issue. In my part of Scotland, more objections have been received to the planning application to replace an incinerator than to any other planning application in the city's history. That is how strongly people feel. The Government would be well advised to accept that, although incineration may have a role to play, that role is neither urgent, nor major. In reality, the danger is that even accommodating incineration will destroy the beginnings of a real waste reduction strategy. A moratorium on new incinerators would thus be constructive for that reason.

My suggestion to the Government is that they need to adopt a more focused and less complicated approach. To put it simply, present policies will not allow us to meet our obligations under European directives, or Government targets derived from them. If we do not act soon, it will be too late to introduce policies that will turn the matter around. We need simple targets—such as ensuring that 60 per cent. of household uplift is recycled—and we must ensure that local authorities have the responsibility to deliver that within an agreed timetable. To do that, they will need funding, and the ability to impose penalties.

I suggest that the simpler the mechanism involved, the more likely we are to get results. At present, the mechanism is too complicated. Authorities have too much discretion to adopt differing approaches.

Finally, will the Minister clarify how we are to sort out the problem posed by cast-off refrigerators? In addition, how are we to avoid the similar problem with the recycling of electrical goods that will arise with the next directive coming down the track?

As I understand it, the Government started discussing the regulation on fridges three years ago. The final terms of the regulation were published in October last year. The regulation's wording made it clear that, by 1 January 2002, the removal of CFCs and related materials in fridge insulation would be a mandatory requirement. That is a specialist process for which we have no capacity in the UK.

My understanding is that someone in the Department misread the regulation and believed that it contained some degree of flexibility. I was told that the person involved believed that the regulation used the phrase "where practicable", and that that was considered an obvious excuse—that the UK does not have the necessary capacity, so the regulations' requirement with regard to fridges cannot be achieved and are therefore not practicable. As a result, it was believed that the European Commission would have to give us enough time to get the capacity in place.

In fact, the regulation does not contain those words. It does not allow any flexibility or discretion, yet this country has no relevant capacity.

I am told that it could be a year before the capacity is in place, which means that 2.5 million fridges—the number thrown out every year—will have to be transported to licensed premises, and stored there. Thereafter, when the capacity is in place, they will have to be transported again and disposed of in the required manner.

All that will cost a significant amount of money. The Department disputed the figures advanced by the Liberal Democrat party, and I have no quarrel with that. Our estimate was based on the information that we had gathered from various sources about what the average cost of moving the fridges would be. Even so, it is clear that a substantial amount of money will have to be spent, in part because a regulation was misread, and in part because we did not take steps to provide the necessary capacity in time.

Local authorities and retailers need to know what will be done to cover the shortfall in capacity until such time as we can dispose of the fridges. The Department has said that it recognises that a problem exists, and that it will do something about it, but no one knows exactly what will be done.

I have been asking local authorities for estimates of the cost. I received the latest figure, from Cumbria, today. That authority said that it estimated the extra cost of handling these fridges at £900,000. My local authority, Aberdeenshire, put the figure at £350,000. The figure varies according to the size of the authority, but the numbers that I have given are typical of what local authorities have told me. In addition, local authorities are not the only ones who will have to deal with the fridges, as retailers will also face certain costs.

I hope that the Minister will accept that we need to know what is going to be done—as well as how it is going to be done, and how soon—to avoid the problem of fridges being dumped by the roadside, in fields or in other places where we would not wish to see them.

The Select Committee that has now been replaced by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has done an extremely worthwhile job. It has set out clearly its aspirations for Government policy, most of which I endorse. I urge the Government to accept the Committee's recommendations as far as possible, and to act on them. My final plea to them is to simplify the process so that people know what is required and what the mechanisms are, so they can deliver. At the moment, the targets are unrealistic and the mechanisms are not in place.

8.5 pm

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): It is always interesting to follow the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) in a debate. He mentioned kerbside collection, and the fact that the Liberal Democrats estimated that it would cost, I think, £200,000 to implement such a scheme. Obviously, if that was the right figure, there would be no hesitation in doing so. However, I received today a report from the UK waste management industry entitled "Facing the Facts", which is published by Onyx. It states:

> "Local authorities will need to invest up to £7bn if they are to meet the EU directive of reducing the amount of waste going to landfill."

So, there is a vast difference between the figures quoted by the Liberal Democrats and those quoted by the people involved in the industry. The report goes on to say:

> "UK inhabitants produce 550 kg of municipal waste per person per year—among the highest volume in Europe . . . UK inhabitants recycle an average 60 kg of municipal waste per person every year—this compares to 250 kg from the average American."

Those figures have an impact on what we are discussing tonight.

I want to express my appreciation to my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett), who chaired our Committee and worked very hard to ensure that the work of the Committee was constructive and directed so that we could publish the report that we are discussing tonight. Members of the Committee appreciate the work that our colleague has done as Chairman.

As a member of the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee, I want to raise certain issues that I consider important to the Committee and to the industry involved with waste and packaging. I also wish to declare that I am the co-chair of the all-party sustainable waste

[Mr. Bill O'Brien]

group, which came together in 1995 to raise issues in Parliament involving waste and sustainable waste management.

Let us consider the terms of reference of the Committee, as outlined in paragraph 6 of the fifth report, which states:

> "Our terms of reference were to examine whether the policies set out in the *Waste Strategy 2000*"—

a publication from the Government—

> "are sufficient to deliver sustainable waste management, and whether the necessary measures, including provision of financial resources, were in place for those policies to be implemented."

Our terms of reference were to consider whether the strategy would result in

> "more efficient use of resources and a consequent reduction in the amount of material entering the waste stream".

If we can achieve that result, we can reduce energy costs. We can reduce the amount of material that is needed to sustain the waste and packaging industries.

Our terms of reference referred to

> "an increase in recycling of waste, particularly by greater development of markets for recycled material (including compost) and the use of producer responsibility measures".

Producer responsibilities are certainly an important factor. I know that the glass, aluminium, steel and paper and board industries are making approaches in a bid to recover all possible waste consisting of those materials from the waste stream for recycling.

I live near a Rockware Glass factory. I am told that within a 10-mile radius of that factory, 30,000 to 40,000 tonnes of glass go into landfills every week because there are no procedures to extract it from the waste stream. Every ounce could be recycled, turned into cullet and returned to the system. Similarly, the aluminium industry will take all the aluminium waste that it can recover. The steel, paper and board and plastics industries are crying out for material to be recovered. Most of this is municipal or household waste. I agree with the hon. Member for Gordon that we should press the issue. I am sure that my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister for the Environment are familiar with such demands, and that their recent initiatives will help.

The terms of reference also referred to

> "sufficient action to educate the public about the importance of sustainable waste management".

I know of a number of manufacturing firms that have set up their own education units. Rockware Glass and Re-use, a recycling company, have such a unit, to which children are brought from all over the country so that they can understand the importance of recycling. Coca-Cola and Schweppes in my constituency also has a unit to educate people in the importance of returning not just glass but plastic bottles so that they can be recycled, and libraries have similar units. A great deal of time and money is being spent on programmes to make people understand the importance of extracting materials from the waste stream. I have already mentioned the 30,000 tonnes of glass, plastic, steel, aluminium, cardboard and paper.

When we took evidence on sustainable waste, we were referred to the role of civic amenity sites and their importance to recovery and recycling.

There are threats that civic amenity sites could be taken from my own authority of Wakefield and offered to the private sector. They are purpose built and they operate efficiently, so I would consider removing them from local authority operation a sin. We have recycling targets and the main one for recycling or composting household waste is at least 25 per cent. by 2005, increasing to 30 per cent. by 2010 and 33 per cent. by 2015. The civic amenity sites can play a major part in meeting those targets, so I plead with the Minister to ensure that their development is encouraged, as outlined and recommended by the Committee.

I sat on the Standing Committee that considered the establishment of the Environment Agency under the Environment Act 1995—there was a Division over that legislation—and the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 followed. Under the regulations, material manufacture was to bear 6 per cent. of the responsibility for the finished product; converting materials to packaging, 11 per cent.; packing and filling, 36 per cent.; and the retailers—supermarkets and others—47 per cent.

There was a tremendous imbalance there, because the retailers collected all the waste and sat on it, as they had much more than their 47 per cent. The packaging recovery note system was the currency through which people could purchase waste from those with a surplus to enable them to meet their targets as outlined in the packaging waste regulations. We were told that they would apply for five years, but after the 1997 election my colleague the Minister for the Environment listened to the industry's pleas and agreed to review the producer responsibilities and the obligations under the regulations.

A consultation document was published in 1997 and slight adjustments were made to those percentages, which benefited the industry, but they did not go far enough to redress the advantages that the retail people—the supermarkets—enjoyed under the regulations. The document says:

> "The purpose of the consultation document is to present options and proposals for the modification of the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997".

The industry appreciated my right hon. Friend's intervention in reviewing the percentages, and the glass, aluminium, steel, paper, plastics and wood industries responded to the document by offering him advice. I am sure that he valued the interest that came from the industry.

Recently, however, there has been anger among people in the packaging industry because of a statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—there are problems when departmental boundaries cross. She announced that the new code, as recommended by the Competition Commission and involving the supermarkets,

> "effectively formalises the relationship between retailers and suppliers"

and that was obviously welcomed by the supermarkets. The code has had an impact on the packaging industry and on farmers. However, that made waves: it creates problems for the waste packaging industry. We need to consider decisions that have an effect on people in that industry and on those involved in recycling.

May I make a plea on behalf of the packaging industry? In many instances, owing to cheap imports, our industry is at a disadvantage compared with competitors in Europe and the far east. The massive increase in gas prices, the climate change levy and the proposed mineral extraction levy will all have an impact on the competitiveness of our packaging industries. Will my right hon. Friend the Minister try to find an opportunity to discuss with his colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury the impact of those levies on the waste packaging industry?

We should use the recycling process. We need to undertake more recycling, so if we can obtain more material through the waste system, it will help to offset some of the industry's problems and the extra costs—including those from increased administration—that it has to bear. My plea to my right hon. Friend is that we implement kerbside collection as quickly as possible. We must extract between 30,000 and 40,000 tonnes a week of glass and other materials for recycling. That will help to make our packaging industries more efficient and accountable, and environmentally friendly.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend is fully aware of the situation and of the plea in the report, which I support, that that recycling should continue.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Before I call the next hon. Member, I point out to the House that there is a time limitation, so it would be helpful if everyone who seeks to catch my eye bears their colleagues in mind and tries to keep their remarks reasonably concise.

8.23 pm

Sue Doughty (Guildford): I very much congratulate the Select Committee on its work in producing the report. During the run-up to the election and subsequently, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) pointed out, many of its recommendations were extremely helpful to people who were considering the development of alternative strategies for sustainable waste management.

Last week, a planning meeting was held in Surrey to examine proposals for three incinerators—one of which was for Guildford—and the Select Committee report was cited most constructively. We all found it helpful.

We are looking for a sustainable waste management strategy—indeed, at present, we are looking for any waste management strategy at all. During the past few years, report after report has been issued, after which the Select Committee report was a breath of fresh air. There was even a waste summit, but we are getting no further. We want firm guidance from the Government and a deliverable waste plan, rather than words over which people argue. There was discussion earlier about whether we should refer to incinerators as energy from waste. Those little words that creep in when we try to justify what is happening are important to people.

Our approach in Guildford to incinerator proposals is not a case of nimbyism; in fact, I am very pleased to say that when I was approached by a neighbouring Surrey Member asking whether we would agree to send our waste to an incinerator just outside the area, I had to say, "No; Guildford does not want to incinerate waste. We want instead to develop a sustainable waste strategy in which all the feasible options are considered, after which we shall decide what to do with the final waste element." Whatever happens, the people in Guildford are absolutely determined that the solution has to be sustainable and pose minimal health risks, about which there has been much concern.

I know that I speak for other hon. Members when I say that constituents who would have to work near incinerators, or send their children to school near them, are very deeply worried about proposals to build incinerators. Those worries are shared by those who own houses near incinerators. Although the Guildford housing market is desperately overheated, parts of it have declined because of the issue. It has happened in a part of Guildford that is not affluent, where a large percentage of household income is used to buy a house. It has been heartbreaking to see people in the area unable to move because they cannot sell their property for anything like the amount they paid for it. We have to resolve that issue and make clear our intentions.

When we talk about recycling, we are really talking about materials recovery, which is a term that I much prefer. Industry wants more materials recovery, as should we all, because that is the sustainable way of approaching the issue. I hope that, in their planning, the Government will help local authorities to agree a standard measurement for recycling. Does local recycling include deposits at local supermarket facilities, or only at local authority facilities? The waste is all produced in one local authority, and we have to address the various measurement issues. I know that councils will be very pleased to see a consistent method of measurement.

There are difficulties also in distinguishing between doorstep recycling and recycling in materials reclamation facilities, and in dealing with contaminated recyclables as opposed to clean ones. We want to set ourselves recyclables targets, but to do that we have to be able to measure them. We want not only high-quality doorstep recycling but much greater investment in alternative sustainable ways of handling waste, such as composting. Much more needs to be done on municipal recycling.

We have to determine how local government can best use the available funding to develop materials recovery and composting streams and facilities. I realise that we have been bandying about figures, and that earlier in the debate one figure was misheard, thereby producing another one. However, research commissioned jointly by Friends of the Earth, Waste Watch and Biffa estimates that £17 per household would cover the initial transition and implementation costs of an effective recycling and composting service. However, we have to find the money for the initial investment.

One deep disappointment is that only very modest annual increases to the landfill tax, which seems to be a good thing, are being proposed. Indeed, the Environmental Services Association is one of the few industry groups ever to have said, "Please increase tax and help us to invest in materials recovery. We believe that the impact of an increase on local government and on commerce will be minimal." Liberal Democrat Members would also like the rate of those tax increases to be accelerated in the next few years. If we are taxing waste management technologies that we do not like, should we not be thinking about an incinerator tax? The Select Committee report mentions such a tax.

[Sue Doughty]

In the meantime, we should develop a third approach that involves composting and materials recovery so that we are not presuming in favour of incineration at the cost of landfill. Local authorities are still doing that. Those fighting the proposals are still working with people who want proven technologies. No local authority will take risks when it is making recommendations about this or that new technology. Local authorities have a legal responsibility and they want reliable solutions. However, we need investment to help bring those solutions to the point at which they will be right for local authorities.

Local residents should not be writing their own handbooks about how to achieve zero waste because local government does not have the solutions, and the structure within which they are working is not sufficiently good. Yet so many of the good recycling activities in London, which have high levels of recyclables, are community led. Although we are all pleased about that, we should be delivering solutions, through local government, possibly in partnership with other providers. Local government need these tools; it should not be left to private individuals and protest groups to solve these problems for the Government.

We need to look at waste management in the farming sector. Farmers have to bear the cost of disposing of materials on their land, which is why we must do all we can to discourage fly tipping. Where fly tipping occurs on the county's land, the council is at least obliged to take the waste away even if the farmer picks up the cost. I do not condone the amount of money that local authorities have to pay for this service. Farmers often have to pay for the removal of several tonnes of tyres and builders' rubble. More than a quarter of farmers have seen a significant increase in fly tipping this year. We need to ensure that solving urban problems does not lead to rural difficulties. That is most important when we look at what can be done to help the rural community. The days when farmers had a lot of money to spare are long gone, and the problem is on our doorstep.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I put it to the hon. Lady that fly tipping in rural areas is not, as she suggests, predominantly the responsibility of the urban population. My constituency is very rural in parts, and in some cases the villages surrounding the agricultural areas contribute to the increase in fly tipping, possibly as a response to the increase in landfill tax without adequate recycling opportunities.

Sue Doughty: I thank the hon. Gentleman—that was a useful piece of information. There is a mixture of urban and rural in my constituency, with fields close to the edge of town, but circumstances may vary in different constituencies.

Two years ago, a Tidy Britain survey on the impact of the landfill tax found that most fly-tipped material was of local origin and that 57 per cent. was household or garden waste. People drove their cars to tip that waste on to somebody else's property. Building trade waste amounted to 21 per cent., with cars or tyres at 9 per cent. We all know that that figure will rise rapidly. Waste on verges amounted to 28 per cent.; 28 per cent. was on private land; and, sadly, 12 per cent. went into rivers. We need to consider the needs of the rural economy in managing waste.

We are looking for a sustainable waste strategy. The Select Committee report goes a long way to pointing the way forward. However, we need a context in which that can be delivered by local government, the best companies and community groups, and we are looking to the Government to take the lead.

8.34 pm

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): We cannot ignore waste management because the issue simply will not go away; it is increasing in magnitude. It is unfortunate that municipal waste in the United Kingdom is increasing by between 4 and 5 per cent. a year. Across the country, there are closed historical landfill sites that remain ticking timebombs. It is no longer like that because we now have good and improving waste management practice, but the United Kingdom is far too dependent on landfill, with 81 per cent. of waste going to landfill sites, and it is important to view that in a European context. In Denmark and Holland, just 12 per cent. of waste goes to landfill sites, and the figure is 50 per cent. in France.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) stressed very strongly the importance of waste minimisation, recycling and composting, but the time has now come to convert the rhetoric into reality. We in the United Kingdom do very badly on recycling and composting, with the figure at just 11 per cent., compared with Denmark on 30 per cent. and Holland on 40 per cent. It is important to note that, while waste is increasing in the United Kingdom, firm political leadership has led to a reduction in waste in Germany, Denmark and Sweden.

We must move away from landfill as quickly as possible. Of course, the new EU waste directive will enable us to do that, backed by the local authority targets, but there are other pressures. All over the country, as the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) said, complaints are made about landfill sites. There are problems with local authorities gaining new consents for landfill sites. For example, Nottinghamshire county council has been striving to open the Bentink void for five years, but the planning process is still not complete and engineering work remains to be done. I suspect that another five years will pass before that sites opens.

It is important to note that any planning application connected with waste meets opposition—whether we are talking about commercial composting sites, such as that mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish, or waste recycling centres. To establish a proper infrastructure in Nottinghamshire, two waste recycling centres will be needed by 2005. Even today, there is no clear idea where those sites should be and the planning process has not even started.

Mass incineration is universally abhorred, and quite rightly so. Within the next day or two, the Government will produce a Green Paper on a new planning process. It is important that that process enables local people to raise objections, and their objections are paramount. We must have a new planning system that is swifter at delivery than the one we have at present.

David Taylor: My hon. Friend refers to a swifter system, but is it not equally the case that communities pitted against a very powerful applicant, as with the New Albion site in North-West Leicestershire, face a very uneven struggle when the public inquiry takes place? Surely there have to be improved opportunities for communities to express their concerns.

Paddy Tipping: My hon. Friend will have to contain himself, but I suspect that the Green Paper on planning will address that point. It is important that community groups are supported in such David and Goliath situations, so that their voices can be heard in a contest that is not always equal.

It is important to note that waste is viewed as cost-free to the householder. In the United Kingdom, waste disposal costs the householder £47 a year—90p a week. That is typically 25 per cent. of the sewerage and water costs. The comparable figure is £100 a year in France and £150 a year in Germany.

It is important that we consider other ways of raising money to build an infrastructure for waste disposal. I agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) that there is a strong case for increasing the landfill tax substantially from the current £12. I would not advocate a move to the £46 charged in the Netherlands, but there is a case for a big gear change in charging policy. Providing kerbside collection across the country will cost a great deal of money. The hon. Member for Gordon said that it would cost £20[illegible] million and my own estimate would be around £500,000 for a small district council.

There is a compelling case for charging householders for the waste that they produce. It must not be seen as cost-free, or as free of cost to the environment. Those households that recycle could receive a reduction in council tax bills. I hope that the performance and innovation unit will also consider charging households directly for the waste that they produce.

Andrew Bennett: Does my hon. Friend accept that the great danger of what he suggests is that it would increase fly tipping? Another issue is how we could stop people putting their rubbish in next-door's wheelie bin or dustbin.

Paddy Tipping: Such a move would cause problems, but we cannot continue with a situation whereby the amount of waste going into rubbish bins is still increasing and people have a perception that they pay nothing towards the disposal of waste. We must establish a link between charging and waste disposal.

Malcolm Bruce: The hon. Gentleman's idea is interesting, but would it not just introduce another complication? Most people regard the local authority as the body that removes their waste. Would the simplest answer not be for the local authority to say that people had to put their waste in certain boxes and that it would be taken away only if they did so—and for penalties to be charged for non-compliance? That is what people pay their taxes for. It would not be cost-free, but it would be the simplest answer.

Paddy Tipping: Yes, but we must establish a link. Householders must know that the disposal of waste costs both the environment and real cash. We lack the attitude to tackle the problem, and that is reflected in the amount that we spend on waste disposal. In the UK, local authorities spend £1.5 billion on waste disposal. In France, they spend £3 billion.

If we are to build an infrastructure, we must find ways to deliver the money to do so. My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) mentioned the Ernst and Young report that suggested that it would cost £7 billion over 10 years. There is big money in waste and if we develop a national plan for waste disposal, the private and public sector should both contribute.

Waste planning should be localised, too. It is a local problem and local solutions should be found. I was especially struck by developments in the Isle of Wight, where a partnership between the local authority, Biffa and the ENER.G Group has reduced landfill by 45 per cent. through recycling and energy recovery. Some 65,000 households are served by the scheme, but it costs. The average cost in the UK is 90p, but that service costs £1.50. However, it is more sustainable and it is a local solution to a local problem.

The Isle of Wight scheme has its problems. The waste recovery heat and power plant is losing money hand over fist and there is a real danger that it will go out of business or relocate overseas. The Minister will be aware of a possible solution using the draft UK renewables obligation order, which is in its second draft form at the moment. That perceives that support for "Advanced (Energy from Waste) Technologies" might be available. However, the order specifies that it is for gasification and pyrolysis, but we should not be backing technologies but examining good quality heat and power schemes. What is significant is not the technology but the inputs and, more important, the outputs of a plant. There is a strong case for extending the order to high quality, more conventional means of disposal and incineration. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will comment on that.

Last month, the decision to call a waste summit was announced and the PIU has been charged with the task of producing solutions. I hope that those solutions will be sustainable. Waste is a cost to us all. It is a cost in real terms and to the environment, so we must use the waste summit and the PIU report as a spur to finding a long overdue solution. We must change the rhetoric of sustainability so that reality lies behind it.

8.46 pm

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): I am extremely pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this important debate. Conservation and sustainable development are causes very close to my heart, so I was glad recently to join the Environmental Audit Committee.

As a constituency Member of Parliament, I have a duty to fight for the interests of an area of which more than 70 per cent. is designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty. As a Conservative, I care passionately about the environmental future of the country and indeed the planet. However, I wish to start by praising those local councils that have bucked the national trend and have managed to put in place a progressive recycling regime.

One such authority is Wealden council, part of which I am proud to represent in the House. It has one of the best recycling records in the country and I hope that Rother—which I am also proud to represent and which is now firmly Conservative after years of Liberal control—will start to blaze a trail in that regard too.

Getting a grip of the problem of waste in Britain is not just a lofty aspiration; it is a political imperative. After five years of Labour Government, any semblance of a

[Mr. Gregory Barker]

progressive and effective waste strategy has ground to a halt. The recent waste summit called by the Secretary of State was not about taking a record of achievement to its next logical step or shifting up a gear. It was a vain effort to breathe life into what was clearly a political corpse.

So soon after winning a fresh mandate from the electorate, one would have hoped that the Secretary of State would have her own ideas or even manifesto commitments to which she could refer to deal with the mess and intractable muddle that is the Government's waste management strategy. However, as with so many moribund areas of Government policy, she has contracted a nasty outbreak of "reviewititis" in the vain hope that a problem deferred is a problem halved.

After five years of Labour Government, there is no effective waste strategy; after five years of Labour Government, the Secretary of State was unable to tell my Committee where she stood on incineration; after five years of Labour Government, there is no effective national recycling policy; after five years, the amount of waste we generate is increasing not diminishing; and after five years, the Secretary of State has gone back to the political drawing board and passed the buck to the PIU.

It is not sufficient expert advice that the Government lack—far from it, because there have been numerous reports and reviews in recent years—but political will. They lack the political will to go beyond the soundbite and the political cliché to tackle the problems head on. That is not the only problem. Rather than face up to the environmental challenge, the Government have neutered the issue of environmental protection and sustainable development by salami-slicing policy responsibility between the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. While we wait for the Government to rearrange the office furniture in Whitehall, the environmental future of the country is going up in smoke.

As the problem of incineration has been offloaded into the political long grass of the PIU, beleaguered county councils up and down the country are being left to make critical decisions on incineration in a political vacuum. While the Government procrastinate yet further, councils are being asked to take decisions that could have consequences for countless communities for up to 25 or 30 years to come. Councils such as East Sussex in which my constituency sits, face the prospect of having to give the green light to the building of incinerators while important issues of public health remain unanswered.

I have pledged to fight the siting of incinerators in my constituency at Mountfield or Pebsham. That is why I wholeheartedly backed the Conservative party's commitment at the recent election to obtain a national moratorium on the building of new large-scale municipal incinerators until independent British scientific evidence proves that they are safe.

Too much incorrect information is flying around on both sides of the argument for proper conclusions to be drawn. Too many unanswered questions swirl around the incineration debate, and the Labour Government deliberately choose to ignore them. Without an effective national waste strategy, councils such as East Sussex may find themselves driven into the business of incineration and licensing commercial incinerators that will ultimately rely on importing rubbish into the county to keep those costly facilities commercially viable. I vigorously support free enterprise and I have seen in my lifetime the value of throwing off the shackles of the state, but the clean air of Bexhill and Battle is not for sale.

As the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) said, the United States of America, the home of free enterprise, manages to recycle an average of 250 kg of municipal waste per person every year compared with a lousy 60 kg in the UK. After five years of a Labour Government, the UK now produces 550 kg of municipal waste per person per year, which is among the highest in Europe.

David Taylor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Barker: No, I am limited on time. The hon. Gentleman will get his chance.

I am amazed that Ministers have the sheer brass neck to come to the House and tell hon. Members that they face the threat of up to 100 new large-scale incinerators pumping out emissions when the Government's record on recycling is so risible. They are failing across the spectrum of waste policy.

As other hon. Members said, the latest comprehensive Ernst and Young local authority waste management survey reveals a startling £6 billion to £7 billion shortfall in the investment required to meet EU landfill targets. Perhaps the Minister should tell that to the Chancellor. The same survey reveals that only 10 per cent. of local authorities have finalised plans to deliver an integrated waste management structure. Some 14 per cent. have not started their plans and the remaining plans are languishing in various states of early drafting. I hope that the Minister will address that point.

The lag is due not only to the shortfall in funding, but to the uncertainties in the procurement of contracts in the waste disposal sector. With so many areas labouring under a regime in which one authority has responsibility for collection and another for disposal, the Government's total lack of an enforceable coherent national strategy is acting as a serious brake to the development of a sensible and ambitious recycling strategy that could be delivered on the ground. That failure is driving Britain into the arms of the incineration industry.

There will be a high price to pay for this Government's poor record, not least fines of up to £500,000 per day if the terms of the EU landfill directive are not met, but that will be a small cost compared with the prospect of a whole generation of children growing up in the shadow of Labour's massive incinerator-building programme.

8.55 pm

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): The Select Committee's report calls for vision, ambition and action to implement an integrated waste management strategy that minimises waste, reduces landfill and increases recycling and re-use. The evidence is that this Government have made great strides towards achieving that, but can still make more improvements and indeed need encouragement to ensure that that happens.

The waste strategy 2000 is a step in the right direction, and its initial target to almost treble recycling rates by 2005 is admirable. The concern lies in the absence of specific measures to ensure that those rates are attained. There is concern that the Government do not appear to be paying sufficient attention to waste minimisation. They seem to be accepting that household waste will continue to grow by 3 per cent. per annum. I hope that, in replying to the debate, the Minister for the Environment will assure us that the Government are concerned with waste minimisation, as well as with better methods of waste disposal.

The Government's waste disposal initiatives should be recognised and applauded. WRAP, the waste and resources action programme, set up to overcome market barriers to re-use and recycling, is to be welcomed, but it would be helpful if we could have a progress report on its targets and on how much is being achieved.

The Government's decision to call a waste summit only a month ago is a sign of their commitment. Their action in bringing together business, green groups and representatives from the voluntary sector and local authorities indicates the importance that they attach to partnership work. The Government's commitment that the performance and innovation unit will report in summer 2002 on its review of the waste disposal strategy is another important step. It is equally important that the Department of Trade and Industry is the lead Department in this matter, because that emphasises the importance of business in efficient waste disposal policies.

I draw the attention of the House to the role of key players in improving our policy and taking forward the recommendations of the Select Committee. The Government must continue to show leadership, to set targets and to introduce legislation where necessary. I hope that they will do more to recognise the importance of producer responsibility, because they have not acted on that as strongly as they might have done.

Fiscal measures are important in improving efficiency and reducing landfill. The landfill tax was perhaps the first environmental tax, and it has been greatly welcomed by those who are concerned about better means of waste management. I would hope that the Government could identify further fiscal measures and financial incentives to support better waste disposal practices and a more integrated approach to the subject. The climate change levy led to the identification of a number of energy-intensive sectors of industry in which supportive financial incentives have been introduced and are now being acted on. I hope that that thinking can be extended to the whole issue of integrated waste management, perhaps through the green technology challenge. I look forward to hearing further details about that. The regions should be used more positively to promote better practices. Regional chambers should develop better strategies on integrated waste policies and should work with regional development agencies to publicise proposals and work out better means of disposal, perhaps using regional investment funds.

Local authorities should continue to be seen as an essential part of a sensible policy. They are due to receive £140 million from the special fund that the Government established for local authority recycling. I hope that the local government White Paper, which was announced today, will provide more opportunities and flexibility for local authorities to take more action and become involved in more joint ventures. I hope that the Government will heed the Select Committee recommendation that their assessment of best value in local government should include recycling targets. They should also consider the specific recommendation that beacon councils should have achieved at least a 50 per cent. kerbside collection of recyclable items before they are given that status.

I want to pay particular attention to the importance of community involvement. We are all aware of the importance of community involvement in assessing and often in reacting to proposals on waste management and disposal. I wish to draw attention to the important contribution made by social enterprise in Liverpool, particularly the work of Create, an entrepreneurial and environmentally beneficial social enterprise that creates jobs and provides training that leads to jobs and, at the same time, recycles and re-uses household goods. Create was founded in Liverpool in October 1995 and is a company limited by guarantee. It began as a partnership between the Furniture Resource centre, which is a charity, and Thorn EMI. Last year, its turnover was about £650,000; it employed 15 permanent staff and trained 28 people. Indeed, since its inception, it has trained 98 people, most of whom have since found permanent employment.

Most important, perhaps, Create's work involves the recycling and refurbishment of used household goods such as fridges, washing machines and cookers. Those goods are resold in the community at affordable prices for people on low incomes. During the time in which it has been operating, 70,000 appliances have been collected, 12,000 of which have been sold following refurbishment; 3,700 tonnes of scrap have been sent for recycling and 4,000 fridges and freezers have had ozone-depleting CFCs removed.

The project is recognised for using initiative and flair, improving the environment, showing the way forward and, at the same time, creating employment. It has been involved in the new deal's environmental taskforce, has worked in Liverpool's employment zone and is seen as an excellent example of an intermediate labour market project. I hope that the Government will recognise the importance of that initiative and enterprise in Liverpool and will ensure that, through various means of allocating funding and support, such projects can be expanded and developed. Indeed, I understand that Create is already expanding and working in a London borough, but I hope that that example of local enterprise will be seen as a national leader and something that should be followed up across the country.

During the past four years, my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) has chaired the Environment Sub-Committee with flair, expertise and commitment. It is a matter of great regret that the environment has been removed from the remit of what is now the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions. I bring it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment that the members of that Sub-Committee and its Chairman will be following the consequences of the Select Committee's report and will retain a keen interest in the way in which its recommendations are pursued.

I hope that the importance of the current Select Committee's work is recognised. It has identified the importance of going ahead with a sound, environmentally beneficial policy for waste minimisation and disposal. I hope that in my right hon. Friend's reply, he will give us an assurance that the Government will follow the Select

[Mrs. Louise Ellman]

Committee's recommendations. I can assure him that its members, past and present, will listen carefully to his remarks.

9.6 pm

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): I am not a member of the Select Committee, but I have read its report with great interest and listened to the debate with even greater interest. It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) who as always made a thoughtful contribution.

It is interesting to follow at one remove the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker). I do not know his constituency, but I did not recognise the picture that he painted of the good citizens of his part of Sussex cowering in the shadow of huge toxic incinerators. That is not a picture that any of us would recognise.

Mr. Barker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. I can tell her that there is genuine concern in my constituency at the prospect of an incinerator being built at Pebsham in Bexhill or at Mountfield near Battle. There is a huge public outcry and huge public concern about the potential environmental impact. There is also huge concern from parents and families who live in the communities around the areas that stand to be blighted. The hon. Lady makes light of the matter at her own cost.

Jane Griffiths: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his most helpful intervention. I was not, of course, seeking to make light of his or his constituents' concerns. I was simply pointing out that to paint such an overblown picture does no service to this important issue.

The targets in the Select Committee's report have been described from all parts of the House this evening as unchallenging and not strict enough. In an ideal world, those targets might not seem greatly challenging, but in the country in which we live, they do present a challenge to those seeking to recover value from 40 per cent. of municipal waste by 2005, and from 45 per cent. of municipal waste by 2010, under the terms of the Government's waste strategy. Those are not unchallenging targets.

The Government's waste strategy, recognising that different local authorities are at different points in increasing the amount that they recycle, called for those recycling less than 5 per cent. of waste in 1998–99 to achieve at least 10 per cent. by 2003; for those recycling between 5 per cent. and 15 per cent. in 1998–99 to double their rate by 2003; and for the remainder to achieve at least one third by 2003. It is estimated that that will achieve 17 per cent. nationally by 2003.

I suspect that those targets will be difficult to achieve. That is why I found the Select Committee report so useful, as it takes a hard look at the issues associated with recycling and the difficulties in its way.

Some remarks have been made from various points of view about incineration. The Select Committee report states that energy from waste incineration should be excluded from energy renewables targets. I am not sure whether I agree with that view. The choice is not between incineration and wonderful, completely clean waste management, but between incineration, landfill and other measures, so I do not believe that we can try to exclude incineration all together.

Little mention was made of clinical waste, which forms a small but important proportion of our total waste. The Royal Berkshire hospital, which is situated in my constituency, is very large and is surrounded on all sides by a densely populated residential area. No complaint has ever been made to me about the clinical waste that is incinerated there. I believe that the process is carried out in a very clean fashion. I am not aware of any way of disposing of most sorts of clinical waste without using a form of incineration to prevent infection.

There are a great many pressures. The various EU directives put pressure on our Government. The end-of-life directives on vehicles, batteries and waste electrical and electronic equipment all extend producer responsibilities. The EU landfill directive of 1999 requires the amount of biodegradable municipal waste that is sent to landfill to be reduced to 75 per cent. of 1995 levels by 2010. That is a very challenging target.

In representing Reading, East, I represent part of the local authority area of Reading and part of that of Wokingham, which has a doorstep recycling scheme and some bring sites, and forecasts the achievement of 16.87 per cent. recycling. In national terms, that is a very high level. Reading has only bring sites and no doorstep recycling, although it has begun a doorstep recycling trial. That is welcomed by constituents who live in the borough, which achieved a recycling rate of 7.7 per cent. in 1998-99. Both those local authorities are working with the neighbouring area of Bracknell Forest borough council, none of which is situated in my constituency. They are working together on a long-term recycling waste treatment and disposal contract to find the most sustainable and cost-effective way of dealing with household wastes for between 10 and 25 years. The project aims to reduce the growth in waste by 2007 and then reduce the amount of waste arising by a further 5 per cent. It also aims to ensure recycling levels of 30 per cent. by 2005, 35 per cent. by 2010 and 52 per cent. by 2028. I believe that the project should be successful and that those targets are achievable.

Once minimisation, recycling and composting have made the maximum possible contribution, the proposals go on to deal with generating energy from waste, especially in the form of combined heat and power. The aim is that, by 2020, 13 per cent. of total waste arising, and no more, should go to landfill. There is also an intention to cap the ratio of waste to energy, with the aim that any waste that arises as a result of the forecast population growth in the three authority areas is dealt with higher up the waste chain. In the Thames valley, that growth is considerable and appears likely to continue. The point about landfill is important, because it is predicted that, if there is no change in the current extent to which it is used—this information comes from several sources—the available landfill in Berkshire will run out by 2006–07.

I know that there is another school of thought which says that landfill is not such a problem as most of those who are involved in waste and environmental issues hold it to be. Many who work in earth sciences believe that we should not worry too much about landfill. I am not convinced by that, but it is useful to discuss matters with people who take a different view.

It is planned that the project in Berkshire should be undertaken by a joint contract with an organisation through a public-private partnership. The plans are subject to discussion between my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and the relevant local authorities. We shall meet next week to discuss taking those important proposals forward.

The report contained several recommendations that merit serious consideration. They all involve considerable resources. An environmental crime unit that could tackle fly tipping has been proposed. That would be immensely welcome in every constituency, but it would not be cheap to run; it would require a lot of resources.

The planning system does not always favour sustainable waste management. I am not simply referring to incinerators and proposals for them, although I do not believe that we should exclude incineration from our waste management plans. Problems can arise when land that has been used for landfill is subsequently proposed for housing development. For example, in Woodley in my constituency, problems arose when only part of an elderly landfill site was subsequently built on. Planning applications for more dwellings ran into serious difficulty.

The planning process must change. Like other hon. Members, I look forward to the Green Paper, which will be published soon and will highlight proposed changes in the planning process. If it does not include proposals that help us to manage waste more sustainably and minimise actual and perceived health risks to local populations, we will all fail in our endeavours. I am optimistic that we can achieve much more in sustainable waste management. We must do that for future generations.

9.17 pm

Bob Russell (Colchester): I appreciate the opportunity to make a brief contribution. I hope that the Minister for the Environment can clarify the Government's position on incinerators. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) drew attention to possible contradictions, and the Minister knows from parliamentary questions that other hon. Members and I tabled that we have tried to ascertain the Government's precise view.

The Minister told me in a written answer that there is no legal requirement for county councils to include incinerators in their waste plans. However, Conservative-controlled Essex county council is proceeding with incinerators in its plan because it claims that that is a legal requirement. We need clarification.

The Minister knows from when he was a resident in Colchester that two of the six proposed sites for incinerators in Essex are in Colchester: one in Stanway and one in Old Heath. That is causing considerable anxiety and alarm. There is a belief that incinerators will undermine the thrust of waste recycling, including doorstep collections. I say that from a strong position because Colchester, through policies that the Liberal Democrats introduced and developed, has produced the best recycling record of any council in Essex.

We need a firm but clear statement from the Government. What is their position on incinerators? Will they give a clear commitment tonight that incineration is not their preferred policy?

9.19 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): I feel sorry for the Minister for the Environment. Apart from one nodding donkey on the Labour Benches, no one has had a good word to say about the Government's environmental policy. The Minister's heart is in the right place, but the trouble is that no one in Government seems to listen to him.

The former Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Select Committee published the report that we have been discussing on 14 March this year. It is an excellent report, and I congratulate the Committee and its Chairman at the time, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett).

The report makes many good points clearly and succinctly, and much of it has considerable validity. There is no doubt that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish has demonstrated over many years a commitment to protecting and enhancing the environment. That showed in his speech today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) made a battling speech. He made many a good point, to the evident discomfort of Labour Members.

Conservatism and conservation go together. My party is passionate about preserving the United Kingdom's natural heritage and the future of our planet. The most obvious starting point for that is to implement an effective strategy for dealing with the waste that we produce.

No waste strategy will be effective until we all understand that caring for the environment must be approached by educating people and instilling a collective responsibility. I am sure that we can all agree that Governments must work with people, and have faith in them—in the farmers who manage our countryside, in those who run the businesses that produce our wealth, and in every householder whom we are here to serve. We should align the people's best interests with their self-interest.

No one would deny that we produce too much waste, and I shall show that things are getting worse. I shall also seek to demonstrate that landfill is not the answer, and that incineration is no easy substitute. The only real answer is far less waste, far more recycling and re-use, and a Government who spend their time acting effectively rather than talking loudly.

England and Wales produce about 400 million tonnes of waste each year. In 1999–2000, average municipal waste was 26 kg per household per week, an increase of 1 kg from 1998–99. Nationally, the municipal waste management survey for 1999–2000 showed that there was a total of 29.3 million tonnes of municipal waste in England and Wales in that period, up from 27.9 million tonnes in the previous year.

To our discredit, we are a "throw-away" society that produces too much waste, and the waste that we are producing is growing by 3 per cent. a year. That might not sound too much, but in practice it means that, if nothing is done, we will need to double our waste disposal capacity by 2020.

Historically, landfill has been seen as the answer, but the space for landfill is rapidly running out. Landfill sites are deservedly unpopular: as any Bedfordshire MP knows, they scar the landscape, they smell, and they produce methane, which is a highly damaging greenhouse gas that contributes to global warming.

[Mr. Jonathan Sayeed]

It is true that landfill tax has been increased, and that we were told that it was a tax designed to discourage landfill and protect the environment. Well, it certainly is a tax, but for the amount collected it has had modest environmental impact, and there is little evidence that the proceeds have been spent on recycling incentives or measures.

What we do know is that EU directives dictate that the level of biodegradable material sent to landfill must be reduced to two thirds of the 1995 level by 2020. We also know that, with their current policies, the Government will not achieve that.

We should not ignore one of the consequences of landfill tax—fly tipping. Despite the Government's protestations to the contrary, higher levels of landfill tax have increased the incentive for many to fly tip to avoid paying tax. Farmland, especially, is often prone to abuse in this way. The National Farmers Union conducted a telephone survey of 300 farmers and growers last year, and more than 50 per cent. of the respondents identified fly tipping as a major ongoing problem; more than a quarter said that they had noticed a significant increase in fly tipping over the past year. Landowners or authorities then have to pay the costs of removing the material from the land and, often, the costs of proper disposal at a licensed landfill site. The Select Committee has urged far higher penalties for such "environmental crimes"—the Committee's own words—to combat the increase in fly tipping, and I agree.

I urge the Government to impose tougher penalties. Higher average fines should be introduced to discourage fly tipping, and local authorities should be able to keep the revenue from such fines to encourage them to catch the fly tippers. Dumped cars, discarded fridges, leaking drums of chemicals and old sofas line too many verges. The unintended, unfortunate consequence of one Department's decision on the policy of another Department shows that joined-up government is a wish yet to be realised.

As a result of new EU directives and the Government's failure to boost recycling, Labour is attempting to divert rubbish from landfill towards incineration. According to the Government's waste strategy, "A Way with Waste"—a snappy title, I admit—up to 165 large incinerators may have to be built across the country. But the waste and resources action programme, an initiative funded by the Government, has stated that

> "the Government has failed to convince the public that waste incineration is not a threat to public health. Well publicised instances of high dioxin levels in bottom ash, and questions as to whether emission scrubbers have been updated or even switched on have given the public genuine cause for concern."

The Conservative position on incinerators is clear. We wish to see a moratorium introduced on new large-scale municipal incinerators until independent British scientific evidence proves that they are safe. Tighter controls should be introduced on emissions from existing incinerators.

Andrew Bennett: I am pleased to hear this statement from the Conservatives. Will the hon. Gentleman convince his local councillors that that should be the policy in places such as Surrey and Essex?

Mr. Sayeed: I will certainly endeavour to do so. As I shall illustrate, I am endeavouring to do so on other issues, such as recycling. The problem is that, because recycling has been so poorly conducted in this country, councils have considerable difficulty in getting rid of domestic waste.

Incinerators should be used to generate energy from waste. Local residents should receive benefits from being located near an incinerator and the Government should consider ways of discouraging recyclable materials from going up in smoke.

The Conservative party has called for a review of regulations to cut down on wasteful packaging and tackle waste at its source. We want to see a simplification of regulations, to improve their effectiveness and to reduce their burden. As a general principle, we believe that regulations should discourage excessive packaging in products. Clear incentives are needed to minimise waste at the point of origin, and packaging regulations should require a higher recycled content.

There should be tougher enforcement by trading standards officers of existing regulations on over-packaging, and the regulatory burden should be streamlined so that processes are tough but straightforward and easy to understand. Under the packaging recovery note system, established in 1997, manufacturing companies are required to buy PRNs for every tonne of packaging waste that they produce and are required to send for recycling. The PRNs are used to show compliance with regulations. The notes are bought from agents who arrange waste recovery and recycling, or directly from waste producers.

Since 1998, about £250 million for PRNs and packaging export recovery notes has been channelled to reprocessors in this way; but there is little evidence that money has been invested in increasing the collection of material for recycling. The operation of PRNs is deficient in that regard, and should be reconsidered so that it works to everyone's benefit.

The words "sustainable development" do not, I regret to say, appeal to many members of the public, and some do not even understand their meaning. It is when they are put in the context of everyone's everyday experience—when people can see that what they are doing is of value to them, close to home—that our efforts to achieve sustainability will succeed. That is why the Conservative party's recycling policy is significantly greener and more radical than that of any other party. *[Laughter.]* It is clear from Labour Members' guffaws that they have not bothered to read any manifestos apart from their own party's.

We have proposed for some time that 50 per cent. of household waste should be recycled or made into compost by 2020. That target is significantly higher than the Government's, and it is the reason for our saying that we would introduce doorstep recycling for all households. The question is, what are the Government going to do?

The United Kingdom must improve its record on recycling, which will in turn allow less dependency on landfill as a means of disposal. Britain has just nine years in which to triple the amount of waste that it recycles, or it will face harsh financial punishment from the European Union. The Government's own officials have warned that the UK faces fines of £500,000 a day if EU rules on landfill sites are not observed by 2010.

The Government could help themselves to reach that target if they followed the Conservative lead. We want every home in the country to have recyclables collected separately from other waste. Perhaps the Government should learn from an organisation called Wastepack and its "pink bag" system, or perhaps they should learn from Berlin; but they must learn from someone.

Mrs. Ellman: Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us what recycling percentage had been achieved by the Conservative Government after 18 years?

Mr. Sayeed: First, I am happy to have been promoted to the status of a Privy Councillor, which I am not.

Mrs. Ellman: I apologise.

Mr. Sayeed: The hon. Lady should not apologise. I ask her please to go on doing it! Secondly, I was about to deal with her question in any case.

Labour claimed that it would be "the cleanest Government ever", but Britain still recycles just 11 per cent. of household waste, as opposed to more than 50 per cent. in Switzerland, Germany and Austria. At the recent waste summit, the Secretary of State announced the production of a consultation paper dealing with how to spend the £140 million that the Government had allocated to local authorities to promote recycling. I welcome that move. This country's recycling performance is lagging far behind where it should be—and just as we lag behind as a country, many local authorities lag behind comparable authorities in the recycling of domestic waste.

That brings me to the point made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman). Why did 42 per cent. of Labour local authorities have no provision for separating recyclable material from household waste, according to independent Audit Commission figures for 1998-99? The figure for Liberal Democrat authorities was 29 per cent., and of the three parties, the Conservatives showed the lowest figure—19 per cent. I have recently contacted that 19 per cent. to ensure that many more Conservative councils are taking appropriate steps, but what is the Minister doing about the 42 per cent. of Labour councils and 29 per cent. of Liberal councils whose performance is lamentable? Why is Scotland's record on waste such a disgrace? Waste management may be a devolved responsibility, but this Labour Government are the Government for all the United Kingdom, so it is unacceptable that they should do nothing to persuade the Labour and Liberal Administration in Scotland to clean up their act.

British households produce enough waste to fill the Albert hall every hour. Unless the Government rethink their approach to waste, we face the shame and expense of being branded the dirty man of Europe. We produce too much waste and the situation is getting worse. Landfill is no answer, nor is incineration a proven safe substitute. The only answer is far less waste, much more recycling, much more re-use, and a Government who talk less and begin to act with vigour.

9.36 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): I begin by paying genuine tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) for his Committee's report, which is a good one. Also, I pay him a personal tribute for his distinguished record as Chairman of the Environment Sub-Committee. He leads a Committee that has produced a series of most telling and effective reports that have had a not insubstantial impact on Government policy, and that reflects his dedication and commitment to the environment. Indeed, as he suggested, it also shows why he, as a person who is seen as independent, respected and a champion of the environment, was chosen for the investigation being undertaken in Byker, Newcastle.

I am sorry that the report was delayed, but I can assure the House that the response is in its final stages and it will be submitted to the Committee shortly. The reason for that is that the Government's response was delayed by the general election being called in May, as my hon. Friend acknowledged. Also, for a lengthy period, from May to October, there was no Select Committee in existence and thus nobody for the Government to respond to.

Once the new Select Committee was established, there was a need to update the material in the Government response, given the passage of time. Finalisation has been further delayed to take account of the recent waste summit and the Prime Minister's announcement that the performance and innovation unit has been asked to review the waste strategy and consider what more needs to be done to ensure its effective delivery.

My hon. Friend made important points and I shall try to take most of them up. He said at the outset that we are not a sustainable society, and that is perfectly true. I always use this example: there are 60 million people in this country and average yearly consumption is 1 tonne per person. Taking into account input to the productive process and the energy involved in processing products and waste material, the figure is 11 tonnes.

A ratio of 1:11 is simply not sustainable and we recognise that. The Prime Minister established the PIU review on resource efficiency and the report was produced recently. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) said, we have announced that the PIU will now review the waste strategy. It will deliver its initial findings in the first half of next year, with a final report due in summer.

There is no doubt that the minimisation of waste is most important. Contrary to the impression given by several hon. Members, there is a clear national waste strategy plan. There is also a clear waste hierarchy, the first and most important element of which is waste minimisation. The best thing is not to create waste in the first place—not to quarrel about recycling or incineration.

Secondly, and clearly—in response to the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell)—the requirement of the waste strategy is to maximise recycling, re-use and recovery as long as that is the best practicable environmental option. In the vast majority of cases, that will be true, but it is not always so. For example, it may not be easy to extract waste from individual households in tower blocks. Similarly, as rural households may be at a considerable distance from recycling treatment centres, it may be best to use alternatives. However, recycling is obviously the most desirable course in the vast majority of cases.

We realise that, on its own, merely to set targets will be insufficient to deliver waste minimisation. I am keen to develop effective mechanisms actually to reduce the creation of waste. However, there must be adequate policy instruments, some of which we have already introduced: the landfill tax escalator—I shall talk about levels in a

[Mr. Michael Meacher]

moment—producer responsibility and support for Envirowise, which gives businesses advice on waste reduction.

I think that the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) mentioned the fact that there had been an increase of about 3 per cent. a year in waste arising. That is far too high and must be reduced. The objective is to reduce that plus-three percentage towards nought and then to a minus figure in order to decouple economic growth from waste arising. Although we can all agree on that objective, it is another matter to deliver it. We need effective instruments and I hope to introduce a clearer and more comprehensive policy than we have managed to initiate in the past.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish referred to targets. I do not accept that the recycling targets are unambitious. I am grateful for the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) in that regard. Many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) who spoke for the Opposition, referred to the much higher recycling figures in other countries. I shall refer to the record under the Tories in a moment.

High recycling rates in other countries are often cited as evidence that our targets are too low. However, many countries include construction and demolition waste in their recycling rates for municipal waste. Such waste is both heavy and easily recyclable, thus increasing the potential for higher recycling rates. Construction and demolition waste is, however, largely excluded from the figures for England and Wales. That is an important consideration.

The targets set are demanding. It is rather too easy for Members to say that instead of talking about doubling and trebling the amounts we should be aiming for a 60 per cent. increase. Let us achieve a doubling and trebling of the amounts within a relatively short time—let us get that under our belts—before we aim for more ambitious targets.

Those targets are not, of course, ceilings—they are targets that we expect people to exceed. They are realistic minima that every local authority is being required to achieve. In fact, under our proposals, 83 local authorities are required to achieve recycling and composting rates greater than 33 per cent. by 2005–06, although the overall national target for that date is 25 per cent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish mentioned markets. He referred to Aylesford and the £20 million that WRAP had made available to enable further newsprint recycling to take place. That will have a major impact on recycling in this country.

I should also certainly like to mention other examples of markets. Several such examples have been produced by WRAP—the waste resources and action programme—which was established to develop as a centre of expertise in market development. That is its precise purpose. In its first three years, WRAP is being supported by £40 million of Government funding from my Department and other Departments. Its first business plan has focused on seven key sectors in which there are particular market barriers to increasing recycling. It is tackling those barriers with the Government's support.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish also raised the incinerator issue, which is often the most controversial part of the strategy. He made the important point on the security of supply in relation to an incinerator's long lifespan. I make it absolutely clear, however, that the Government are not encouraging incinerators. We are simply recognising that there may be a role for some incinerators if we are to achieve by 2016—or, with the derogation period, by 2020—a massive shift from the 1997 position in which about 85 per cent. of household waste was landfilled—that is 28 million tonnes a year—to one in which no more than 35 per cent. of 1995 levels are landfilled. However, we are not encouraging such a role.

There is absolutely no figure on incinerators in our back pocket. The figures of 100 and 165 have been mentioned, but that was totally mischievous. The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire knows perfectly well that that is nonsense—I have said so, and he has heard me say it. He repeats such figures simply to be mischievous. We have no intention of supporting or recommending any such total whatever.

Mr. Drew: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Meacher: I have very little time and am very reluctant, but I shall give way this once because it is my hon. Friend.

Mr. Drew: I am grateful and I shall be very brief. Will my right hon. Friend therefore agree to examine closely and rule out of order any waste plan proposing waste importation to bulk up the numbers and make an incinerator economic?

Mr. Meacher: The requirement in our policy is that statutory recycling targets must be met and that no incineration proposal shall be permitted which will pre-empt recycling or reduce the option of recycling for the future. A local authority may be able to demonstrate that it can achieve those targets consistent with small-scale incineration, preferably linked with combined heat and power. Although I do not rule out such proposals, I do not think that there will be many such examples. The Government's proposal is to increase recycling to the fullest degree to which it is environmentally the best option.

I am not sure of the exact figures on fluorescent tubes, which my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish mentioned, but I know that they are nowhere near what they should be. I shall write to him, and I shall once again press local government and central Government Departments to recycle more of their fluorescent tubes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish also mentioned refrigerators. The ozone depleting substances regulation was agreed in October 2000. Before that, my Department queried Brussels on the exact interpretation in relation to the extraction of chlorofluorocarbons, not only from cooling equipment but from foam. We did not receive an answer for 18 months, until June 2001.

Contrary to what the hon. Member for Gordon said, it is a question not of misreading but of interpretation of the regulation's exact meaning. As soon as we found out the meaning, we took the necessary action, which is to seek to put in place, when we can, a producer responsibility regulation. We are also installing a capability for recycling which currently is not available. Many developers are certainly interested in creating that capability provided that they are assured of a market. Many of them have said that they can have the technology in place early next year.

In the interim, we are also funding local authorities' storage capacity, providing £6 million which should cover them until the end of March 2002. We believe that the rate of about £2 million a month is certainly adequate. We have made it perfectly clear that in the light of experience, we will make further funding available as necessary.

Mr. Sayeed: Is the Minister saying that the Government—I am not sure which one—signed up to a directive without knowing what it meant?

Mr. Meacher: The regulation, we believed—along with many other member states—did not include the extraction of CFCs from foam. We are not alone in uncertainty on this matter. It is remarkable that the Commission took 18 months before making up its mind.

My hon. Friend's last point was about the zero waste concept. It is an attractive idea—nothing should be wasted to landfill or incineration but should be recycled or re-used and there should be penalties for non-biodegradable material. It is a valuable concept, although a long way from being realised. That, ultimately, would be the optimum solution.

The hon. Member for Gordon does not seem to have taken on board what has happened. He is diligent and conscientious, and I cannot understand how he could make some of the statements that he made. He said that we are dragging our feet—we are patently not. He said that we need a national recycling programme—we already have one. He said that what was needed were incentives, penalties, markets and funding. With regard to incentives, there are statutory recycling targets introduced by this Government, not the last one. They are statutory and enforceable, and we shall enforce them.

Secondly, there will be penalties for local authorities which do not achieve the doubling or trebling that we require of them. We are concerned about markets. There is no point in recycling if people have a collection of glass, aluminium or cans that cannot be used, but that is what WRAP is meant to do. The Government set it up with £40 million.

Following the 2000 spending review, by the end of the three-year period, we provided £1.1 billion in the local government settlement for environmental protection and cultural services, a sizeable proportion of which I hope will go towards waste management. The sum of £140 million has been ring-fenced for local authorities, specifically for waste management, £220 million is for private finance initiatives and £50 million is for the new opportunities fund for community recycling. That is a sizeable amount of funding.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned packaging. The regulations are being tightened year on year. They are 50 per cent. this year, with 15 per cent. material-specific requirements for each product. Those will be tightened in successive years. The hon. Gentleman mentioned Germany as a better example. He should say that to the packaging industry. The green dot system that Germany uses costs three times more than our packaging waste regulation system. Our system costs about £0.6 billion, while theirs costs nearly £2 billion. I do not think that our industry has much doubt about which is the better one, and nor do I.

On the role of incineration, the hon. Gentleman said that we have left the door open to large-scale use of incinerators. That is blatantly untrue.

Malcolm Bruce: The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish said that.

Mr. Meacher: Well, I do not think that my hon. Friend did say that. Whoever said it, it is not true. I repeat again that there may be some incineration as a result of integrated waste management plans so long as there is maximisation of recycling, re-use and recovery.

Having paid a visit in or near the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), I agree that Rockware Glass is a model company. It provides educational facilities at the factory to enable people to understand the importance of recycling. I agree with him about the need for encouraging civic amenity sites and the importance of kerbside collection. Our view—*[Interruption.]* I have never before managed to turn off the microphones.

I recognise the commitment of the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) to such issues, but I was surprised that she asked how to measure recycling and whether it includes packaging waste. Of course, they are two totally different systems. Packaging waste comes under the regulations on packaging waste and involves a specific requirement on retailers. The hon. Lady also mentioned the £12 landfill tax, but we recognise that a £1-a-year tax—

Sue Doughty: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Meacher: I am sorry; I simply cannot give way—I need to mention so many other hon. Members. We are certainly considering what level of landfill tax will deliver the increase in recycling that lies at the heart of the strategy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) referred to the need for a big gear change in landfill tax, and I understand that point. He also referred to the desirability of charging households directly. Of course, the point is that we need to incentivise waste minimisation, and the hon. Member for Gordon intervened to suggest that the simplest way to do that is to get local authorities to provide multicoloured boxes and then take away the contents. However, in no way does that incentivise the reduction of waste; it is simply a more organised way to get local authorities to take away whatever waste is produced.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood also made a point about the Isle of Wight and the renewables obligation. The Government have recently consulted on our view that waste incineration should not be promoted through the renewables obligation and that such projects will not contribute to the Government's proposed target that renewable sources should comprise 10 per cent. of electricity sales by 2010.

The Government propose that support under the obligation should be concentrated on those technologies that require such support to succeed commercially.

[Mr. Meacher]

That is the key point. The issue is not whether something is good and should be supported; it is whether support is necessary for commercial success. The incineration of mixed waste, as a well established technology, is not regarded as requiring support under the obligation. The obligation has also been framed with a view to supporting more efficient and environmentally benign technologies.

The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) must be making a bid for the parliamentary award for the silliest speech this year. We have to recognise that there was not a single person behind the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) throughout the debate and that it is necessary to recruit someone to say something from the empty Opposition Benches, but surely anything is better than Bexhill and Battle.

First, I shall mention the Tory record. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle accused us of having only 11 per cent. recycling—in 1992, the Tory record was 2 per cent. After four years of Labour Government, the figure is 11 per cent., and it will be 25 per cent. by 2005–06. The Tory record is one of no statutory recycling targets and no shift from landfill, and some incinerators were built, which has not happened under this Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) drew attention to an important initiative, and we will certainly consider it as a national model. My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) talked about Reading's integrated waste management project, which we shall discuss next week.

The hon. Member for Colchester asked about the position on incinerators, and I have made that very clear. He also asked whether there is a legal requirement to include incineration. There is absolutely no such legal requirement.

The speech made by the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire at least shows that he has a sense of humour. He made a passionate statement of the Tory commitment to preserving the landscape, but the Tory Government had the biggest road-building programme in modern times; 60 per cent. of building took place in greenfield developments; and they had a recycling rate of 2 per cent. He made an attack on the landfill tax, on the grounds that it had had little impact and had increased fly tipping, but seemed to forget that it was the Tory party that introduced the tax. He referred to 165 incinerators, but he knows that that figure is total nonsense. He referred to a moratorium on incinerators, which is a cheap point in this House when Tory councillors throughout the country—

It being Ten o'clock, Mr. Speaker *proceeded to put forthwith the deferred Questions relating to Estimates which he was directed to put at that hour, pursuant to paragraphs (4) and (5) of Standing Order No. 54 (Consideration of estimates).*

VOTE ON ACCOUNT, 2002–03

Question,

That resources, not exceeding £1,489,011,000, be authorised, on account, for use during the year ending on 31st March 2003, and that a sum, not exceeding £1,488,290,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for the year ending on 31st March 2003 for expenditure by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport

put and agreed to.

Question,

That resources, not exceeding £955,500,000, be authorised, on account, for use during the year ending on 31st March 2003, and that a sum, not exceeding £993,621,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for the year ending on 31st March 2003 for expenditure by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

put and agreed to.

It being after Ten o'clock, Mr. Speaker *proceeded to put forthwith the Questions relating to Estimates which he was directed to put at that hour, pursuant to paragraphs (1) and (2) of Standing Order No. 55 (Questions on voting of estimates, &c.)*

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 2001–02

Resolved,

That further resources, not exceeding £6,469,599,000, be authorised for use for defence and civil services for the year ending on 31st March 2002, and that a further sum, not exceeding £7,238,134,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to meet the cost of defence and civil services for the year ending on 31st March 2002, as set out in HC 391.

ESTIMATES, 2002–03 (VOTE ON ACCOUNT)

Resolved,

That further resources, not exceeding £122,901,958,000, be authorised, on account, for use for defence and civil services for the year ending 31st March 2003, and that a sum, not exceeding £122,332,660,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, to meet the costs of defence and civil services for the year ending on 31st March 2003, as set out in HC 392, 393, 394 and 395.

Ordered,

That a Bill be brought in upon the foregoing resolutions: And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Andrew Smith, Dawn Primarolo, Ruth Kelly and Mr. Paul Boateng do prepare and bring it in.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (No. 2) BILL

Mr. Paul Boateng accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the years ending on 31st March 2002 and 2003: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed [Bill 65].

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Contracting Out

That the draft Local Authorities (Contracting Out of Highway Functions) (England) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 21st November, be approved.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation), HIGHWAYS

That the draft Street Works (Charges for Occupation of the Highway) (England) Regulations 2001, which were laid before this House on 21st November, be approved.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Social Security (Loss of Benefit) Regulations 2001, which were laid before this House on 22nd November, be approved.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Question agreed to.

SECTION 5 OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES AMENDMENT ACT 1993

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [3 December] and Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

PRE-BUDGET REPORT 2001

That this House takes note with approval of the Government's assessment as set out in the Pre-Budget Report 2001 for the purposes of section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

EUROPEAN ARREST WARRANT AND THE SURRENDER PROCEDURES BETWEEN MEMBER STATES

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 13425/01, Draft Council Framework Decision on the European Arrest Warrant and the Surrender Procedures between the Member States; and supports the Government's active participation in the debate on the draft Framework Decision and the Government's intention to ensure that extradition within the European Union takes place on the basis of the principles of mutual recognition.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Mr. Speaker: I think the Ayes have it.

Hon. Members: No.

Division deferred till Wednesday 12 December 2001, pursuant to Order [28 June].

Drinking Glasses

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

10.4 pm

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): The issue that I raise should concern all Members of the House. It relates to the problems that arise in the pubs and clubs throughout the land that are frequented by young people and to the injuries, in particular facial injuries, that can result from incidents involving glasses and bottles.

A few months ago, a constituent came to see me following an incident involving her child at a licensed premises in Lancashire. The child was badly injured by a glass as the result of an assault in a public house. Following her visit, my constituent spent a great deal of time and energy examining how the incident happened and the factors that might be involved in reducing the incidence of glassing in pubs and clubs.

My constituency includes the town of Leyland and the southern suburbs of Preston, so many of the young people in my area go to pubs and clubs in Leyland, but most of them go to the town centre pubs and clubs in Preston. The university in Preston now has more than 20,000 full-time students and it is the seventh largest university in Great Britain. It is a Mecca for young people.

The police and the local authority have been assiduous in ensuring that the pubs and clubs catering for young people are grouped together. There is closed circuit television, a strong police presence and most of the public houses and clubs have people on the doors. However, that does not stop incidents happening.

If large numbers of young people mix together with significant amounts of alcohol available and with glasses and bottles close to hand, violent incidents occur. Some of them will involve glassing that leads to severe facial injuries. We often think that such incidents involve males who one might argue have only themselves to blame. However, that is not always the case. Many incidents involve innocent bystanders or women both as victims and as aggressors. Therefore, we need to examine the scale of the problem as well as its causes.

I have carried out a little research on how many incidents of glassing take place each year. In 1999, the British crime survey estimated that there were 80,000 incidents involved glassing and that figure was based on a survey of a certain number of households. A survey a couple of years earlier produced a figure of 178,000 each year, but not all those incidents led to conviction or severe facial injuries.

I have a number of letters that give a Home Office figure of between 3,400 and 5,500 glassing incidents a year and the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority has released figures on the incidents involving severe injuries that have led to compensation claims. In 1999–2000, 6,550 claims were made following violent incidents in public houses, and many of them would have been glassing incidents. Of those, 3,448—that is 53 per cent.—led to monetary awards costing £7.2 million.

It has been pointed out to me that the statistics deal only with incidents in licensed premises and do not cover those that spill out of them on to the streets or surrounding areas. It has been estimated that the cost of glassing incidents to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority is about £10 million. The figures are not insignificant.

[Mr. David Borrow]

What are the key factors that cause this problem? An important element in any glassing incident is the nature of the glass or bottle itself and significant progress has been made in many pubs and clubs in that regard over the past 10 years. Many traditional glasses have been replaced by ones made out of toughened glass, but it is clear that the repeated use in pubs and clubs of toughened glassware leads to the weakening of the glass itself. When toughened glass goes through the washer many times, it no longer has the properties that led people to support its introduction. An increasing number of severe injuries are arising from its use.

In 1998 or 1999, a patent was made for Safeglass, although production of glasses and bottles in that safety glass has not got off the ground. The documents relating to the patent state that there are two important applications of safety glass. The first is glassware and bottles. The documents explain that

> "12000 drink related incidents happen every week. The Home Office are to order magistrates to tighten conditions of pub and club licences to use toughened glasses to serve beer. This will reduce the injuries caused when glasses are used as weapons, currently running at 5500 per year. Safeglass glasses and bottles could play an important safety and security role in clubs or live events, they would also be cheaper than glass."

Will the Home Office consider whether more research and investigation should take place into the use of such safety glass? Perhaps the Government could recommend that or introduce it in regulations as an alternative to toughened glass, given the weaknesses that have been discovered. Research into that is insufficient, and that needs to be addressed.

Figures from a survey in 1993 on the wider problems of glass and their effects on bar staff suggested that 40 per cent. of bar staff received injuries not as a result of violent attacks, but simply through handling glassware in pubs and clubs. Anything that can be done to make glassware less likely to cause injury would have significant health and safety implications for bar staff.

My constituent and several organisations have mentioned the value of placing kitemarks on glassware. That would give people who go into pubs and clubs, and local authorities who inspect them, an idea of the quality and type of glassware that is being used. I am sure that that would improve things.

We need to consider the whole issue of alcohol-related violence. The use of CCTV in many pubs and clubs, which is growing, makes a difference by controlling the licensed premises. There are serious concerns about under-age drinking and excessive drinking by young people. There is also concern about the policies of the alcohol trade, which manufactures products with a high alcohol content which are attractive to young people.

Young people have nights out when they drink excessively, and that will probably always be the case. When I was 18 or 19, drinking pints of beer was a slower and different experience from drinking high-alcohol sweet-tasting products, which is what many young people drink. Much more alcohol is consumed in a short space of time than it was 30 years ago. It would help if the Government invested in schemes to deal with alcohol-related violence.

My constituent has been assiduous in campaigning locally on the issue. I have no intention of mentioning her by name because of the trauma that she and her family experienced, but I made the commitment to raise in the Chamber all the matters that she has discovered from her research.

I have received a number of petitions and letters of support from police and Church groups. I also received a letter from Katie Parr, the welfare officer at the university of Central Lancashire, which says:

> "These acts are mindless and stupid and if we could implement the Safety glass, kite marks and a new scheme which concentrates on incidents relating to alcohol, then I feel we would all suffer less."

The students' union at the university has taken a particular interest in the safety of its members when they are enjoying themselves in the centre of Preston.

I received a letter of support from Tina Morrow, the director of Victim Support in Preston, who has been active in collecting signatures on petitions in the area, and a letter from Kevin Quigley, the principal at Cardinal Newman college in Preston, which takes many young people from my constituency. He says:

> "I write to support you in your attempt to get something done through the House of Commons about this issue."

I have received a letter and much active support in collecting signatures for petitions from the Knights of St. Columba and the 323 branch of Leyland council. I had a very long and thoughtful letter from David Jenkins of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, which has looked at the ways in which the number of accidents can be reduced. It is particularly concerned about the use of better glass.

There may be no simple method of making it safer for our young people to have a good night out. Young people will always be fairly active and run the risk, when they have had a bit too much to drink, of being aggressive. As I said, the combination of energetic young people, excessive alcohol and dangerous weapons in the form of glass bottles and glasses full of alcohol leads to all too many severe facial injuries. Incidents will always happen, but as Members of Parliament, we need to do what we can to minimise the risks.

10.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) on securing the debate. I know what competition there is for such debates and the effort that he has had to make. All those present will join me in offering regrets and sympathies to his constituent, and also our thanks for the fact that some good has come of a terrible event, in the sense that my hon. Friend and others have been encouraged to campaign on this important matter.

My hon. Friend drew attention, in particular, to the devastating consequences of glass being used as a weapon when violent incidents occur on licensed premises. Before responding to the detail of his remarks, I should like to state clearly for the record this Government's absolute determination to tackle violent crime, including violence that occurs on or in the vicinity of licensed premises, which we know is often fuelled by heavy drinking.

We know that something like 90 per cent. of the adult population in this country drink alcohol, often in the social setting of a pub, club or other licensed premises. They do so lawfully, peacefully and without causing harm to themselves or to others. Although they rightly expect to be able to do so without the threat of violence or other antisocial behaviour, we know from a Portman Group survey, conducted about a year ago, that 14 per cent. of people have been the victim of violence in a pub at some time or other.

The British crime survey tells us that about 40 per cent. of all violent crime is alcohol-related, with as much as half of all stranger violence taking place in or around pubs and clubs. So as my hon. Friend rightly pointed out, we are not talking about a small minority of people who drink too much and get into fights. Far too many completely innocent people are affected by this problem.

The issue raised by my hon. Friend concerns drinking glasses and the harm they cause when used to inflict horrible facial injuries in a violent act. I agree that we must do all we can to reduce that potential but, at the same time, we must ensure that we are doing all we can to tackle the circumstances in which violence occurs in the first place. Our general approach is set out in the action plan to tackle alcohol-related crime and disorder, which was launched by the Home Office in August 2000 and which explicitly recognises the part that glass can play in violent situations; some of the facts and figures that it quotes are well worth repeating. First, about 120,000 people suffer from facial injuries in violent circumstances each year in this country. In the vast majority of cases, either the victim or the assailant will have been drinking. About 5,000 of those incidents will involve what is commonly known as glassing, with devastating and often permanent consequences for the victim.

Research undertaken by the university of Wales suggests that bar glassware accounts for 10 per cent. of assault injuries in accident and emergency departments that lead to permanent, disfiguring facial scars. We believe that one response to that is the adoption of toughened drinking glasses in pubs and clubs. My hon. Friend mentioned safety glass, but the critical point is that toughened or safety glass alone will not prevent violence or injury, as he pointed out. Toughened glass can be up to six times more resistant to impact than conventional annealed glass, and breaks into smaller, blunt-edged pieces rather than long, sharp shards, so it significantly reduces the injuries that can be inflicted if the glass is used as a weapon. That is an undoubted benefit.

My hon. Friend spoke about the effect of time and wear on the properties of toughened glass. We are fully aware that it weakens far more quickly than conventional glass and has to be replaced more often. However, there are benefits to toughened glass, including its resistance to breakage and the manner in which it breaks. If my hon. Friend was trying to suggest that the way in which the glass breaks changes over time, I should be interested to know the facts, as we are not aware that it has such properties and would be happy to look into the matter.

Whatever the relative merits of toughened glass versus safety glass, the *British Medical Journal* noted in an editorial some years ago that

> "injury caused by drinking glasses could be reduced substantially by the universal use of toughened glass in bars and clubs."

I am pleased that those words did not fall on deaf ears. In October 1997, the Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association—now the British Beer and Pub Association—estimated that toughened glass was in use in about a third of public houses and recommended the more widespread adoption of toughened glass. Since then, those responsible for licensed premises have been making the switch to toughened pint and half-pint beer glasses—the glasses that are most often used in violent incidents—as they replace old stock. The British Beer and Pub Association now estimates that toughened beer glasses are used in about 90 per cent. of establishments, which is good progress.

As well as looking at toughened or safety glass, we need to look more fundamentally at the availability of glass and glass bottles, particularly in some of our busier city centre establishments, where they are more likely to cause problems. Like glasses, empty beer bottles can be used as weapons and it is worth looking at whether or not anything can be done about that. Options are available, including a refusal to provide drinks in bottles—a practice that is followed in some establishments—or the adoption of plastic drinking glasses to replace beer glasses entirely. The Government support such measures, but we know that there can be resistance to ideas like these. Drinking from bottles is very much in vogue, particularly among younger drinkers, but fashion can be changed over time if there is a willingness to do so on the part of those who may be able to influence it. We are keen to promote a dialogue on such issues with the drinks industry. We know that some manufacturers and retailers have experimented with the use of plastic beer bottles in pubs and clubs, which may offer a viable way forward.

Home Office Ministers meet with representatives of the alcohol industry from time to time. I last met industry representatives as recently as 3 December, and at that meeting I raised the issues that my hon. Friend raises in the House. We should like the greater use of plastic to be considered, as part of our forward programme for tackling alcohol-related crime and disorder.

In the individual establishment, there is a wide range of steps that can usefully be taken. Specifically in relation to glass, those include the education of customers, licensees and staff about the potential dangers arising from the careless use of glass; ensuring that bar staff are diligent in collecting up empty bottles and glasses within the establishment, thereby reducing the potential for accidental harm; and ensuring that licensees and door staff keep a tight rein on their bottles and glasses, preventing them from being removed from the premises where they might later cause injury or other problems to people leaving the premises.

Those are relatively simple steps, but we know that where they are followed—as they have been, for example, by establishments in Liverpool city centre—they can reduce the potential dangers considerably. We are keen to see those and similar measures adopted throughout the country.

Alongside those important measures, there is more work that can be done to ensure that licensed premises are safe and trouble-free places. Indeed, we must recognise that the overwhelming majority of them are. The licensed trade clearly has the primary responsibility for managing licensed premises properly, so as to prevent trouble occurring in the first place or see that it is nipped in the bud.

It has for many years been an offence for a licensee to permit disorder on his or her premises, and we have recently strengthened the law in section 32 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, which came into effect on

[Mr. Bob Ainsworth]

1 December, so that it is now an offence for anyone who works on licensed premises, not just the licensee, to permit drunkenness or violent behaviour on the premises.

Other key measures that we are raising with the industry include initiatives to encourage sensible drinking and to discourage binge drinking, which can often precede trouble on licensed premises. The recent phenomenon of "happy hour" and other retail initiatives encourage the wrong kind of drinking and do great damage to the reputation of the industry. We support initiatives such as Pubwatch schemes, backed up by exclusion orders, to keep known troublemakers out of licensed premises. We believe that the industry can do more to avoid irresponsible sales promotions, such as those that offer, for a fixed fee, the chance to "drink 'til you drop." Those encourage heavy drinking, which often leads on to trouble.

We know that other measures can be taken when all the local key partners work together to develop innovative solutions to local problems. That may provide some of the answers that my hon. Friend was looking for when he spoke about the need to reduce alcohol-related violence. In a number of areas, local licensees sit on the local crime and disorder partnership, which can help to a produce co-ordinated local programme such as the city centre safe initiative in Manchester, which offers a clear example of what can be achieved through effective partnership working.

The partnership in Manchester includes local sponsorship and has been able to set up a wide range of key initiatives, including late-night transport, targeted policing, pub and club-watch schemes and design and training initiatives to make the city centre a safer place for those who go there to enjoy an evening's entertainment. Any ideas that my hon. Friend wants to feed into the ongoing debate between the Home Office and the industry would be very welcome. I look forward to receiving those suggestions and to having a continuing dialogue with him.

I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important issue and enabling us to raise its profile through this debate. I hope that I have been successful in demonstrating to him that we take these matters seriously and are seeking to work with the industry. We are receiving from the overwhelming majority of those involved in the industry a fairly positive a response to the sort of initiatives that we are asking them to consider. If we can persuade them, there is an awful lot that we can change in terms of the habits that have grown up in the retail sector and the alcohol trade.

We have seen some great changes with regard to the way in which the product itself is marketed. My hon. Friend referred to some of the high-alcohol drinks now available, which were not available some time ago. Some of the advertising associated with such drinks, aimed at young people and the very worst of habits, was effectively curtailed by guidance followed by the industry. We now need the sort of thing that has been done so successfully with regard to the product to be applied to the retailing of alcohol as well. I think that we could make great strides in reducing the sort of incidents that my hon. Friend so graphically brought to the House. I thank him for doing so.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 12 December 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

GREENHAM AND CROOKHAM COMMONS BILL

As amended, considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Nuclear Installations

2. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): What recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales on the environmental and social impact of nuclear installations in the vicinity of the Severn estuary and the Bristol channel. [20037]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): I meet the First Minister regularly to discuss a range of issues.

Mr. Heath: I am grateful for that informative answer.

The Bristol channel area probably contains the highest concentration of nuclear installations anywhere. Given that fact, given the strong feelings on both sides of the channel about expansion of the nuclear industry—last evidenced during the inquiry into Hinkley C more than a decade ago—and given the energy review that is now under way, does the Minister not think it important for the Wales Office and the National Assembly for Wales to have an opportunity to put a case to those conducting the review regarding feelings in Wales and, incidentally, in the west country?

Mr. Touhig: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, which is very important. I can tell him that I represent the Wales Office on the performance and innovation unit's review body. The energy review was announced by the Prime Minister in June 2001, and is examining strategic issues surrounding energy policy for Great Britain up to 2050. The Prime Minister will receive a copy of the report before the end of the year, and will then make a decision on its publication. Obviously I cannot say what its content will be at this stage, but I am sure that the matters raised by the hon. Gentleman will be debated vigorously as soon as it is published.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): My hon. Friend will know of the findings of Dr. Chris Busby on the incidence of cancers in populations living along the Severn estuary. He will also know that the Welsh cancer intelligence and surveillance unit is studying those findings. Does he agree that, where scientific findings on public health issues are concerned, we must insist on the fullest candour and exposure of the evidence on the part of all involved?

Mr. Touhig: I am aware of the concerns expressed by my right hon. Friend following the publication of Dr. Busby's report in April. I am also aware of the report's contents. A report by the independent Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment comparing the pattern of cancer cases around nuclear installations with the national pattern is nearing completion and, hopefully, will be published by the end of the year. I am also aware that the Assembly has asked the intelligence and surveillance unit to report on childhood cancer data relating to the Chepstow area, which will be published early in the new year. I agree with my right hon. Friend that we should then engage in the fullest possible discussion of its contents.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The Minister has an important role to play on the PIU working party. Given the discussions and concerns on both sides of the Severn about nuclear power stations, will he take this opportunity to rule out any expansion of nuclear energy in Wales or the west country? Will he also tell us what consideration the working party is giving to the huge potential for tidal energy generation on the Severn? Finally, does he agree that we in Wales need what Scotland was given this week—a report stating exactly where renewable energy will be produced in the country, in this case Wales?

Mr. Touhig: I seem to remember the hon. Gentleman asking me exactly the same question in the Welsh Grand Committee on 28 November. He will know that my response must be the same now—that it would not be proper for me to comment on the contents of the PIU report until it is published. I can tell him that there was no presumption either for or against nuclear power as a source of energy for our country, but he and other Members must now wait until the report is published. I have no doubt that the matters he has raised will be discussed fully then.

Working Families Tax Credit

3. **Dr. Hywel Francis** (Aberavon): How many households in Wales have benefited from the working families tax credit; and if he will make a statement. [20038]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): The Inland Revenue estimates that 76,000 families were receiving working families tax credit on 31 May 2001.

Dr. Francis: In my constituency, 1,300 families benefit from the tax credit. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a vital part of the Government's anti-child-poverty agenda? Does he also agree that the work of the Children's Society in Wales is also part of that agenda?

Mr. Touhig: Indeed I do. The Government are committed to making work pay by improving incentives to help people move from benefit into work. I know that there was a debate in Westminster Hall about the Children's Society this morning, and I share some of the worries expressed by many Members about its decision to pull out of Wales.

It is important to recognise the value of schemes such as the working families tax credit in moving people from benefit into work. According to the labour force survey results published today, Wales has accounted for well over half the job growth in the United Kingdom in the last quarter, and 14,000 more people are in work now than in the last quarter. Working families tax credit and similar measures are turning out to be a very good story for the people of Wales.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Is the Minister aware that there is a serious lack of appropriate child care, particularly in very rural areas such as Caernarfon, despite the generous provision in the working families tax credit for child care? When he next meets his colleagues in the National Assembly for Wales, will he press for development of child care in very rural areas by means of the national child care strategy?

Mr. Touhig: I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. A total of 2,200 families benefit from the working families tax credit in his constituency. Throughout Wales, 38,000 lone parents have been helped into work. There is an element of the child care strategy attached to the working families tax credit, but I am aware from my constituency surgeries of the problems that he outlines. I shall raise that with colleagues in the Assembly when I next meet them.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): Seventeen hundred hard-working families in my constituency have also benefited from the working families tax credit. Does my hon. Friend agree that working tax credits will build on the enormous success of the working families tax credit and get more people into work?

Mr. Touhig: I do. Like many hon. Members, I suspect, when knocking on doors during the recent general election, I found lots of people who did not have children and could not benefit from the working families tax credit but who felt that they needed some help and support, too. The Government are committed to that. That is why we will have the working tax credit and child tax credit in place from 2003.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): On behalf of Conservative Members, may I offer our condolences to Labour Members on the sad loss of Ray Powell? I knew him better than most in my party, in that we worked together for many years through the usual channels. We disagreed often but he was usually fun to work with and always kept his word. He will be sorely missed in all parts of the House.

Is not the most alarming thing about the working families tax credit the fact that it is costing employers approximately £100 million a year to pay it through the wage packet? How much of that burden is falling on employers based in Wales? Does the Minister accept that the scheme ignores the needs of those in training? How does he intend to deal with that?

Mr. Touhig: I sincerely thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments about Ray Powell. I am sure that many hon. Members on both sides of the House have many stories to tell of their associations and work with Ray. He will be sadly missed, and is a great loss to the House and to his constituents.

The right hon. Gentleman must recognise that his party was totally opposed to the working families tax credit, just as it was opposed to the introduction of the national minimum wage, the working tax credit and the child tax credit. We are putting those measures in place in order to make work pay. It is no good moving people from poverty in benefit to poverty in work. The working families tax credit and the other tax credits, coupled with the national minimum wage, mean that today a person working 35 hours a week in Wales will have a minimum income of £225. That is a good news story.

Innovation and Enterprise

4. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): What recent discussions he has had with other ministers and the First Secretary of the National Assembly about steps to promote innovation and enterprise in Wales. [20039]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): I have regular meetings with ministerial colleagues in government and with the First Minister to discuss a range of issues, including innovation and enterprise.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer's recent pre-Budget report announced a number of measures that build on existing programmes to promote innovation and enterprise in Wales and throughout the United Kingdom. Those include the extension of research and development tax credits to all UK companies and support for small businesses, which will benefit many small and medium enterprises in Wales.

Mr. Bryant: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. He will be aware that there are many highly innovative medium businesses in the Rhondda, such as MFC Survival and Harwin's, but they are still based in outdated buildings, and they have terrible difficulties attracting finance for expansion. What further aid can the Government give to small businesses such as those, so that our small industries become medium industries and our medium industries become large industries that can beat the world?

Mr. Murphy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question because it is important for the House to understand that small and medium-sized businesses in Wales now form the backbone of the Welsh economy. Some 600,000 people work in Wales in 140,000 companies, some of which are based in my hon. Friend's constituency. The Assembly, together with the Welsh executive responsible for European matters, has instigated the joining together of Finance Wales and Barclays to provide £40 million to develop Welsh firms. It is a partnership between the Government and the Assembly to help small and medium-sized firms in his constituency and in the rest of Wales. That partnership is working and that is why we have had news today that 14,000 more people are in work in Wales than in the early summer.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): May I first add the Liberal Democrats' condolences to the friends and family of Ray Powell, whose memory will live on in our hearts?

Did the Secretary of State note, in the Chancellor's pre-Budget report, that the regional analysis showed that the gap between rich and poor is twice as bad in the UK as it is in the US and worse than in any other EU country? In order to stimulate the kind of growth that he described, would he lend his support to calls for a regional enhancement to the research and development tax credit, which could significantly help businesses to develop so as to close that gap in Wales?

Mr. Murphy: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments about Ray Powell, with which we all agree. The most important decision that the Government took on regional aid, which the National Assembly has implemented, was to obtain and fund objective 1 funding for two thirds of Wales. That is the means by which we can ensure that the gap between the wealthier and poorer areas of Wales shrinks. In addition, the Government indicated in the pre-Budget report that they would provide stamp duty relief for some 363 wards in Wales. We are also introducing a community investment tax credit that will deliver capital to disadvantaged communities. The aids that the Chancellor has introduced, together with objective 1 funding, are the answer to the problems that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Mr. Dai Havard (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): My right hon. Friend will share my concern that Impress Metal Packaging in Rhymney is set to close, despite the efforts of the workers to keep it open. That will be a desperate blow to an area of high unemployment, but it is an illustration of a company in an oversubscribed market that could have done with some new product development. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that his efforts will continue, to ensure that all elements of the Government will co-operate with the National Assembly and its agencies to find new employment skills and opportunities for those affected by the closure?

Mr. Murphy: Yes, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work that he has done on behalf of those people who work at Impress in his constituency. He will be aware that the National Assembly and the Government are introducing measures that should help those who will be made redundant—a decision that all of us regret—and that new jobs are coming to that part of Wales: to Tredegar with Desklink, and Ebbw Vale with Continental Teaves. He rightly makes the point that we must emphasise training, through ELWa—Education and Learning Wales—and other agencies in Wales, and I am grateful to him for introducing the subject in the House.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I wish to be associated with the remarks about Ray Powell. He represented Ogmore and Wales over many years and he will be sadly missed, especially at Welsh questions. Our thoughts are with Marion and his family at this time.

In the past three months, more than 2,000 manufacturing job losses have been announced in Wales, with Sony, Alcan, Corning and Alcoa among the well known names that have announced job cuts or closures. Why do not the Government care about manufacturing?

Mr. Murphy: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's remarks about Ray Powell; it is kind of him to make them on the Opposition's behalf. On the issue of manufacturing, the hon. Gentleman obviously did not hear what I told the House some moments ago. Unemployment in Wales has fallen again, and we have 14,000 more jobs in Wales than we did back in the early summer. That is testimony to a Government who have produced a stable and strong economy, with inflation and interest rates at record low levels. As the hon. Gentleman knows, that compares with the nearly 3 million jobs in manufacturing that disappeared over the 18 years the previous Conservative Government were in office.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is familiar with the statistics regarding the different firms coming to Wales. He will know that many jobs are being created in the manufacturing sector. I mentioned Ebbw Vale, but the same is true of Tredegar, Pontardawe, Abertillery, Deeside, Llanelli and Swansea. Many jobs are being created in Wales as a direct consequence of the strong and stable economy in the United Kingdom, and in Wales itself.

Mr. Evans: The Secretary of State is clearly not listening either. He knows that there has been an increase in unemployment in the manufacturing sector, which is vital to Wales. The Confederation of British Industry regional trends survey reveals that investment intentions for buildings, plant and machinery for the next 12 months are extremely weak. Will the Secretary of State look again at the climate change levy, which loads extra costs on manufacturers? Will he also give an assurance today that Welsh businesses will not face a supplementary business tax?

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman will know that business rates are a matter for the National Assembly, which is discussing that and other issues with business in Wales.

On the climate change levy, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales recently met representatives of the CBI and the Trades Union Congress to discuss the matter. However, despite what the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) has said, thousands and thousands of jobs are coming into Wales, and many are in the manufacturing sector or high-tech industries. That is news to be welcomed. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Could the House come to order? It is far too noisy.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the universities form one of the engines of enterprise and innovation in Wales? Will he therefore support the bid of the North East Wales Institute for university status?

Mr. Murphy: I welcome the work that the North East Wales Institute has done to encourage enterprise and improve the economic life of north-east Wales and of north Wales as a whole. I am especially glad to have met recently the college's new principal, Professor Scott, and we await the institute's application for university status.

Dee Estuary

5. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): When he plans to discuss the economy of the Dee estuary with the First Secretary. [20040]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): I have discussed economic issues surrounding the Dee estuary strategy with the First Minister during our regular bilateral meetings.

I have also contacted my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on these issues. In addition, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under- Secretary of State for Wales has discussed several areas of concern with Welsh Environment and Rural Affairs Ministers.

Mr. Chapman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Deeside economy is, in effect, unitary? The gain or loss of jobs one side of the river affects the other side equally, as people cross the river in both directions to find work. Given that jobs have been lost at Corus but gained at Toyota, does my right hon. Friend consider that the post-devolution relationship between the Welsh Development Agency and the North West development agency is as close and integrated as it needs to be to tackle these problems?

Mr. Murphy: My hon. Friend has raised this issue in the House on many occasions. He and I met recently to discuss the common purpose for industry and the environment on both sides of the Wales/England border. My hon. Friend will be glad to know that I hope to visit the Dee estuary fairly soon in the new year, and I hope that he will join me. I agree that, economically, there is much to be gained through co-operation between the National Assembly and the Government.

Foot and Mouth

6. **Mr. David Cameron** (Witney): What discussions he has had with secretaries in the National Assembly for Wales about the impact of foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [20042]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has regular meetings with the First Secretary to discuss a wide range of issues, including the impact of foot and mouth disease. I also have regular discussions with the Welsh Agriculture Minister.

I welcome the recent news that Wales has now been classified as disease free. Farmers, Government and other stakeholders must now work together towards creating a viable long-term future for farming in Wales.

Mr. Cameron: I am grateful for the Minister's reply. Will he explain which of the many inquiries into foot and mouth—none of which are public—will look at how the devolved authorities in Wales handled the issue? In particular, which inquiry will consider whether devolution was a help or a hindrance?

Mr. Touhig: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, three independent inquiries are considering the lessons to be learned from the problems caused by foot and mouth. Two of the three will apply to Wales and I have no doubt that his point will be covered in the reports.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): I welcome my hon. Friend's announcement that Wales is now free of foot and mouth. Does he agree that it is important to resume the exporting of meat, which is very important to farmers in Monmouthshire? Will he also speak to the Minister for Rural Affairs in the National Assembly to ensure that we have more abattoir facilities, especially in south-east Wales?

Mr. Touhig: I welcome the re-establishment of Welsh lamb and beef in the domestic and export markets. That is important, and the recent announcement means that we can start to export our produce again. Discussions are currently taking place between those with a wide range of interests in the matter, and I believe that we shall make progress before too long.

I am aware of my hon. Friend's point about abattoirs. When I was recently in mid-Wales, I discussed with a number of producers the problems caused by not having enough abattoirs. I have also discussed the matter with my colleague, the Assembly Secretary responsible for agriculture. I have another bilateral set up with him in a week or so, and I will take up the issue further. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Chamber is still far too noisy.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I associate myself and Plaid Cymru with the condolences expressed to the family of the late Sir Ray Powell.

On the impact of foot and mouth on small and medium-sized businesses in tourism, will the Minister reconsider the amount of compensation directly available to those businesses? Will he also contact the Wales tourist board to hear whether it is satisfied with its current budget for advertising, which is important at this time of year to obtain next season's bookings?

Mr. Touhig: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words about our colleague, Ray Powell.

I am aware of the problems faced by tourism in rural areas. I have travelled across north and mid-Wales several times in the past few months to meet people who run small hotels and other facilities. I understand the difficulties that they face. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Assembly announced a £65 million rural recovery package, which included £4.2 million for marketing and the development of the tourism business. I have recently had discussions with the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), and he has advised me of a number of initiatives that the British tourist authority and the Wales tourist board will take to ensure that we recapture markets and get people to return to Wales for their holidays.

Manufacturing

7. **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): What assessment he has made of the impact of levels of education and skills on the level of manufacturing employment in Wales. [20043]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): Increasing skills is vital to raising productivity in all parts of Britain. The National Assembly has launched for consultation an action plan to increase the demand for skilled employment in Wales. This contains 50 positive proposals to improve skills and employment levels in Wales.

Mr. Brady: Given the policies that have been set out to improve skills and education, why is the net rate of manufacturing job losses in Wales the highest it has been since 1983?

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman obviously did not hear the point I made to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). I referred to the 14,000 jobs that have come to Wales in the past few months. In addition to that, unemployment in Wales has dropped and there are many more jobs as a result of the partnership between the Government and the National Assembly. In the past 12 months, 7,500 manufacturing jobs have come to Wales—to Ebbw Vale, Abertillery, Llanelli, Deeside and Swansea.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): The Minister will be aware that Blaenau Gwent council has financially supported the conversion of a Victorian theatre into a high-tech training and skills centre for the arts and culture generally. He will also be aware that it has failed to receive supporting funding through objective 1. Is he aware that the cost of the conversion is equivalent to only half the yearly subsidy to the proposed new millennium arts centre in Cardiff bay?

Mr. Murphy: I am aware of my hon. Friend's interest in the theatre at Abertillery. He and I will be meeting later today to discuss those matters. In the first instance, I encourage his local authority to re-submit its application.

Hill Farming

8. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): If he will make a statement on the problems facing hill farming in Wales. [20044]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): The recent outbreak of foot and mouth disease has exacerbated an already difficult situation for Welsh hill farmers.

I therefore welcome the Assembly's strategy "Farming for the Future", which sets out a vision for the industry to achieve sustainability. I encourage farmers to work closely with the Assembly and other partners to ensure that the necessary changes are made to secure a good agricultural future for Wales.

Miss McIntosh: The House will be aware of my general interest in hill farming in the whole of Great Britain. What possible future does the Minister see for hill farming in Wales against a background of reform in the European Union and the next round of negotiations in the World Trade Organisation?

Mr. Touhig: There are a number of hill farmers in my constituency and I was talking to one of them this morning. He outlined some of the serious problems that he has faced and continues to face. He told me that what we must do above all else is to reinvigorate farmers and give them a new enthusiasm—young farmers in particular—so that they believe that they have a future. The Government, working in partnership with the National Assembly, will seek to achieve that. "Farming for the Future", the strategy to which I referred, will make a major contribution to that success.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [20066] **Mrs. Annette L. Brooke** (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 12 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): Before listing my engagements, may I say—I hope on behalf of all Members of the House—how sad we were to learn of the death of Sir Ray Powell? He was a great servant of the people of Ogmore, a champion of the valleys, a long-standing and loyal member of the Labour party, and an excellent Member of Parliament. I believe that he will be deeply missed on both sides of the House.

In relation to my engagements, this morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Mrs. Brooke: Is the Prime Minister aware of the financial difficulties experienced by the councils in my constituency when providing essential social services for the vulnerable—the young and the elderly? Does he agree that it is essential to provide adequate, good social care, along with better funding for the national health service?

The Prime Minister: I do agree with the hon. Lady. It is important that, in addition to the national health service being properly funded, social services are funded too. I know that the hon. Lady will agree that the settlement of—I think—6.7 per cent. for Dorset for the next year is excellent, and it should allow that council to make greater provision for people in respect of social services.

Q2. [20067] **Linda Gilroy** (Plymouth, Sutton): Three months on from 11 September, will the Prime Minister share with the House his view on the outlook for fighting terrorism? In that regard, will he say what importance he attaches to the emergency legislation before the House this week?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to raise the importance of not letting the time that has elapsed since 11 September dim either our outrage at the events of 11 September or, indeed, the absolute certainty—shared on both sides of the House at the time—that it was right that we strengthen the law in order to make sure that we could deal with the dangers of terrorism in our country and elsewhere in the world. We have put forward those measures, on advice, because we genuinely believe them essential in order to fight terrorism properly. They are, in my view, necessary in order to diminish the risk of terrorist attack in this country and elsewhere, and I hope that—even at this stage—both sides of the House will support the measures and allow us to put them in place as soon as possible so that we can prosecute the war against terrorism successfully in this country as well as abroad.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): May I join the Prime Minister in paying our respects to Sir Ray who was, as he said, a much-respected Member of the House? He was not always an easy Member—a tough Member and a tough opponent—but none the less a much-respected Member. Our condolences go from this side of the House to all his family.

Last week, the Prime Minister said that he was committed to increasing spending on the health service to 8 per cent. of national income. Yesterday, the Chancellor said it was not a commitment but a policy. So, what is it? Is it a commitment? Will the Prime Minister confirm that?

The Prime Minister: In fact, the Chancellor said exactly what I said. The fact is that it is, indeed, the policy of this Government to increase our spending on the national health service, and the figures will, of course, be set out in the comprehensive spending review. That is a manifesto commitment that we have made as well. Now, we are committed to increase public spending in the NHS—perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would now tell us whether he is?

Mr. Duncan Smith: I think that the Prime Minister ought to talk more to his best friend, because his best friend does not think that that is a commitment, but if it is a commitment, perhaps he would now like to comment on this: the Chancellor said that the NHS was the most efficient form of health care available to this country—and he is nodding. If that is indeed the case and the Prime Minister achieves his 8 per cent., does he expect that the health service in this country will be at an equivalent standard to health services in Europe?

The Prime Minister: Certainly. The very reason why we wish to increase health spending is to bring our health care system up to the best in Europe. That is precisely what we want to do, and that is the purpose of the money that we are spending at the moment on more doctors and more nurses, on the new hospital programme, on cancer treatment and on cardiac treatment, and elsewhere. Of course, there are still big problems to overcome, but we believe that the combination of investment, plus reform, will work. Now, I repeat that we are in favour of spending that additional money in the national health service—is the right hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister therefore believes that he will achieve those standards. So perhaps he would like to comment on the fact that, in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, more than 8 per cent. is already being spent, yet Scotland has the lowest survival rate of breast cancer and lung cancer of any major European country. In Wales, the number of people waiting for out-patient treatment has doubled and those waiting more than three months for treatment has quadrupled. In Northern Ireland, the Labour party's sister party, the SDLP said yesterday:

> "We spend a higher amount than the Irish Republic or anywhere in England. However, our waiting lists are far the worst of any UK region and are worsening all the time."

Does that not show that his and his Chancellor's figure of 8 per cent. is vacuous and that he made it up as he went along, and does it not show that, because they have abandoned health service reform, it is not just about money? The reality is that he does not have a clue and he does not have a cure for the health service.

The Prime Minister: Of course, it is true that the health service needs reform as well, which is precisely why we are reforming it by making sure, for example, that 75 per cent. of the budget will be devolved to the local primary care trusts. We are reforming it in the new contracts for doctors, nurses and consultants. We are reforming it in the new system of inspection and accountability, and in the national service frameworks, but, of course, it also needs money. That is absolutely true, and we know from the right hon. Gentleman's article in *The Daily Telegraph* that putting money into the

> "NHS is like pouring water into a colander."

Let me come to the right hon. Gentleman's own health authority for a moment, and say what that money has done there. If he says that it is all wasted, let me tell the House what has happened in his own health authority: a 25 per cent. reduction in in-patient waiting lists; £1.8 million to modernise the accident and emergency wards at Whipps Cross and King George; £1.8 million to expand critical care services; £205,000 so that local hospitals can introduce booked-admissions systems; and £149,000 earmarked funding for heart disease services. Now, all that money has improved health care services in his own health authority. What part of that money does he think is like pouring water into a colander? [*Interruption.*]

Mr. Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will join me in condemning the recent escalation of violence on both sides in the middle east. What diplomatic pressure is the United Kingdom Government putting on the Israeli Government to return to the peace process, to de-escalate the cycle of terror in the region?

The Prime Minister: What is important is that pressure is put on both sides to return to the peace process. There is a very dangerous situation in the middle east in which Israel is faced with suicide bomb attacks against its citizens, which is an outrage and must cease, and the Palestinian Authority and people within its area are obviously living in very difficult conditions.

My view remains that the initial security steps have to be taken as soon as possible, and then the peace process has to be relaunched, based on two points of principle: the first is Israel's existence, secure and confident in its own borders, and accepted by the whole of the Arab world, and the second is the need for a viable Palestinian state. If people accepted those two fixed points of principle, we would have a chance of getting a peace process that worked. That is not only in the interests of the outside world; it is most profoundly in the interests of the citizens of Israel and the people living within the Palestinian Authority area.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): May I fully associate my right hon. and hon. Friends with the appropriate expressions of condolence which have been extended, by all parties now, to the family of the late Sir Ray Powell? I reassure the House that if ever there was a case of cash for questions, I should be sending an invoice to the leader of the Conservative party.

In view of the shocking news this morning about 30,000 proposed job losses for postal workers over the next 18 months, and the revelation that the unions say they were not consulted and had no advance warning, may I ask the Prime Minister whether the Government were consulted, and if so, what view did they take?

The Prime Minister: No, it is not a matter for the Government; it is a matter for the company and the unions. We gave the commercial freedom to the Post Office that people wished for. The Post Office faces an extremely challenging and difficult time, and of course I would regret any job losses in the postal sector. However, it is important that the matter is dealt with by the company and the unions, taking account of the fact that there will need to be big changes in postal services over the next few years.

Mr. Kennedy: There will be rightful dismay in the country that 30,000 job losses are not considered a matter even for consultation with the Government. That is unbelievable. What assurances can the Prime Minister give in light of those tens of thousands of job losses that postal services will be maintained, in rural as well as urban Britain, on an equitable and equal basis into the future?

The Prime Minister: Of course it is our responsibility to make sure that postal services are maintained in the rural parts of the country, and that is precisely what we will do. I did not say that the Government did not regret any job losses in the industry; I said specifically that we do. However, I also said that the Post Office faces very challenging times, and these are matters to be worked out between the company and the unions.

If the position of the Liberal Democrats is that they would intervene, say that there should be no job losses and give an undertaking that they would give whatever amounts of public money were necessary to achieve that, I would be interested to hear that from them, but I doubt it very much. If I may say so, it is a classic example of what someone once said about the Liberal Democrats:

> "It is easy for the third party in British politics to make promises which they know they will never be in Government to implement and be responsible for."

That was one of his hon. Friends, the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden).

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): I welcome the Government's decision to extend the pub and club licensing hours over the new year, but may I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the fact that in those very pubs and clubs many women will become victims of the date-rape drug, GHB? May I encourage support for the police campaign to make sure that people are aware of the potential for drinks to be spiked? Will my right hon. Friend discuss with the Home Secretary the need to ban the drug at the earliest opportunity?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right—she makes a very good point. The Government have accepted a recommendation made by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs that GHB be controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, and we strongly support the police campaign. She is right to draw attention to the dangers: we are working in conjunction with the police to draw public attention to those dangers and to protect the public from them.

Q3. [20068] **Mr. Peter Duncan** (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Following today's further extraordinary and damning suggestions, does the Prime Minister retain full confidence in the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, his hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths)?

The Prime Minister: I do, yes. Any allegations made should be investigated by the appropriate authorities; they are being investigated and I believe that those authorities will make their decisions shortly.

Q4. [20069] **Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): I warmly welcome the additional extended cost of living allowances awarded last week to nurses in Harlow and throughout Essex; they will make a real difference to recruitment and retention. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if we are to continue to get such improvements, we need extra public investment? In that respect, will he reject out of hand the views of those who advocate private health insurance? Is that not the system used in America, where 40 million people are denied access to the hospitals they need? Does not the Conservatives' support for such a system demonstrate more clearly than anything else that they have learned nothing from two crushing general election defeats?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. Although problems persist in the recruitment of nurses, consultants and doctors, over the past few years more than 20,000 extra nurses have been recruited to the national health service, as well as almost 7,000 doctors and consultants. It is important that we keep the programme going. The reason that we are able to attract more nurses is the financial help we are giving. The scheme to which he refers has been extended to north and south Essex, and it is extremely important that we take such measures.

The problem with the Conservatives' proposals is that simply putting money into private medical insurance is not an answer—people are already entitled to take out private medical insurance. What the Conservatives really want is to force people to take out such insurance, which will result in many people not getting the treatment they need.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Will the Prime Minister tell us whether train delays due to track and signals failures have gone up or down since he pushed Railtrack into administration?

The Prime Minister: My understanding is that figures will be published within the next few days, but those figures are for April to October and so cover only a small part of the period since the company went into administration. The figures for October onwards will be published early next year. However, as I understand it the problems with train delays began in September, before the company went into administration.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The reality is that all the figures from the companies and Railtrack show that train delays have jumped by 45 per cent. since the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions put the company into administration. The Prime Minister mentions one set of figures; but is it not a fact that the Government have decided not to publish any figures during the winter months but to wait until spring next year? Is his Transport Secretary looking for another good place to bury bad news?

The Prime Minister: No, that is not the case. The reason the company had to go into administration is that it simply could not carry on as it had been, asking for billions of pounds in public subsidy and not providing a decent service to rail users. It is right that the company goes into administration, that it is sorted out and put on a new basis for the future that will allow it, in time, to deliver a better service to rail users. The idea that the problem of the railways started with administration is false: the problem started with probably the most botched privatisation in the history of privatisations.

Mr. Duncan Smith: There he goes again—more blame for everyone else—the same old story. The Prime Minister spent six months with his Transport Secretary finding ways to take over the railways and he has done it. Only a few weeks ago, he was blaming Railtrack's management, saying that the process would cut the expenditure that they were wasting, yet he is now to spend £1 million on a chief executive for Railtrack, having only just got rid of the last one for a third of a million pounds. It is absolutely ridiculous. The right hon. Gentleman will get no more investment because none of the private companies will invest any money in his railways, which his Deputy Prime Minister botched up along with his Transport Secretary.

Is it not the truth that the Prime Minister and his Deputy Prime Minister clearly wanted a train set for Christmas? Now they have one they cannot run it. The reality for the public is that there will be delays, cancellations and a winter of discontent.

The Prime Minister: Again, I have gently to point out to the right hon. Gentleman that the problems—I think that most people accept this—with the railways were twofold. First, there was under-investment over a long period. Secondly, rail privatisation ended up with a fragmented system that was unsustainable.

When we put Railtrack into administration, it was literally asking us—with great respect, this is the point that the right hon. Gentleman does not deal with—for billions of pounds of extra public money. We believe that that system could not continue. We must ensure that public money that is put into the railways goes to improve the railways. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the salary of the new chief executive. The biggest difference between us on the funding of the railways is that the right hon. Gentleman has given a commitment that if he were in office he would be bailing out all the Railtrack shareholders. That would mean £1 billion paid out to them, but not to improve the railways.

With the greatest respect, the right hon. Gentleman and his party were the people who started the problems in the railways as a result of privatisation. It will need time and investment to sort them out. I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that no one believes that the Conservative party would do it.

Falkirk Wheel

Q5. [20070] **Mr. Eric Joyce** (Falkirk, West): Whether he intends to visit the Falkirk wheel.

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so—my apologies. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must hear about the Falkirk wheel.

The Prime Minister: I have now found the right place, Mr. Speaker.

I understand that this innovative project in Falkirk will be officially opened next year by Her Majesty the Queen. However, at present I have no immediate plans to visit it.

Mr. Joyce: May I thank my right hon. Friend for his recognition of the project? Does he recognise that the full economic benefit of it will be felt in central Scotland only if the related agencies that are helping British Waterways identify ways of generating real jobs along the canal and at the wheel site over the coming years?

The Prime Minister: As a result of the partnership between the public and private sectors, the millennium link will improve enormously the quality of services in the local area. More than that—my hon. Friend is right—it will bring jobs into the area as well. That is yet another example of how, with some help with money from the public sector or the lottery, plus the involvement of the private sector, we can provide jobs and decent investment for the future.

Engagements

Q6. [20071] **Mr. Colin Breed** (South-East Cornwall): Does the Prime Minister consider it fairer to raise national insurance contributions or to increase income tax properly to fund the national health service?

The Prime Minister: Decisions on how to fund the NHS will be made in the Budget, as the hon. Gentleman knows. We have commitments not to raise the basic or higher rates of income tax. I know that that is not the view of the Liberal Democrats, who want a top rate of tax of, I think, 50 per cent. I believe that the money that we have put into the NHS over the past few years exceeds enormously any sum that was ever asked for by the Liberal Democrats. We can always be sure that no matter how much money we put in, no matter how generous my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is and no matter what the comprehensive spending review delivers for the health service, one group of people—the Liberal Democrats—will tell us that it is not enough.

Q7. [20072] **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): My right hon. Friend will have seen the chief medical officer's report on the dangers of alcohol misuse and the increased incidence of death from cirrhosis. While, of course, substantial sums have been invested in practical measures on preventive health care, does that not highlight the need for a widespread public awareness campaign on the dangers of alcohol misuse, especially in relation to binge drinking and young people?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that the dangers of substance abuse are not limited to drugs. Alcohol abuse is a serious problem and it is for that reason that the Government are increasing substantially the amount of money going into education and awareness, particularly among young people, of the dangers, not merely of drug abuse but alcohol abuse as well. I therefore entirely support what he said.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): This weekend, the Prime Minister will sign up to the European arrest warrant at the European summit. Is he aware that the final proposals have not been debated by the House because the English text was not available to the Select Committee on European Scrutiny this week? Is he aware that under the text as reported, a British citizen can be deported to another EU state for an offence that is not a crime in this country; that the normal protections against wrongful arrest will be denied him or her; and that, once deported, they can face charges in the receiving state of any other nature whatsoever?

The Prime Minister: I understand that it is being debated. Of course, there will be many opportunities to debate it. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] There will be many opportunities, not least in the Extradition Bill. So there will be many opportunities to debate that. On the substance of the issue, however, I profoundly disagree with the right hon. Gentleman. It is manifestly in this country's interest to have a fast-track procedure for extraditing people to this country from other European countries. Of course, we already have a European convention on extradition, but this will simplify the procedure enormously and it is in our interests. At the moment, some extradition cases allow organised criminals in particular to get away with stringing out proceedings for long periods. I may be wrong, but I regret to say that there is one problem with the proposal for a large part of the Conservative party; it has got the word "Europe" in it.

Q8. [20073] **Mr. Tom Clarke** (Coatbridge and Chryston): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the British Harry Potter movie has now broken all box office records in the United Kingdom and the United States? Does he agree that the renaissance of the British film industry is a great compliment, both to those who work in it and to his cultural and fiscal policy since coming to office?

The Prime Minister: I can tell my right hon. Friend that no one has done more to promote the interests of the British film industry than he has, over a long period. Partly as a result of his work, the Chancellor introduced fiscal measures that have released about £100 million for the British film industry. One reason for it being a success story today is the policies that we have pursued, which he did so much to promote.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley): Prime Minister, your Government's local government White Paper announces the intention to remove the municipal trading ban on local authorities. Can the right hon. Gentleman justify that to the many small businesses of this country that pay taxes, business rates and VAT and will find themselves competing against local authority units that do not pay taxes—in fact, they are assisted by taxes paid—and will not pay business rates, will not have to make a profit and will have their overheads covered by local authorities?

The Prime Minister: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. If better value for money is given by public authorities, it should be open to local authorities to contract with them. Just as I disagree with the idea of private—bad; public—good, I disagree with the position that I think the hon. Gentleman takes: public—bad; private—good. It is sensible to make sure that local authorities have the power to get the best deal for the people in their area.

Q9. [20074] **Mr. Andrew Dismore** (Hendon): I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the NHS in Hendon, where unfortunately waiting lists for hospital treatment still remain too long, in part because of the under- performance of Barnet general hospital. I welcome the increase of more than 10 per cent. in health spending for our health authority, which has just been announced for next year. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the necessary resources will be directed towards addressing the shortcomings at Barnet hospital and continuing the build-up of services at Edgware community hospital, which was closed by the Tories and re-opened under Labour?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that waiting lists still remain too high. Although waiting lists are down in his area, there are still people waiting too long. As a result of the extra money, we are able to reduce waiting lists. We can do more as that extra investment goes in, matched by reform. It is now true that about 70 per cent. of those who get their operation on the NHS get it within three months. There are still far too many people waiting longer than that, but over time, we will get that investment in, matched by reform. My hon. Friend is right that the central difficulty for the Conservative party, and the difference between us, is that we believe in that money going in, and they would take it out.

Q10. [20076] **Mr. Nick Gibb** (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): The Prime Minister's reforms to the ministerial code are very welcome. Important policy issues should be announced and debated in the House. Does he accept that that reform, and those proposed by the Leader of the House, would do little to tackle the deeply held cynicism of many voters about politics and politicians? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the root of the problem lies with us all in the House, including the Prime Minister, and that, instead of for ever changing the structure of Parliament, what we need is more forensic questioning and fuller answers, less point scoring—*[Interruption.]* and fewer bogus statistics and ritual rants against the last Conservative Government? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are over-running now.

The Prime Minister: I agree that we need more forensic questioning. To deal with the hon. Gentleman's suggestion, it is important to recognise that cynicism about politics does not help any party in the House. Even though there are huge disagreements over, for example, the future of the national health service, if the public were able to see the genuine debate going on between those with different views about the NHS, or between those with different views on, for example, the prosecution of the war in Afghanistan, or on tax and spending, and if there were greater concentration on those debates and people were able to see them happening, they would realise that despite much of what passes for news about what happens in politics, in fact political debate is alive and thriving, and long may it continue to do so. Yes, it is the responsibility of Government and Government Back Benchers to promote that; it is also the responsibility of the hon. Gentleman and his side.

Points of Order

3.33 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): Reference has already been made this afternoon to the fact that during a Select Committee hearing yesterday, the chief executive of Consignia announced that the Post Office intends to make up to 30,000 redundancies—twice the number that was being reported just a few weeks ago, news that comes at the worst conceivable time of year. Given that the Post Office remains wholly owned in the public sector and that Ministers have overall responsibility, have you received any indication that a Minister intends to come to the Chamber to make a statement about this matter?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no indication, but I consider the matter extremely important. I hope that a Minister will come at some stage to make a statement.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek clarification about today's business. I refer you to the Order Paper, where it is clear that there is an Adjournment debate on international terrorism. The front page of the Order Paper correctly points out that that debate can proceed until 10 pm. I now refer you to the programme motion that has been tabled by the Government in respect of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill. You will see that the knives for that motion fall first at 8.15 pm, in respect of amendments to parts 3, 10, 11 and 13 of the Bill, and that there is a further knife at 9.30 pm concerning amendments to part 4.

Clearly, that is a huge abuse of the House by the Government. It is very probable that the Adjournment debate will continue until 10 pm and that there will be absolutely no debate and possibly no vote on important amendments to an important Bill that is in dispute in the House. I believe that the House has been very shabbily treated. It looks to you for advice and guidance.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I remind you that we drew to the attention of the Leader of the House the fact that that problem could easily result from taking business on which there would be no vote—the Adjournment motion—before matters that should be put to a vote in the House? May I also remind you that, if we had been successful in those representations, the votes would have occurred in prime time and in the full glare of publicity? Instead, the debate has been tucked away in the middle of the night. Will you use your good offices to ensure that the House is given a proper opportunity to debate what are extremely important issues?

Mr. Speaker: Responsibility for the Order Paper and its shape lies with the Government and not with me. It is within the rules of the House to lay out the Order Paper in that way. What I am obliged to do as a servant of the House is to make my way through the Order Paper. That is the only advice that I can give to hon. Members at this stage.

Food Poverty (Eradication)

3.36 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Secretary of State to publish and implement a strategy for abolishing food poverty; to require the setting of targets for the implementation of that strategy; and for connected purposes.

The origins of the Bill are to be found in the Rowntree report of 1999, which drew the attention of the House and the country to the stark reality that there are 4 million people in Britain at the moment who do not have access to a healthy diet. The reasons for that are complex. They include a combination of inadequate income, insufficient access to safe and fresh food and misinformation about nutritional standards. However, the outcomes of that misunderstanding and lethal cocktail are equally stark. In each of our constituencies, up to 5,000 people are malnourished. Those people account for four in 10 hospital admissions. One in 10 of those who are admitted are caught in what is referred to as a malnutrition carousel, in which they make their way back and forth between the national health service and home, unable to sustain themselves on a healthy diet in order to get well and stay well.

The question is what we should do. It is clearly unacceptable for the House or the country to have a strategy that does nothing, and it is not the position of the Government to tolerate that view either. We already have a commitment as a Government to a strategy that will eliminate child poverty. As a Parliament, we have committed ourselves to a 15-year strategy that will eradicate fuel poverty. I believe that the Bill will complete the anti-poverty strategy, so that we have a coherent and comprehensive picture to address.

The Bill is simple and comprises two basic elements. First, it places a duty on the Secretary of State to present to the House a strategy for the elimination of food poverty. Secondly, its implementation mechanism would require local government to set up its own local food authorities, which would be expected, first, to conduct an audit of food poverty as it emerges in their area; secondly, to develop a strategy for eliminating food poverty; and, thirdly, to construct local partnerships to provide the mechanisms for the strategy and for eliminating a national scandal.

Clearly, Parliament and the Government have a duty to set out the framework for such a strategy, but the delivery mechanism must be local. It will draw on the diverse, dynamic and locality-based ideas in local communities and local government. It will go down several different paths, which I do not wish to prescribe. We may choose to try to follow the lead of the Women's Institute, which, in its sweet way, is almost the Khmer Rouge of the safe food campaign. It establishes local food markets around the country, and sets standards for food freshness and food accountability that the rest of us would do well to follow.

We may choose to support and extend the burgeoning growth of farmers' markets, which involve local food production and accountability. We may choose to fund food co-operatives that are currently supported by several health authorities around the country. Whatever collection of ideas we pursue, we will have to consider incentives for dealing with places in almost all our cities and communities that have become food deserts where one cannot find fresh food outlets that are accessible to the food poor.

[Mr. Alan Simpson]

I am tempted to suggest that, rather than offering discounts to supermarkets for zero ratings on their car parks, we should explore the possibility of allowing local authorities to offer 50 per cent. business rate reductions to food outlets where the food has been produced within 50 miles of the urban locality.

There are a myriad possibilities for tackling the scandal of food poverty that continues to blight the social landscape of this country. We may invite the local food authorities that local authorities establish to negotiate safe food contracts between the hinterland of food producers in the agricultural communities that surround urban outlets and the urban concentrations of food consumers.

More than a century ago, local government greatly transformed the quality of life of working people by setting standards for sanitation and food hygiene. They genuinely improved the life and health of working people throughout the land. We now need a different vision that revisits the issue and applies to the challenges of the 21st century.

Throughout the country, swathes of the public are establishing their agendas for food safety, food accountability, food security and food sustainability. The challenge to Parliament is whether we can catch up with the public. One of the exciting aspects of the food justice campaign that the Bill launches is that it crosses party boundaries. In many respects, the formal party political agenda has failed to grasp a political challenge that the public have set for Parliament and every party that is represented in it.

I doubt whether the Bill will make its way into law in this Parliament, but I am certain that, as with the warm homes campaign to end fuel poverty, in five years' time, the House will pass primary legislation to eliminate food poverty from Britain. I am therefore proud to present the Bill. I hope that hon. Members will support it.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Alan Simpson, Mr. Don Foster, Mr. David Amess, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. David Drew, Tom Brake, Dr. Howard Stoate, Peter Bottomley, Ms Diane Abbott, Dr. Ian Gibson, Mr. Tony Colman, Mr. David Chaytor.

FOOD POVERTY (ERADICATION)

Mr. Alan Simpson accordingly presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to publish and implement a strategy for abolishing food poverty; to require the setting of targets for the implementation of that strategy; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 July 2002, and to be printed [Bill 69].

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill (Programme No. 3)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 19th November:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1.—(1) Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at today's sitting and shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) at midnight.

(2) Those proceedings shall be taken in the order shown in the following Table and shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) at the time specified in the second column of the Table.

Lords amendments	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
Amendments to Parts 3, 10, 11 and 13	8.15 p.m.
Amendments to Part 4	9.30 p.m.
Amendments to Part 5	10.45 p.m.
Amendments to Part 14	11.30 p.m.
Remaining amendments	midnight

Subsequent stages

2.—(1) Any further Message from the Lords on the bill shall be considered forthwith without any Question put.

(2) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords on the Bill shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) one hour after their commencement—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

The House divided: Ayes 324, Noes 195.

Division No. 106] **[3.46 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Daisley, Paul
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim

Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Pearson and
Mr. Phil Willis.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger

George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Tom Brake and
Mr. Peter Atkinson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

International Terrorism

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

3.58 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): First, let me apologise for not being able to be present for the winding-up speeches. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I shall be attending and reading a lesson at the parliamentary carol service in St Margaret's Westminster at that time.

Yesterday United States Secretary of State Colin Powell, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I led a simple ceremony in Downing street in memory of those who lost their lives on 11 September. At 1.46 pm Greenwich mean time, 8.46 am eastern standard time, we stood in silence to mark the moment three months earlier when the first plane struck the north tower of the World Trade Centre in New York. Then a brass band from the American school in London played both our national anthems.

Immediately afterwards I remarked to William Farish, the United States ambassador to the United Kingdom, that the ceremony had been a striking combination of sorrow and hope—sad, yet uplifting at the same time. There were sadness and grief at the terrible loss of life on 11 September, and hope because of what has been achieved since then and what can now realistically be achieved in the future—hope that springs from recognition that the military action has worked and, above all, recognition that in turn it has liberated the spirit and the future of the Afghan people, oppressed for so long by the totalitarian intolerance of the Taliban regime.

The loss of nearly 4,000 lives on 11 September resulted from the decision of the al-Qaeda networks to launch those attacks. The loss of life in Afghanistan in the weeks that followed resulted from decisions of the Taliban regime to go on protecting the terrorists in defiance of the will of the international community. At each stage, faced with real choices, the al-Qaeda networks and the Taliban protecting them chose the path of evil and destruction.

The United States, the United Kingdom and other members of the international coalition have faced their own choices. Following 11 September we could have chosen to do nothing and by our inaction invited further attacks. Instead we took the tough decision to embark on a military campaign. I respect the view of those who disagreed with that choice but I hope that they may in turn respect the fact that the choice of military action as part of an overall diplomatic and humanitarian strategy was right, and that the campaign on all its fronts—military, diplomatic and humanitarian—has been vindicated by events.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: I will in a second.

The military coalition is well on the way to achieving the objectives of the campaign. The Taliban protectors of the terrorist networks have been driven out of Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat and now even Kandahar. The al-Qaeda training camps have been destroyed. The Taliban regime became a major obstacle to getting humanitarian relief through. Now that their grip on most of the country has gone, many more aid convoys are reaching the people who need them.

Jeremy Corbyn: Is the Foreign Secretary able to give an estimate of the number of casualties in the military campaign in Afghanistan? What measures does he propose be undertaken to investigate the many human rights abuses on all sides in Afghanistan, in particular the execution of a large number of prisoners when the Northern Alliance took one of the Taliban divisions hostage?

Mr. Straw: I thought that my hon. Friend was going to say, in the spirit of mutual respect, that he recognised that some of his predictions, which he made with such certainty in the autumn, had not turned out to be correct. I look forward to that. We all have to learn lessons from what has happened.

I am happy to put this on the record. I believe that the military action was right but I did not believe that it would be over as quickly as it has been and with such relatively small loss of life. In time, casualty figures will emerge and we will put them on the record, but my hon. Friend has to face the fact that, had the military action not taken place, the Taliban would have maintained their stranglehold on Afghanistan, with the most outrageous and appalling abuse of civil and human rights we have ever seen.

So far we have seen no evidence—again, my hon. Friend speaks with a certainty that I do not find is possible in these circumstances—of executions of the type that he has described. When I was asked about that on the radio on 30 November, I said that if different evidence emerged we would consider it. We always abide by our obligations in international law.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Of course human rights should always be respected and one hopes that they will be, but does my right hon. Friend recall one or two people here and elsewhere saying that if military action were taken, the whole Islamic world would rise against us? That does not seem to have happened. Have we not seen evidence with our own eyes on television that a large majority of people in Afghanistan welcome the liberation from clerical fascism and totalitarianism? This has been one of the most justified military actions since 1945.

Mr. Straw: I share my hon. Friend's view entirely. The record speaks for itself. I am not going to be disobliging. As I say, I respect those who took a different view, but I hope that out of respect for the House they will look at the record of what they said and think about whether the certainty that they showed—for example, they said that the whole of the Islamic world would be up in arms—was correct.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): In view of what the Foreign Secretary is saying, does he support the American policy of fighting terrorism around the world wherever it exists?

Mr. Straw: That is a simplification of the American policy. I certainly support the policy of the United Nations of pursuing terrorism by all appropriate means, wherever it is, and I shall come to that matter in due course.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: This is a short debate and I apologise if I do not take all the interventions that I normally would.

People also raised the issue of whether people would starve in Afghanistan if the military action went ahead. Well, since 11 September, the World Food Programme has brought 70,000 tonnes of food into the country. Never at any point did the humanitarian effort falter. At present, the aid agencies and the international community are getting four times as much food into Afghanistan each day as they were at the beginning of October.

On the diplomatic front, we saw last week perhaps the most astonishing success of all. Exceeding all expectations, the representatives of the non-Taliban Afghan factions, some of whom have fought each other at different times in the last 20 years, sat down together in Bonn and thrashed out an agreement which puts Afghanistan back on the path to peace. In recording that, I wish to express my gratitude to the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, and to his Special Representative, Lakhdar Brahimi. Mr. Brahimi's patience, insight and skill were a critical factor in bringing the negotiations to that remarkable conclusion. I also pay tribute to the Afghan participants. I am also glad that we in the UK were able to play an active part in the process, through diplomats Robert Cooper, Paul Bergne, Stephen Evans, Andrew Tesoriere and many others, and through the involvement of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and myself.

Many of us expected that the next step after Bonn would be for the talks to reconvene in Kabul. Instead, it is an interim Afghan authority that will convene in Kabul on 22 December. The new Administration will include three women: a clear sign that the new Afghanistan is different from life under the Taliban. Like everything else in the agreement, that is the beginning of a process of returning Afghanistan to normality. Those who take the view that we should not have embarked on the military strategy, in the context of the overall strategy, need to reflect on the fact that had it not taken place women, in particular, would have continued to be oppressed in what was a benighted country.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Kelvin): Is not my right hon. Friend's triumphalism a little premature, if not provocative? After all, the vindication he speaks of will be seen only if we are less likely in the future to be attacked by violent terrorists than before the action began. At the very least, it is too soon to say that that is true, given that—according to General Powell—al-Qaeda are in 50 countries around the world, not all in Tora Bora being bombed. On the subject of the Muslim world, will my right hon. Friend accept that more people hate us more intensely today than they did before we embarked on that military action?

Mr. Straw: On the second point, I emphatically disagree with my hon. Friend. That is not the message that I receive from my Muslim friends, of whom I have many in this country and abroad. On his first point, I suggest to my hon. Friend that it would not be a bad idea if he examined the beam in his own eye before he started trying to pick out the mote in mine. If he wants an example of a speech that was not correct, he should perhaps examine what he told the House a few weeks ago. He said:

> "Why do I say that the war is going so badly?"

[Mr. Straw]

He explained why and then continued:

> "the course of action on which we are embarked and in which I predict we will still be involved—perhaps next year at this time—with casualties beyond imagination risks becoming the very third world war that the bin Laden fanatics set out to achieve with their attack on the World Trade Centre on 11 September."—[*Official Report*, 16 October 2001; Vol. 372, c. 1113-4.]

Mr. Galloway *rose—*

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend can make his own speech in his own time, but I wish to make progress. His earlier speech is on the record.

The House can be proud of this country's role in the liberation of the Afghan people, and we can be especially proud of the courage of our troops at Bagram airfield in securing the air base and making it safe for the United Nations and other diplomatic and humanitarian missions. Not least, our deployment at Bagram has made it possible for delegates to fly to the talks in Bonn, and we were the first country to establish a diplomatic presence in Kabul.

Alongside that, however, there has always been the imperative on the international community to deliver a second liberation to free the Afghan people from the other scourges that have beset them for decades—fear, hunger, poverty and war.

There are several immediate and urgent tasks. First, there is the need to ensure that al-Qaeda and the Taliban are completely eliminated. Secondly, there is the immediate humanitarian emergency. Thirdly, there is the issue of the multinational force requested by the parties at Bonn to provide security in Kabul and the surrounding areas for the nascent political community, and for the institutions of that fledgling state.

We have always said that we stand ready to provide troops. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said yesterday, we have indicated, in principle, a willingness to play a leading role in any UN mandated force to provide stability in Afghanistan. No formal decisions have yet been taken.

These are merely the most pressing needs of the new Afghan state, but there are many other problems that cannot be resolved quickly. The country has known little but war, bloodshed and chaos for a generation. A quarter of all children do not make it to their fifth birthday, a third are orphans, and half are malnourished. The international community has let Afghanistan down in the past. We are not going to turn our backs on the Afghan people again.

The Bonn agreement set out a route map to a better future. We have to ensure that all the parties involved stay on the route and follow the map. There will be an emergency Loya Jirgah within six months, from which a broad-based traditional administration will emerge. Eighteen months after that, there will be a full Loya Jirgah to agree a new constitution, under which free and fair elections will be held for a fully representative government.

We must also ensure that donor countries provide good measures of support, and that the tangible support that is provided is conditional on progress being made in Afghanistan.

The Afghan Support Group, which brings together all the major donors, has met in Berlin to discuss practical ways of assisting the interim administration. Meetings of donors and other interested parties in Brussels later this month, and next month in Tokyo, will lead to firm pledges of funds. We have to get reconstruction work under way quickly to produce an early peace dividend.

I want to pay particular tribute to the central role that the United Nations has played since the beginning of this crisis. I spoke of the ceremony yesterday to mark the fact that three months had passed since the atrocities of 11 September. Today, it is exactly three months since the UN moved so rapidly into action by passing Security Council resolution 1368. Two weeks later, it passed resolution 1373, and further resolutions were passed when I attended the Security Council and the General Assembly between 10 and 14 November.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Straw: I am sorry, but I want to make progress.

Important as the military, diplomatic and humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan are to the fight against international terrorism, their successful completion alone will not remove the scourge of terrorism as a force in international affairs. We therefore have to do all that we can to promote peace. That includes fostering the middle east peace process, which represents the only way in which Palestinian grievances can be addressed, and Israel's security guaranteed.

Forlorn though the hopes may be, we have to encourage both parties in that terrible conflict to go back, in appropriate circumstances, to the negotiating table.

We also have to step up international measures to combat terrorism. We have to work for universal acceptance of the principle that violence directed against civilians for political ends is never justified. We do not condone acts of terrorism carried out under the guise of fighting for freedom. Although we are prepared to talk to states that do not endorse this principle, our scope for active co-operation with them is severely limited.

We have to go on providing development and humanitarian assistance, and making the case for effective action to combat poverty, oppression, conflict, criminality and every malign force that excludes our fellow human beings from the benefits of a globalised world.

We should not delude ourselves that the defeat of al-Qaeda and its Taliban protectors in Afghanistan spells the end of the international terrorist threat, or of the fight against it. We, the United States Administration and the international community have made it clear from the beginning that it will take a long time to remove the threat. However, we should take heart from the successes of the last few weeks.

We have shown that the determined will of the international community can defeat the evil that seeks to destroy us and that destroyed the lives of so many people on 11 September. We have shown that action to enforce universal values is a powerful force for good. Alongside the physical rebuilding of Afghanistan, we have to encourage and, above all, work for, the spiritual regeneration of that country. We have shown that we have not forgotten 11 September, and we will not rest until we have made sure that such an atrocity can never happen again.

4.15 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Since the House last met to discuss the war on terrorism, much progress has been made and Conservative Members welcome the success that has been achieved in recent weeks. It is a vindication of the strategy pursued by the international coalition, with the United States at its head. It is only the beginning, however, and we must never lose sight of the fact that the fight to eradicate terrorism wherever it is to be found will be a long, hard and unrelenting one. That fight did not start in Afghanistan and it will not end there. We must never allow ourselves to be tempted into believing that once the Afghan phase is over, our job is done.

In the House on 16 October, I outlined what I believed that our objectives should be. The first was to bring Osama bin Laden to book and to destroy his al-Qaeda organisation. The second was to enable the people of Afghanistan to regain their rights and to live in peace, not least by a determined effort to free them from the threat of famine that confronts so many of them. The third was the longer-term but equally essential aim of the eradication of international terrorism and the very real threats implicit in it. I believe that those objectives remain valid.

Achieving those objectives was central to justifying the international involvement of the unique and remarkable international coalition that has been so successfully sustained. These "agile partnerships", as President Bush has described them, have proved very effective, as, indeed, has the flexible approach that the European Union has adopted to the crisis—a flexibility that Conservative Members warmly welcome and endorse.

Mr. Dalyell: The right hon. Gentleman's third objective was the eradiation of international terrorism. Will he clarify whether that, in his view, means bombing countries other than Afghanistan? If it does not mean that, what does the eradication of international terrorism mean?

Mr. Ancram: There would be many different ways in which we would seek to eradicate international terrorism, depending on the circumstances. It would be wrong to rule anything in or to rule anything out.

I hope that the conversion to a flexible Europe that I mentioned will be sustained by the Foreign Secretary in the weeks ahead. It has also been a salutary experience to work with a coalition in which Russia has co-operated so effectively with the United States and Europe. I hope that we will be able to build on that growing understanding.

Intrinsic to our prime objective was the early removal of the Taliban, which has almost been done now. Over the past few days, in their remaining erstwhile stronghold of Kandahar, the prospective surrender of the Taliban forces has been brokered by the man who is to be Afghanistan's interim Prime Minister, Hamid Karzai. Now the net is inexorably closing in on bin Laden and his al-Qaeda forces in Afghanistan. The latest reports suggest that the battle among the caves at Tora Bora is reaching a conclusion.

The professionalism of our armed forces, American and British, working with and alongside the anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan, will help to ensure either that bin Laden is brought to justice or that justice is brought to bin Laden. I salute the courage and skill of our service personnel who have been in one way or another involved in ensuring the effectiveness of this campaign.

The Afghan phase of the battle against terrorism is not yet complete and there must be no let-up, no premature satisfaction and certainly no complacency until it is done. Nevertheless, the work of helping to establish a representative Government in Kabul must now be pursued with vigour. That second objective of which I spoke is urgent if the vacuum left by the collapse of the Taliban regime is not to be filled with further dissension and unrest.

In Bonn last week, a major piece in the jigsaw of our second objective fell into place when the major Afghan factions agreed on a transitional Government to run the country. On 22 December, when the interim Government come in, Afghanistan will start on a new path. It is important that the agreement was made by the people of Afghanistan, for the people of Afghanistan. The Opposition welcome that progress and I, too, pay special tribute to Lakhdar Brahimi of the United Nations. We wish him success in his continuing diplomatic efforts.

Understandably, there is now a tremendous sense of hope for the future, but Afghanistan has only just begun on the path towards exorcising the demons of its recent past. The next stage in that process is for the transitional Government to prove themselves genuinely representative of the whole of Afghanistan and resolute in ensuring that Afghanistan will never again be used as a haven for international terrorism.

There has been some surprise and concern at the way that announcements have been made over the past few days about the further deployment of British troops in Afghanistan—I hope that the Foreign Secretary will give me his full attention at this point—through leaks in newspapers—*[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State for Defence suggests that there has been no announcement, but that is what I am complaining about.

There have been leaks in newspapers, hints have been given—not least by the right hon. Gentleman—in television interviews, and announcements have been made in other countries. As Mr. Speaker made clear yesterday, the House should be told first, and should be told fully, what is intended. The result is that we have grave misgivings about what is being mooted. We need answers to many questions.

Mr. Straw: I accept—as I have always done—the importance of making announcements to the House. However, in defence of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and myself, the only occasions on which we have dealt with that matter have been when we explained to people that no decisions have been made, and so no announcement has been made. We have made a statement of the obvious, which I repeated in my speech: we stand ready in appropriate circumstances to take a leading role in that force, but no decisions have been made. That remains the case. Once the decisions have been taken, they will be made known to the House.

Mr. Ancram: I hear what the Foreign Secretary says, but I read the front pages of all the national newspapers on Sunday and Monday. I also heard what the US Secretary of State said in Paris yesterday before he arrived in this country. I find it hard to accept that there has merely been a declaration in principle and that there is no intention behind it.

[Mr. Ancram]

Yesterday, the Prime Minister was reported speaking, outside the House—again—of British troops being involved in, as the Foreign Secretary correctly quoted,

"a UN mandated force to provide stability in Afghanistan".

We need to know precisely what that means. What would be the limits to the time and extent of any involvement? What would be the remit of any such engagement? In the past, we have expressed reservations about being involved in what has been described as "nation building", especially as we have been protagonists in the campaign so far. Do the Government still share our reservations about that?

Patrick Mercer (Newark): Can some light be shed on the warning orders that are currently thrashing around in the joint rapid reaction force and the headquarters of 1 Armoured Division? Is that merely contingency planning?

Mr. Ancram: As the Secretary of State for Defence has heard my hon. Friend's very valid question, I hope that he will be able to answer it at the end of the debate.

I have further questions to which I hope to receive an answer. What would be the involvement of the United States in the United Nations mandated force? Who is envisaged as commanding the force? UN officials recently expressed the need to leave "a light footprint", but how would the Government define that? Can they assure the House that any involvement would be time-limited, would not lead to mission creep and would not suck our armed forces into a long-term policing role from which it would be difficult to extricate ourselves?

I should also like the Government to enlarge on the speech made on Monday by the Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, in which he referred to the choices facing the country and the coalition in relation to the next phase. What were the national interests to which he alluded in contrast to altruism? What are the differences of emphasis between the United Kingdom and the United States at which he hinted? Do the Government think that the next phase involves a straight choice between continued involvement in Afghanistan or supporting the United States in the wider fight against terrorism? Or can we do both? What warning was he seeking to give when he talked about trapping

"our hands in the mangle of Afghanistan in order to facilitate the political process"?

Those crucial matters are clouded at the moment, and the House should be told.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Am I right to conclude from the right hon. Gentleman's remarks that the Conservative party is prepared to support only a very short, time-limited involvement of British forces and that if the situation in Afghanistan requires international involvement that includes our forces, which play a crucial role, and our country, which is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Conservative Members will not support such a commitment?

Mr. Ancram: I take it from the hon. Gentleman's question that he is prepared to support an unlimited, untimed involvement. On behalf of the Opposition, I am seeking to get some clarity into the suggestions, hints and inferences that have been made during the past few days, because the House deserves clarity on those issues.

Hand in hand with the diplomatic and military efforts there has been a humanitarian aid effort of unrivalled scope and dedication. That has further justified our actions. Sir Michael was certainly right about the need to address the hearts and minds of the population, and there is more to be done in that regard.

The World Food Programme has exceeded its target of 52,000 tonnes of food entering Afghanistan every month, but concern persists about reports by certain charities that food is not reaching the most vulnerable people. There are continued reports of aid convoys being looted, although security is said to be improving. My hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), who would normally be in her place, is in Pakistan, visiting a land mine charity in Peshawar and attempting to discover whether food in Afghanistan is reaching those who need it, and we all look forward to hearing her report. On a positive note, Afghan refugees are slowly returning home. More than 120,000 refugees have returned to Afghanistan since November, and that is to be welcomed.

The events of 11 September have shown that there is no weapon terrorists will not use and no life they are not prepared to take. If we fail to maintain the pressure on terrorism everywhere, we are all at risk. President Bush understands that. He is right to say that this is a moment to "rise up and fight terror". His Administration—many of whose members I met in Washington last week—also understand that that is vital if we are to have security in future. Furthermore, they appreciate that they must act, and be seen to act, in an appropriate, calculated and responsible manner, and they have done that with great skill and determination. That is why they took such swift action to freeze the assets of groups supporting the Hamas terrorists who only recently took the lives of so many Israeli citizens.

Indeed, the events of the past two weeks in Israel remind us that we still have a long way to go before the scourge of terrorism is eradicated. Fifteen people were killed in Israel by terrorism a week ago last Saturday. Twenty-five died because of terrorism the day after. What we were forced to accept from 11 September is that we cannot appease terror. The recent murders took place just as the American envoy, Anthony Zinni, was trying to negotiate a ceasefire. They have threatened stability in the region and in doing so played into bin Laden's hands.

Of course, we look to Israel to exercise restraint and to return to the peace process and the talks table, but after recent events the pressure is especially on the Palestinians. On Monday, the European Union called on Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to close down the terrorist networks of Islamic Jihad and Hamas. EU Foreign Ministers meeting in Brussels this week said that Mr. Arafat should also publicly call for an end to the Palestinian intifada against Israel, which has continued for more than a year. We on the Conservative Benches support that, and I believe that the Palestinian Authority cannot and should not renege on its obligations.

David Winnick *rose—*

Mr. Ancram: I shall give way for the last time, because I want to make progress.

David Winnick: I and many others deplored the terrible atrocities that occurred in Israel last week.

However, is it not the case that the terror organisations that the right hon. Gentleman named are not in favour of any negotiations, hence the terror during the Israeli prime ministerial elections? Is it not vital that, at long last, Palestinians get the justice that has been denied them? Does he therefore accept the need for a viable Palestinian state to end the Israeli occupation that has been taking place since 1967? Israelis deserve justice certainly, but why not Palestinians as well?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman knows that there is always a balance to be struck in the middle east between the need for a just settlement for the Palestinians and the security of the state of Israel, and that, in the end, that can only be negotiated. We know that George Mitchell made proposals for the resumption of talks, and I look to the implementation of their requirements so that talks can resume. That is urgently needed.

The international campaign against terrorism must go far wider. We should no longer be prepared to tolerate Governments who themselves tolerate or sponsor terrorist activities. That goes for Afghanistan, but it must go too for other countries that we know, and can show, are involved in international terrorism. President Bush was right yesterday to set down a very clear and stark warning to such countries. When those states are unwilling to take effective action against terrorism, they must be prepared to face a determined response from the wider international community, and I hope that the United Kingdom will continue to be at the forefront of that response.

There are further clear phases of the campaign against international terrorism to be pursued once the immediate fight in Afghanistan is over. The next immediate phase must be the continued pursuit and eradication of al-Qaeda wherever it still flourishes. First, the terrorists must be pursued to wherever they have fled. They cannot be allowed to establish new bases and boltholes. Secondly, wherever there is the potential for them to establish a new command and control structure, under a new leadership, that must be nipped in the bud.

Thirdly, where there are al-Qaeda cells independently capable of carrying out international terrorist acts, they must be ruthlessly hunted down and eradicated, as must any other terrorist organisations that can and might act as their surrogates. It would be a travesty to draw a line at Afghanistan, only to see the monster that is al-Qaeda regroup and re-establish itself. Let me make it clear that where there is evidence of such continuing terrorism, or the threat of it, Conservative Members will support whatever action is necessary to deal with it. But the fight against terrorism cannot end there either.

We must look at those countries who themselves pose a terrorist threat—rogue states who not only sponsor and encourage terrorism but carry the threat themselves. The further phase must be to bring appropriate pressure to bear on them to end their terrorist threat. When President Bush says that there can be no further justification for the continuing Iraqi failure to abide by the Gulf war ceasefire obligations to allow United Nations inspectors back into the country to monitor its weapons of mass destruction, we support him. The evidence suggests that Iraq has used the three years since UNSCOM was banished to build up its arsenal.

As President Bush again made clear yesterday, the threat that Iraq poses is not one to which a blind eye can be turned. To do so would be to entrench the threat and merely to postpone the need to deal with it. Iraq, by whatever appropriate means, must be brought to mend its ways. It is to be hoped that the example of Afghanistan will bring helpful pressure to bear on Iraq, if only as an indication that the international community will no longer tolerate rogue Governments who cultivate international terrorism. There are many means by which pressure could be brought to bear. It is not necessary for the moment to speculate on what action would be appropriate or where, but it is necessary to demonstrate the resolve of the coalition to deal with terrorism or the threat of it, wherever it occurs. Again, where the evidence justifies it, we on these Benches will support whatever action is appropriate and necessary to close down that element of international terrorism. I hope and believe that the Government will do the same.

I hope that today the Government will take the opportunity to restate their determination, in the words of the Prime Minister,

> "to take . . . what action we can against . . . terrorism in all its forms."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 966.]

I hope too that the Foreign Secretary will reiterate the remarks that he is reported to have made to the Select Committee on 5 December, when he confirmed that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction posed a considerable threat to international security. He is reported as saying:

> "we are very concerned about Iraq's development of these weapons and believe action must be taken."

To him I say that we support that view.

Mr. Galloway: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: I shall not give way again because I want to finish.

This is a campaign that must be won. We must never forget that it is a campaign about peace and the threat that international terrorism poses to peace. The fight for peace and for freedom from terror can never be qualified or restrained. It cannot be pursued half-heartedly. That is why we Conservatives wholeheartedly support the fight and support the Government and the United States in their pursuit of it.

As we in Britain know only too well, terrorism threatens us all. We have to pursue it relentlessly and without compromise wherever it occurs. We must not let up until the battle against it is won. The House should know that there is a long way to go, but we Conservatives are ready and prepared to see it through.

4.36 pm

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): First, I pay my respects to our colleague Sir Ray Powell, who died this weekend, and send my sympathies to his family. As one who knew Ray throughout my 14 years as a Member of Parliament, I have many happy memories and many stories to tell in after-dinner speeches for the rest of my life. I send my best wishes to his family.

We all know where we were on 11 September. I was 30,000 ft up in the air flying into London Gatwick when the terrible atrocity occurred. As I walked off the flight, the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell), who was returning with me from Gibraltar, tapped me on the shoulder and told me that he had just received a teletext

[Mr. Jimmy Hood]

message that an aircraft had flown into the World Trade Centre. It was horrific news, but we thought that a terrible accident had occurred. However, as I walked into the airport lounge on my way to catch my connecting flight to Scotland, I saw the full horror of the events.

That is something that lives with us all, and none of us can adequately describe it. I hear pundits, commentators and colleagues saying that we should never forget 11 September, but it is impossible for us to forget it. In my local constituency newsletter, I commented that life would never be the same after 11 September. I am sure that everyone agrees.

Are we for war, or are we against war? Surely we are all against war. To every inch of my being, I am against war. I think that it was James Connolly who said that the working man is at both ends of the bayonet. That is the view of a pacifist and a great socialist, but he was speaking at a time when wars were fought on the battlefield; the war against international terrorism is one that no one could ever have contemplated. It will be difficult for us to come to terms with the horror of it.

I have to say to many of my dear and good Friends who are opposed to the action that has been taken that, although I have regard for their genuine views, while disagreeing with them, only one thing would have been worse than taking action, and that is not taking action. We should reflect. We were worried that there would be a knee-jerk reaction from America, with military action being conducted unilaterally. We were all pleased—some of us were surprised—when the involvement and leadership of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister led to the forming of a coalition and an understanding of what we were facing. None of us understood the seriousness of the threat. The consequences of not defeating those who perpetrated such a terrible act are too horrific to contemplate.

My constituency is in the west of Scotland. It is a rural area. There is not a large Muslim community—the Asian and Muslim community is about 5 per cent. or less of the entire community. Much has been said about Muslim communities. My experience in meeting, living with and representing Muslim families has been wonderful.

I hear that there is a debate that stems from something that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is alleged to have said about teaching immigrant families English. There is nothing more wonderful than to be in the west of Scotland and to hear a Pakistani child speaking in broad Scots. Please believe me. That is perfect English in a broad Scots accent.

We should not lecture Muslim families on how they should bring up their children. I have never met a more respectful, polite and conscientious group of people. That is my experience of Muslim communities, wherever I have met them. We should talk more about that. We have taken it for granted too often, and I should put that on record.

There are issues with which I am not comfortable. None of us can say that we support 100 per cent. everything that has been happening. I have great concern about what is happening in the middle east. Israel has many friends in the House. They are on both sides of the Chamber, and they are vocal and supportive. I support the Palestinian cause for an independent state. Given our experience of the past three months, we must not ignore the middle east and say that it has nothing to do with what happened on 11 September. The evil people who perpetrated that evil terrorism were using, are using and will continue to use the lack of a settlement in the middle east.

David Winnick: That is an excuse.

Mr. Hood: Of course it is an excuse, but it is not an excuse from our point of view. My hon. Friend and I and many other Members have argued for a peace settlement in the middle east, and it was once within our grasp.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I assure the hon. Gentleman that I share his view that there will never be lasting peace in the middle east until both Israelis and Palestinians have their own separate states. However, is he not being unrealistic? Is not the objective of those who are carrying out the suicide bombings in Israel nothing less than the destruction of Israel?

Mr. Hood: I concede that people are perpetrating evil acts of terrorism by becoming suicide bombers and, more importantly, encouraging others to become suicide bombers. However, they are extremists who feed off the sort of response that the Israelis have made. There is no way that I could even try to justify the Israeli Government's response. I can understand their anger and the need to protect themselves against terrorism, but one cannot defeat the evil of international terrorism with state terrorism. I tell Israel and the friends of Israel who want a middle east peace settlement that we should address that issue. We should tell Prime Minister Sharon that behaving like a state terrorist is not the answer to the problem; I say that as a supporter of the present international action.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that the balance to the reasonable point made by the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) is that Sharon is increasingly giving the impression that his intention is the destruction of the potential state of Palestine?

Mr. Hood: That will never happen without war in the middle east. If we cannot get our minds round what happened on 11 September, believe me, a middle east war will be a lot worse. It is in everybody's interest, as well as in the interests of morality and social justice, to give the Palestinians their own state within their own lands and, along with that, to give the Israelis peace. We cannot criticise the evil of international terrorism while turning a blind eye to supposedly friendly countries that embrace state terrorism. It gives me no pleasure to tell the House that, sadly, what the Israelis are doing is wrong. How Mr. Peres can remain in that Cabinet is, frankly, beyond me.

I was delighted to hear from the Home Secretary the statistic that four times as much humanitarian aid is now going in.

Mr. Straw: I am the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Hood: I must apologise to my right hon. Friend; he has a new job.

I saw a television report today about young boys playing football in Kabul. Before the downfall of the Taliban, they could have been put in prison for wearing football shorts, let alone playing football. That says a lot about what is happening. We are seeing changes; we welcome the new interim Government that will be set up in Kabul, and we welcome the liberation of women, and their inclusion in the new Government. We should take the opportunity to get more humanitarian aid in to save the many millions of Afghans who need it.

In conclusion, I hope that in our next debate on this subject we will have many more joys to discuss. Perhaps in two or three months' time the Government will be up and running, military action will have ended in Afghanistan, and there will be an end to the terror. I see that the Secretary of State for Defence, whose position I shall not get wrong, is on the Front Bench. It is my honest view—and history will tell—that the Prime Minister performed as great a service as anyone could have done in giving support to the American Government. I commend him for doing what he did when he did, and the way in which he did it. Hawks in the State Department now want to expand military action into parts of the Sudan and Iraq, but I caution against such an extension. We should argue that what we are doing to defeat international terrorism is moral and right, but we should not allow the hawks in the State Department to take us that step further, which would undermine our moral case.

4.50 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I propose, so far as I can, to strain neither my voice nor the patience of the House in this short debate. I hope that those two objectives are mutually consistent.

In the light of recent domestic political events, it would be right for me to restate once again Liberal Democrat support for Government policy since 11 September. Our support has never been slavish, as the Foreign Secretary knows, but I am satisfied now, as I was after 11 September, that action in Afghanistan is justified in law and is necessary for our protection. Like the Foreign Secretary, I could not have predicted that the action would be so successful so swiftly, or that a political framework would so quickly be put in place.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Does that support extend to the Liberal Democrat's newest recruit, the hon. former Labour Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden)? If not, can the right hon. and learned Gentleman explain how the Liberal Democrat Whips succeeded, where the Labour Whips so signally failed, in keeping the hon. Gentleman quiet on the subject, as I do not see him in his place today?

Mr. Campbell: If the hon. Gentleman has any pretensions to fly-fishing, he will have to learn to cast a rather more gentle line than that. Such decisions are far above my pay grade—I am a humble foot-soldier in the Liberal Democrat army. All I can say is that in my father's house there are many mansions.

More seriously, may I sound a note of caution? As our American friends say, it's not over till it's over. There may yet be substantial loss of life in Afghanistan before victory has been achieved. I know that to some extent it has been dismissed by those on the Treasury Bench, but I remain anxious about events at Mazar-e-Sharif and so, too, do many people.

It is true that terrible things happen in conflict, but prisoners of war are entitled to the protections of the Geneva convention. I do not shrink from asserting without qualification that those who fight wars in the name of civilisation have a duty to observe civilised standards. There are as yet too many unanswered questions about what happened in the fort at Mazar-e-Sharif. Who, for example, took the decision to bomb the prisoners? How many of the dead, in truth, had their hands tied behind their back? What was the role of British forces?

In another context, to which we shall no doubt move later today in the business of the House, the Home Secretary—the present Home Secretary—is fond of saying that those with nothing to hide have nothing to fear from scrutiny of their actions or even of their e-mails. We can apply that principle to the present issue. The House is entitled to know in due course, after proper investigation, precisely what happened at Mazar-e-Sharif and what role, if any, British forces played in those events.

Questions still remain about the humanitarian effort but, like others, I welcome the information provided by the Foreign Secretary about the extent to which aid is now being admitted. As I have said before in the House, the political legitimacy of military action would be undermined, albeit retrospectively, if the humanitarian effort were to falter.

The opening of the rail bridge in the north allows the mass transit of supplies, but they still have to be distributed throughout the country to all those who are in need. They will have to be distributed in a way that deals with the emergence of local warlords and, in some cases, bandits whose interest will be to try to acquire that aid for themselves, and to use it as a means of enforcing their own influence.

As I think the Foreign Secretary expressly said, the achievements of the United Nations in Bonn and the formation of an interim Government should not be underestimated, although we are yet to be satisfied about how effectively their writ will run on the ground in Afghanistan. We may have managed to export some of the features of Cabinet democracy, as it appears that there is already some competition for the jobs that have been allocated and suggestions that others should have been preferred. Like others here, I think that the United Nations deserves enormous credit for its achievement at Bonn, as does Mr. Brahimi in particular.

That achievement at Bonn underlines the need for a force on the ground. I would prefer it to be described as a stabilisation force. The shadow Foreign Secretary was right to ask a number of questions about that force. To some extent, they are allowed to lie on the table, because, as the Foreign Secretary said, no firm decisions have been taken. I should like to add that it is essential that the force should have a clearly defined mission and an express mandate from the United Nations. It must be mandated to intervene if that is necessary to prevent gross breaches of human rights. Srebrenica is a harsh lesson that should never be forgotten by those who seek on behalf of the international community to deploy military assets for the purpose of protection. Such a force will require robust rules of engagement, but, most important, it will require to know precisely why it is there in the first place.

Estimates of the reconstruction bill in Afghanistan run as high as $25 billion for the next decade—a substantial financial commitment. If we are to undercut the warlords

[Mr. Campbell]

and free people from the grip of the extremists who ran Afghanistan in the past, we must ensure that the funds for reconstruction do not end up in the pockets of the warlords. Furthermore—this point was hinted at in the early days after 11 September—we will need a regional approach that deals not only with Afghanistan, but with the region in which it lies. It must try to deal with reconstruction, development, debt, the drug trade and security issues in central Asia and Pakistan, as well as Iran, to which I shall return in the context of what the shadow Foreign Secretary was pleased to describe as rogue states.

The principal political issue that concerns most of us today is the question of a wider campaign. Military force has a place in the campaign against terrorism, but we should always remember that it is a tool or mechanism and not a policy in itself. It is most effective when it is used discriminately and in proportion to the achievement of precisely defined aims. It may be appropriate in some circumstances, but it may, equally, be inappropriate in others. Indeed, one can envisage some circumstances in which the use of force might be counter-productive in achieving the original objective.

I have never thought that operations in Afghanistan would be sufficient to nullify the threat from al-Qaeda. As we know, evidence suggests that the network operates in other failed states such as Somalia and in the lawless regions of more established states such as the Philippines and Indonesia. If there is to be military action in relation to cells in any of those countries or in other parts of the world, surely we should seek as far as we can to conduct it with the co-operation of the Governments of the nations where it occurs. Where there are no effective Governments, it may be necessary to proceed without such support, but in every case there must be clear and credible evidence to justify action. Each case must turn on its own merits and be based on the most clear and analytical threat assessment.

No substantial evidence has been produced so far to link the events of 11 September with Iraq. If military action were launched against Iraq without incontrovertible evidence of Iraqi complicity, the consequences would be disastrous for stability in the region, the future of the global coalition and the whole effort against international terrorism. No Arab Government, with the possible exception of Kuwait's, could support such a course of action. Moderate Arab Governments, such as Egypt or Jordan, would be bound for domestic political reasons to condemn any such extension of military action. The coalition that has been painstakingly put together would quickly unravel and the international consensus would evaporate.

Most dangerously, especially in the light of current circumstances in the middle east, Saddam Hussein could perceive military action against Iraq as yet another opportunity to widen the conflict by targeting Israel, as he did in the Gulf war. We cannot assume the same restraint from an Israeli Government as was demonstrated in 1991 because the domestic circumstances in Israel today are so different from those that prevailed 10 years ago.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman rule out military action against a country that is probably developing weapons of mass destruction?

Mr. Campbell: I was coming to that express point.

Mr. Jenkin: It should certainly be addressed.

Mr. Campbell: I was about to deal with the matter.

Iraq has posed a serious problem for the international community for more than a decade. Saddam Hussein is a brutal ruler who subjects his people to ignominy and hardship, and we have drawn attention to that insufficiently often in the House. He manipulates the sanctions regime so that it bites where he wants it to bite, and so that the elite—his praetorian guard—are immune and the ordinary people of Iraq suffer grievously. Plenty of statistical evidence from objective sources supports that view.

The Iraqi regime's failure to comply with its obligations under successive United Nations Security Council resolutions, especially on the destruction of chemical and biological weapons capability, is not only a continuing source of anxiety but a mark of Saddam Hussein's determination not to bow to the will of the international community. In 1998, Richard Butler, a most robust and aggressive diplomat, was compelled to withdraw the inspection teams from Iraq because their work was being deliberately inhibited and thwarted.

The Government and the United States Government decided that there should be military action, and that installations that were believed to harbour the means to manufacture weapons of mass destruction should be bombed. We supported that. It was the right thing to do because the action taken in 1998 was a deliberate and flagrant violation of the responsibilities that the United Nations Security Council resolutions imposed on Iraq.

What has happened since? The strategy has been one of containment and deterrence, and it has been effective. There has been no threat to Riyadh or Kuwait City. There has been no threat to use weapons of mass destruction. When we consider the political consequences of embarking on a programme of military action against Iraq, we must ask ourselves: what compelling reasons suggest that an effective strategy of containment and deterrence should be abandoned? If possession of weapons of mass destruction is a casus belli, against how many other countries might military action be taken on that basis?

The shadow Foreign Secretary talked about rogue states; his definition must surely apply to Syria and Iran. The Prime Minister is hardly back from Syria, and the Foreign Secretary has been back from Iran for only a little longer. For what purpose? It was to draw those countries into the international coalition. As both found, the middle east can be a bruising experience. I certainly supported the fact that they went there, and I support the conclusions that they were able to derive from so doing. If we now say that, by definition, these are rogue states, and that they may expect the threat of military action, the maintenance of the coalition will become extremely difficult—although the Foreign Secretary might not think that his journey had been wasted. Are Libya and North Korea to be targeted? Have we thought what the consequences would be if we were to target those "rogue states"? First they were "rogue states", then they were "states of concern"; since the Republican Administration took over they have again become "rogue states".

We tread a dangerous line in subscribing to the notion that we can identify a rogue state and then take military action against it. If we took every case on its merits, based on clear, unequivocal evidence, there might be some justification, but the idea that we should open up a broad front against any state that falls within the definition of "rogue state", and that we could conduct military action against that state without incurring enormous political and perhaps even military consequences is one that carries a great deal of danger.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware of the large degree of support in the British military for the views that he is expressing? Such views were clearly stated by Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, Chief of the Defence Staff, in a speech at the Royal United Services Institute on Monday evening. He said:

> "The desire to use greater force with less constraint, less distinction, and less proportionality . . . exposes our strategic centre of gravity"—

that is, the coalition's—

> " by radicalising the opinion of the Islamic world in favour of"

al-Qaeda.

Mr. Campbell: I have read that speech, which has already been referred to in the debate. It is the measured judgment of someone who would have the legal, moral and physical responsibility for deploying British forces in support of some of the action that is being contemplated. In such circumstances, his views must surely carry weight in our considerations.

Mr. Jenkin: I fully concur with the caution that the right hon. and learned Gentleman and the Chief of the Defence Staff have expressed. It runs parallel with the comment that the Secretary of State for Defence made last week—that it is often best

> "to engage the enemy at longer range before the enemy gets the opportunity to attack."

What evidence can the right hon. and learned Gentleman present to the American Administration to show that the policy of deterrence and containment has worked so effectively that Iraq is no threat, in order to comfort the Americans and create a situation in which his fear that they might act in an intemperate way does not arise? I do not share that fear; indeed, I believe that their response has been very considered.

Mr. Campbell: To paraphrase Shakespeare, the answer lies in ourselves and not in our stars. The answer lies in the exchange between James Baker and Tariq Aziz on the eve of the Gulf war, when James Baker told Tariq Aziz across the table that if he used weapons of mass destruction the response would be disproportionate. We know now that the response would have been a conventional response, but Tariq Aziz and Saddam Hussein did not know that.

We must bear it in mind that totalitarian regimes make a great effort to preserve themselves. They are hardly likely to create circumstances in which their own destruction would be assured, were they to embark on a particular course of action. We have plenty of evidence from 10 years ago that deterrence works. Indeed, I often cite that in the House in support of the argument for the continuance of an independent nuclear deterrent for the United Kingdom, which I believe is fundamental to our defence policy. That illustrates the fact that in Baghdad, at least, they understand that the theory of deterrence could well result in the visiting on the regime of the most terrible destruction, if they were to consider the use of weapons of mass destruction. They need look no further than Mr. James Baker if they want the evidence to support the theory of deterrence.

The campaign against terrorism may almost certainly be moving to a different phase in which the United States, emboldened by its justified success, wishes to proceed much less collectively. We in the House and our Government will have to decide how we should respond, so let me set out a principle or two by which I believe those matters should be judged.

The first duty of our Government is to serve the best interests of the people of the United Kingdom. I have always thought that the principle, "My country, right or wrong" left a great deal to be desired. The supposed principle, "my ally, right or wrong" is hardly less objectionable to me. Members of Congress are never slow to recognise their paramount obligation to serve the interests of those whom they represent. Here in the House, in any extension of the campaign against terrorism, we should surely do likewise.

5.10 pm

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) speaks his usual good sense, not least in respect of Afghanistan and opening the second front. I hear his views on the independent nuclear deterrent and revolting Back Benchers, and perhaps some revolting Back Benchers might reconsider their position if they too hear what he says.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman and the shadow Foreign Secretary raised important questions about deploying British forces in Afghanistan. Clearly, we need to know about their remit and force protection, and clearly there are concerns about overstretch of our forces and the effect on morale. We need to know whether any deployment is for a transitional period and whether those men and women are simply to play a headquarters role. As the right hon. and learned Gentleman rightly said, those questions have not yet been finally decided and, however important they are, raising them at this point is a little premature.

I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary began his speech with 11 September and the fact that yesterday was the three-month anniversary of that atrocity, which must surely be the starting point for any terrorism debate. It would perhaps be instructive for the House to consider, as my right hon. Friend did, the way in which certain elements of the press and public opinion responded to the continuing campaign. First, there was the build up to prepare for the military element. Perhaps three weeks into the bombing, we heard, as we heard three weeks after the start of the Kosovo campaign, that bombing never leads to a successful conclusion and that ground forces must be deployed. We heard about the effect on aid supplies, that lorry drivers and others were

[Donald Anderson]

unprepared to take supplies in and that people would starve. We heard about the effects of the Afghan winter and that there should be a pause in the bombing for Ramadan.

All those questions were raised—indeed, fed—by the Taliban ambassador in Islamabad, and perhaps we should have been more alert about getting our counter-information out earlier. Those criticisms were made in that period by our press and public opinion, but, as my right hon. Friend said, it is clear that almost every one has been totally confounded by the facts that have appeared, so it might be instructive for those who raised the concerns to show a little humility and to be prepared to eat their words, although I do not know whether that will happen in the debate.

Of course the military campaign was more successful than expected. Indeed, part of the problem is that it has been so successful that its political counterpart has taken longer to reach a conclusion. That political counterpart, however, has indeed been successful, so far at least. A remarkable conference has taken place in Königsburg—[Hon. Members: "Königswinter."] Königswinter. Let us get it right. Königsburg is on the other side of the Rhine. Anyway, despite all the tensions of the past, the warrior factions on the coalition side met.

Perhaps most heartening is the fact that a new generation was involved in Petersberg—mostly in their 40s and, perhaps, more internationally minded than the older generation. It looks as though they are now ready to deliver, as far as they can, an Afghanistan that will move into the 21st century and will be a force for stability in that important region, geostrategically.

What lessons can we learn from our position and that of our allies? There is, of course, a long way to go, and Sir Michael Boyce's speech on Monday at the Royal United Services Institute identified some of the problems that remain with the rebuilding of Afghanistan. It cannot be left as a failed state. Anyone with a sense of history knows of those remaining problems and knows that they did not start with the Taliban, but at least—given enough international commitment—there is the prospect of a more settled future for the sad people of that country. Refugees are beginning to return, and I hope that eventually many of the professional people who have fled the country and who are so needed there will have the confidence to return with their families.

A massive and sustained aid effort and a long-term commitment are clearly necessary for stability. The cost may indeed be vast: the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife spoke of $25 billion over 10 years. We should, however, compare that figure with the cost of the US attacks, and put it in the context of the mayhem that may be caused in the region by an unstable, fragmented, broken state of Afghanistan. That perspective will teach us certain lessons.

There is currently no strong central administration in Afghanistan. It is vital that donors not only give food aid, but help to improve the country's governance. Countries that have assisted the US and its allies will expect a reward, but many may have a very doubtful democratic background. A mixture of sticks and carrots will be needed.

The UN's role is vital. The two immediate Security Council resolutions, 1368 and 1373, have been mentioned. As with Voltaire's God, if the UN were not there it would have to be created: only the UN could have provided the necessary cover and endorsement for the welcome moves that have been made.

There have been so many welcome changes that the economic effects of 11 September may well not be as long lasting as some had feared, partly because of the resilience of the US economy. The political effects may be far more profound and far more long lasting. A boulder has been thrown into the pond, and the waves may not settle. Let us consider some of the remarkable changes that have come about.

In our own country, we might not have seen the progress that has been made on decommissioning of weapons in Northern Ireland had it not been for the effects of 11 September. There is also the new relationship broached by our Prime Minister, followed by the NATO Secretary General, in relation to Russia. Russia, having joined the coalition, is now seen as a real partner for NATO, going beyond "19 plus one". It has assisted in so many ways.

Mike Gapes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the relationship between the United States and Russia is central to the future of global security? Does he agree that it is extremely important that the summit scheduled for Moscow next year comes up with a strategic agreement whereby international security will be enhanced, and that no steps are taken that can undermine that relationship over the next few months? It is essential that those two countries work out a new strategic relationship.

Donald Anderson: It is vital to build on the Crawford summit and on the personal relationship between President Putin and President Bush. Russia is not a superpower in the way that it was in the 1970s and 1980s. It can, however, play a positive role. Although there are unilateralist adventures, as there were in respect of Kabul and Pristina, Russia is very much on side. That should be encouraged; it is in all our interests.

Previously, China's views on national sovereignty led it fundamentally to oppose intervention within states, yet it has been ready to assist the coalition, partly because of the overflow of Uighur terrorism from China into Afghanistan. Central Asia has gained a new salience with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. I was delighted to learn that the Foreign Office is reappraising the role of the British Government and, indeed, of our European allies within central Asia, so the world is changing as a result of 11 September. In my judgment, it is changing positively.

President Bush's hesitation about engaging in the middle east, following the failed but magnificent efforts of his predecessor, has been overcome. The United States Administration have recognised that they must be committed to peace in the middle east because it affects their interests.

Jeremy Corbyn: Is not my right hon. Friend a tad optimistic? The Israeli Government seem to be set on assassination squads against certain Palestinian groups, bombing the headquarters of the president of the Palestinian Authority and launching rocket attacks on all sorts of Palestinian places. Does he not think that we must stop that and be much stronger with Israel so that there can be a genuine peace process, and that since 11 September the plight of the Palestinian people has got worse rather than better?

Donald Anderson: My hon. Friend has his own view. I agree in respect of the assassination policy, but his comments are totally one-sided; he has looked at one side of the balance sheet. Is he confident, for example, that Chairman Arafat has the will or the commitment to stop the suicide bombers, who are destined to destroy any fragile peace? The question must surely be asked. If Chairman Arafat were to exert himself more, could he not lock up and keep locked up those who are determined to undermine the peace process in the middle east? Let us have a broader approach, not a one-eyed approach, in respect of the middle east. Clearly, there is now more prospect of positive movement because the US is committed; only the US has the necessary clout in the area.

I shall seek to move on, as it is a short debate. I echo what the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife said in respect of the second phase. I am concerned that some in the US Administration do not take either a multilateral or unilateral approach, but support the concept of the posse: from time to time, rather like in the wild west, the sheriff, the United States, will gather a group of people to ride into the desert, catch the baddies, return and not have a continuing commitment. That is, if I may vastly oversimplify, the theme of Richard Haass, who is now a senior official in the State Department. There is a fear that the US may be ready, with selected allies, to go galloping off into certain areas, in which context Iraq has been mentioned most. I wholly endorse the wise comments of the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife that we must be very cautious about Iraq. The Taliban were never a real state: Saddam's Iraq is. The Taliban and al-Qaeda hardly had any air force or any modern surface-to-air missiles: Iraq does. Iraq also has residual weapons of mass destruction and considerable military potential. It is also questionable whether the Iraqi opposition would provide a successful replacement, quite apart from the major political implications for the region that the right hon. and learned Gentleman set out so eloquently.

Failed states cause major problems, and we all know which ones we mean. We understand that US special forces are already operating in Somalia. However, it is the role of our Government to urge caution. If further campaigns are to take place, military action should be low down on the list of options. We should, so far as we are able, seek to say to our US allies, "Yes, we are with you in Afghanistan and in rooting out the al-Qaeda networks, wherever they are, but beware of blundering into parts of the middle east where the ramifications would be serious." I suspect that debate is being held between each side of the Potomac—between the State Department and the Pentagon.

Major changes have occurred since 11 September. I hope that those who severely criticised the campaign and who were always ready to see the negative side will be ready to revisit their views. Anyone who looks at the situation objectively will now see a far more positive picture than before.

5.27 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) always has the ear of the House and we listen to his comments with great interest. Over the past dozen years, we have passed through three distinct phases of defence threat. The first was the cold war, when the Soviet Union built a wall to keep its people in. We faced the massive military threat of Russia, which had both conventional and nuclear weapons.

At that time, it was difficult to explain our defence strategy. I was the chairman of an organisation called Campaign for Defence and Multilateral Disarmament. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) was also heavily involved in that campaign and we visited schools and colleges to try to persuade students that it was necessary to have nuclear weapons and that mutual assured destruction was the way ahead. However, that was not an easy argument to win. In Liverpool, for example, we went down by 370 votes to 15, with the undergraduates almost universally rejecting the concept of mutual assured destruction. Indeed, it is not an attractive proposition.

I remember Mrs. Thatcher being asked whether she would press the nuclear button and she said with enthusiasm, "Of course." That was not an easy argument to put across, but it was the right approach. We faced down the evil empire and the Soviet Union was weighed down by its excessive military expenditure. Eventually, truth and right prevailed and Russia retrenched. We actually won that campaign. It was not easy, but a consistent thread running through the three phases that we have faced is that careful analysis, the proper motivation of well trained personnel in the Army, Navy and Air Force, and determination will win through to the right answer. That worked in the cold war, which ended at the end of the 1980s.

The second phase was a time of uncertainty, especially from Russia's point of view. Russia was like the Vatican without the Pope after the fall of communism. The Russians were bemused and lost. Their military-industrial combines, which were such an important part of their overall economy, were no longer required in the same way. Russia also lost the satellite countries that purchased its military equipment, and it had to watch the advance of NATO, which took its markets as well as its allies.

Russia had to regroup, which led to uncertainty there, and there was uncertainty too in the United States as it watched Europe taking the peace dividend with enthusiasm. American defence expenditure remains at about 3.2 per cent. of gross domestic product, but European defence expenditure has fallen from 3 per cent. to about 2 per cent. of GDP. In Germany, it is 1.5 per cent. of GDP, and in Luxembourg it is 1.1 per cent.

Last week, I visited the American national defence university, where I picked up some vibrant phrases. I was told, for instance, that Europe was behaving like a "big, fat, lazy Switzerland" with regard to defence.

The Americans are conscious that, in financial terms, the European defence effort is only 60 per cent. of the effort made by the US, but that it is only about 15 per cent. as effective. The Americans have between six and seven times the military power of the whole of Europe. That gap is too large for complacency. It is not acceptable that the Americans should spend 26 per cent. of their defence effort on research and technology, whereas none of the European countries spend anything like as much. The United Kingdom and Turkey come closest to the American proportion. The technology gap is deeply worrying, and it was worrying before 11 September.

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

As for the European perspective, Europe was groping for a role in defence, and produced the concept of the European security and defence identity. After the agreement reached by the UK and France at St. Malo in December 1998, the concept was that Europe would develop its own command structure within NATO. However, it is not good enough to develop command structures without increasing capability. A Texan told me that people in his state had another vibrant phrase for those who acted in that way. He said that they called them "ranchers with big hats but no cattle".

The third phase of the defence threat arose after 11 September, when the situation changed. A new type of threat exists, and it is no longer sufficient to plan in terms of deterrence. We must work to prevent the terrorist threat from being taken further.

That requires decisive military action. I am surprised that the House so far has let off hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), the international development spokesman for the Liberal Democrat party. She is in the Chamber at present, and her policy was clearly contrary to that of her party, in that she urged that we should stop the bombing during Ramadan. Those who agreed with the hon. Lady stand in a direct and consistent line with those many Labour Members who belonged to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament during the cold war.

There will always be people—well meaning enough though they may be—who lack the ability to recognise military need. They will shrink from military measures, and fail to carry through the measures that are needed.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Viggers: Yes. I look forward with great enthusiasm to discovering whether the hon. Lady has recanted from her previous position on urging a delay in bombing during Ramadan.

Dr. Tonge: I do not think that "recant" is the appropriate word. It is rather depressing that so many hon. Members should take that attitude, when other hon. Members were desperately worried about the humanitarian problem in Afghanistan. Millions of people there faced starvation even before the military action began.

We questioned the nature of the military action that had been undertaken, and whether it would make the humanitarian situation worse. In the event, the hon. Gentleman should be honest and decent enough to admit that the bombing came to a conclusion very much more quickly than he thought. [HON. MEMBERS: "And you thought."] Indeed, quicker than I thought—I am perfectly prepared to admit that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Lady cannot make a speech on an intervention.

Mr. Viggers: I hope that the hon. Lady will accept that we all care about the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. We were all concerned about the horrors that were imposed on the population by the leadership of the Taliban. They include the way in which women were treated and the way in which the then Government prevented food aid from reaching its destination.

The Liberal Democrats are famous for saying one thing in one part of the country and another thing in another. It is unacceptable for the hon. Lady, who is the Liberal Democrats' spokesman on international development, to say one thing when their spokesman on foreign affairs, the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), said something clean to the contrary. We have had enough of the Liberal Democrats behaving in that manner. She was wrong, and she should have the decency to admit that not only has she been proved to be wrong but that she was wrong at the time as well. It is also wrong of the Liberal Democrats to seek to give two versions of the same story.

Jeremy Corbyn: Will the hon. Gentleman pause for a moment in his triumphalism and consider the consequences of the bombing of Afghanistan? Depleted uranium bombs, cluster bombs and daisy-cutters have been used and there have been civilian and military casualties. In addition, atrocities have been committed by all sides during the taking of prisoners and particular towns. Does the hon. Gentleman honestly think that Afghanistan is now in that much a better position than it was a couple of months ago?

Mr. Viggers: The hon. Gentleman has an honourable and consistent record in taking the line that he has just expressed so articulately. Yes, I believe that Afghanistan now has a better future than it would have had if we had not taken military action. I believe that it is in a better position than it was before military action was taken. That is exactly the point that I sought to make earlier. Occasionally it is necessary not only to analyse a situation and to have trained and motivated troops, but to have the courage of one's convictions and to carry them through to a military conclusion. That is difficult, but it was necessary and right in this case.

Although military action was necessary, we should also do much more. The phrase "winning hearts and minds" is often used, but winning them in the present situation is not enough. That gives the impression that we know all the answers and that the other side does not. We must think much more in terms of building bridges.

I recently read the well known book "The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order" and I was struck by the fact that, in 1900, about 40 per cent. of the world's population was governed by western civilisations. That figure is now down to 11 per cent. The proportion of the world's population governed by Islamic countries was about 6 per cent. but it has gone up to 18 per cent.

Many people who were previously governed by western nations now look to Islamic Governments and to a different kind of government that is, in its own way, very devout and eschews some of the things, such as alcohol and gambling, that we do not. They believe that we allow our women to wander around semi-naked and they have strong convictions. They do not like the blue jeans and Disney culture of the United States and its allies, including ourselves. We must recognise that there are many genuine people with whom we must build bridges and reach a better understanding. There is a great deal to be done.

There is also a great deal to be done in restructuring the architecture of our military and diplomatic effort. We must look to the United Nations and work out whether NATO should extend its area of operations and be prepared to act out of area. We should examine the G7 and the G8 and attempt to reach a consensus among the Governments there. We must use a range of international structures to try to build bridges to those countries who harbour many people who might be tempted to oppose us. I congratulate all those involved in the military effort, but a great diplomatic effort is necessary too.

Previous generations bequeathed to us the nuclear weapon. So far we have survived without its use except on the two occasions when it was used to end the second world war. Let us hope that we are wise enough to counter the dangers of terrorism and are able to allow future generations to survive in the way that we have.

5.40 pm

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): This is the sixth time that we have debated this matter in the House. I have sat through all those debates, or through the majority of them—it has been Operation Infinite Concentration. They have been fine debates, characterised for the most part by reason, tolerance and an acceptance of each others' views and differences. There has been an almost complete absence of bragging when people are right and a reasonable amount of recantation when people believe that they are wrong. I very much believe that, and in so far as I have been wrong in the views that I have expressed about this war, I shall say so—indeed, I shall do that in a moment. In doing so, I want to make it clear to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that no one has had me behind the bike shed—*[Interruption.]*—or anywhere else for that matter.

At the beginning of the campaign, many of us believed that it would be a much longer and bloodier affair than it has been. We were wrong. I was one of those who believed that—I was wrong. Not only do I acknowledge the fact that I was wrong, but I am overjoyed to have been wrong in that particular respect. I gain some comfort in my recantation from the knowledge that the Foreign Secretary shared my view and my concern as, indeed, did many Members—including Opposition Members. We were wrong—thank God.

The present position in Afghanistan is as set out by the Foreign Secretary. The Taliban, inasmuch as they were a fighting force, have been defeated and destroyed. The Arabs of al-Qaeda are reduced to holding a tiny proportion of the land and are under attack of such sustained ferocity that it is—as we all know—unlikely that they will remain as a military force for much of the foreseeable future.

It must be acknowledged that at least two of the ancillary aims of the operation have been achieved—or will be in the immediate future. The main aim—the apprehension and trial of Osama bin Laden—has not been achieved. It is to be hoped that it will be—as I have always said.

However, there remain a significant and growing number of people, inside and outside this place, who still provide the voices of opposition—I am one. I shall attempt to articulate that. I hope—and think—that I speak for many outside the House, perhaps far more relative to the number inside it. There are those—I was certainly one of them—who have always accepted the need for appropriate military action in order to obtain Osama bin Laden and his fellow conspirators and to bring them before international justice. I have always urged that such international justice should be undertaken by an international court.

The Foreign Secretary is fond of reading debates and quoting them back at those hon. Members who have been involved in them—as he did to some effect earlier. I dare say that if he was still in the Chamber, he might have a copy of my speech of 16 October. If so, he would have found that what I said represents an honourable and straightforward account of my views then. I still hold those views.

However, approval of the principle of military intervention is not to be taken as approval of the methods of military intervention.

Jeremy Corbyn: Before my hon. and learned Friend continues his speech, will he confirm that if an international criminal court came into existence, it would not apply in this case because it could not act retrospectively? Does he agree, however, that one legal way forward would be through a special international judicial process, which could be established through the United Nations, to deal with the perpetrators of 11 September?

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: That is absolutely right, and it is, of course, the purport of an early-day motion that has been signed by very nearly 100 Members of all persuasions and all the varying views, so I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention.

It is the method of military intervention to which the objection relates. The methods of warfare that have been employed in Afghanistan have, most importantly and in its most sinister context, come to represent a pattern of foreign policy that involves the enlistment of any satrap and any agent, whatever the reputation, the form, the background or the antecedents of those satraps for violence, slaughter or brutality during the time of their own reign in their own country.

The Northern Alliance, which wrought havoc throughout Afghanistan from 1992 to 1996, is suddenly elevated to the position of being our friend. Those satraps are enlisted, armed and set to do our own business, supported by high-level bombing from 30,000 ft, using a range of ordnance terrible in its implementation and consequences—much of it covered with the graffiti of American bomb loaders, carrying messages to those who will ultimately be killed. In this case a not insignificant number of those killed were innocent, collateral civilians.

Those who believe that that is a legitimate method of warfare must ask themselves some questions about our own experience in these islands. We are old hands at dealing with terrorism—we know about it; we have sustained the fact and the fear of it for many years and many have died during that time. Many have died in Guildford, Birmingham, London and the Old Bailey—dare I say?—and No. 10 Downing street was subjected to mortar attack. Many British soldiers, policemen and other service and security personnel died in their efforts to apprehend those who were responsible for that and to track down their terrorist groups.

There was an alternative, unthinkable though it was, because all those atrocities were committed by one or other of the branches of the IRA. The alternative would

[Mr. Marshall-Andrews]

have been to arm, encourage and set on the Protestant paramilitaries. They could have been encouraged to do the work of British soldiers to ensure that there were no British casualties. It is absolutely unthinkable that we should do such a thing, that we should enlist the mad dogs of the Shankill road and that we should enlist to our cause precisely the people who commit atrocities similar to those committed by those whom we are trying to apprehend.

What is the difference in truth between doing that and enlisting as satraps those who, in success, have done nothing but wreak havoc, who have killed hundreds of their prisoners and who have publicly castrated and executed the prisoners who have been taken—a fact that has been not only recorded and repeated, but photographed in sickening detail. In truth, what is the difference between what we are doing now and what we could have done in Northern Ireland?

Patrick Mercer: Not for a moment would I compare the security forces in Northern Ireland with the execrable behaviour of the Protestant paramilitaries. None the less, we the English establishment—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): British.

Patrick Mercer: Yes, the English establishment used the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Defence Regiment—in other words, indigenous forces—to prosecute the war over there. The majority of the casualties, of course, came from Irish sources, rather than—I use the term advisedly—English sources.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but in making it he must understand the clear distinction between the Royal Ulster Constabulary and, for instance, General Dostum, who is pressed to our service. Not even in the wildest accusations against the RUC, of which I am a considerable supporter, has anyone suggested that it uses methods such as tying people to tank traps and driving them round the yard until they are reduced to mincemeat, which is the chosen method of punishment of one of our finest friends in the Northern Alliance.

We would never have contemplated the course that I have described because, first, we know full well that it has no sounding in morality and, secondly, if one sows that wind, one reaps a whirlwind more terrible than one can possibly say. We are far away from Afghanistan, and we will not reap the immediate whirlwind, but whirlwind there will undoubtedly be, and at its vortex are the tens of warlords who now reign supreme in Afghanistan.

I can see a certain amount of shifting on the Front Bench, so I shall deal with the point that is implicit. The diplomatic effort has been worth it, and there has been a limited amount of perceived success. Before we count those chitties, however, let us reflect on the fact that one reason why agreement has been reached in those talks may well be that £4 billion of foreign aid is contingent on a form of agreement. That may well be a motivating factor at least as powerful among the warlords of Afghanistan as the concept of international peace.

I turn now to one another matter, which would lead me, if there were a vote, to continue in my opposition. It concerns not Afghanistan, but America. On 13 November, the President of the United States, by unilateral edict and decree, without consulting Congress or the Supreme Court, passed into law a system of American military tribunals. It is the single greatest abnegation of civil liberty since the signing of the American constitution. Military tribunals have been set up which will try people in secret, with no rules of evidence, right to representation or burden of proof, and with two thirds of the court able to pass verdict and to pass a sentence of death. Those tribunals are the ultimate irony in America herself as she fights the war for freedom in which many of us support her.

The one point about the tribunals that is more important than anything else is that they are for foreign nationals only. American civilians, no matter how bestial the acts of terrorism in which they are implicated, retain all the rights of the constitution, to jury trial, representation, the burden of proof and, ultimately, the verdict of their peers. Within America, two laws have been set up: one for Americans and one for everybody else, which, incidentally, includes British citizens. In doing that, America unhappily has now contained within her own jurisprudence the double standards that make her, as she well knows or ought to know, vilified throughout the world, to the despair of her friends, among whom I would name myself without question.

Until America gives up this lamentable legacy of operating by satraps and agents of this kind of reputation, from the Kosovo Liberation Army to the Contras, and from the dictators of Latin America to the dictators of south-east Asia, and until she learns the lessons of this form of foreign policy, all the work we do in Afghanistan and all the success of our policies and our speed in achieving them will be rendered absolutely negligible in the annals of international terrorism.

5.54 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I would be inclined to agree with some of the points made by the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) were it not for the fact that the result of using indigenous peoples and forces, in some of the recent campaigns that he opposed, has been not only the success of the campaign but the introduction of a system of democracy where none existed before. All the signs are that, despite what the hon. and learned Gentleman has just said, we will see a relatively democratic regime emerge in Afghanistan. All the signs are that, despite what he said about the KLA, we will see a relatively democratic regime in Kosovo. And all the signs are that, despite what he has just said, we are seeing a relatively democratic regime in Serbia.

The lesson was also learned right back in 1982 when, in spite of the same sort of objections expressed with the same sort of motives by the same sort of people on the same part of the political spectrum, we saw not only military success in the Falkland Islands but the emergence of democracy in Argentina itself. The only area in which our policy has so far failed was in the Gulf in 1990–91, when half-measures were employed in the case of Iraq, and we did not go to the assistance of those people locally who might have overthrown Saddam Hussein, which might have led to the emergence of a relatively democratic system there as well.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: I know that the hon. Gentleman will accept that many of us supported the war in the Falklands and the war in Kuwait as being necessary. Will he accept, however, that the KLA did not win the war in Kosovo? The end of that war was brokered by the Russians after 78 days of bombing. Will he also accept that as a result of what happened in Kosovo, although there are the stems of democracy, the KLA is now the most widely feared drug-running terrorist organisation within the Kosovan and Albanian borders?

Dr. Lewis: I will not accept the hon. and learned Gentleman's analysis. I believe that it was important that the Russians did not actively support the Serbs, and that was one of several factors in the successful outcome. What really mattered, however, was not the bombing campaign alone, as the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) seemed to imply, if I heard him correctly, but the fact that it was allied to the threat that ground forces would indeed be used.

Mr. Bradshaw *indicated assent.*

Dr. Lewis: I am delighted to see some support from the Government in that analysis. It follows that one of three options will be taken: the first is to take no military action at all against such countries; the second is to take indiscriminate military action involving bombing alone, which will not work; the third is to do the one thing that has a chance of working, which is a combination of bombing and the use of ground forces—either one's own, in a threat or in actual invasion, or indigenous ground forces. Without ground forces of one sort or another, a military campaign will not be successful.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Dr. Lewis: I give way first to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon).

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the North Atlantic Assembly, to which I am a delegate, was told by Interpol that in 1998 the KLA had very strong links with Osama bin Laden and, indeed, that he visited Albania to meet other terrorists? Does the hon. Gentleman not think it ironic that as the allies were acting as the air force for the KLA, those very same terrorists may have been plotting the twin towers tragedy?

Dr. Lewis: If that is correct, and I have no reason to doubt it, my answer is that one can only deal with one problem at a time. If, when one has dealt with the proximate problem—which at that time was Serbian aggression—subordinate problems emerge, one can deal with those as well. I have every confidence that the Americans, under President Bush, and—I am proud to say this as a member of the loyal Opposition—the Government, if they continue on the path that they have consistently followed since 11 September, will prove equal to the occasion. I pay that compliment to the Government and hope that they will acknowledge that they have had unflinching support from the Conservatives, if not from other Opposition parties and some Labour Members. Our support has been given generously and wholeheartedly. We are happy to endorse the Government's actions so far and the success that they have met so far.

Mr. Dalyell: It so happened that last night I was at the annual dinner of my national service regiment, the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, who have returned for the second time from Kosovo. I stayed with them during their first tour of duty there. I asked them what the difference is now, and every one of those people who have just come back from Kosovo said that there is a terrible problem, not with the Serbs, as there was during their first tour of duty, but with KLA extremists. They are the problem facing British troops.

Dr. Lewis: I assure the hon. Gentleman, who knows that I greatly respect his views although I sometimes disagree with them, that I entirely endorse what he has just said. I visited Kosovo as a member of the Select Committee on Defence. My point is that we are now in a far better position to deal with the problems in Kosovo—even if the boot is now on the other foot, as unjustifiably as it was when on the Serbian foot—than we would have been had we not dealt firmly with Milosevic's aggression.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Dr. Julian Lewis: I will now give way for the last time.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): For the sake of the completeness of his list of examples of support for indigenous people in conflicts and the success rate thereof—I agree that there have been successes—why does the hon. Gentleman not use the example of Afghanistan itself? There, support—mainly from the Americans and Saudi Arabia—given to people such as the mujaheddin fomented the problems that face us now. Why not use that example as well?

Dr. Lewis: I am happy to refer to that example. As I have had occasion to point out previously, one must be less selective about where one stops the clock when looking back on history. The cause of the problems is not the support that the Americans and the British special services gave to the mujaheddin in Afghanistan; it is the fact that in 1979 the then Soviet Union invaded the country and triggered the cycle of events with which we are still dealing today.

Having given genuine and well-deserved plaudits to the Government, I want to raise one small issue that has caused me some sadness. It relates to what might be an academic question: what would happen if Osama bin Laden—or, perhaps more realistically, one or another of his chief lieutenants—fell into the hands of the British forces rather than those of America or any other country? During our debate on the coalition against international terrorism on 1 November, I intervened on the Secretary of State for Defence to ask

> "how he would resolve the following dilemma. If Osama bin Laden were to come into United Kingdom jurisdiction, would we be able to surrender him to America, given the restrictions that we have adopted on not surrendering anyone to a country which has the death penalty?"

[Dr. Lewis]

To shows of approval on both sides of the House, the Secretary of State robustly replied:

> "I would have no hesitation or difficulty about achieving that."—[*Official Report*, 1 November 2001; Vol. 373, c. 1022-23.]

I was therefore sorry to see a Press Association release dated 9 December and headed "Britain against bin Laden death penalty, says Hoon." It reports the Secretary of State as saying:

> "We do extradite people to countries with the death penalty, obviously subject to certain undertakings."

The release continues:

> "Asked whether this meant that the US authorities would have to offer assurances that bin Laden would not face execution, Mr. Hoon said: 'That is the position.'"

Whoever has got at the Secretary of State, that is a sad reversal of a welcome and robust answer he had previously given in the House.

Mr. Savidge: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Lewis: No, because others want to speak and time is limited.

I was fortunate enough to participate in the first of these debates, during the emergency sitting that took place when Parliament was recalled on 14 September, so soon after the events in New York and elsewhere in the United States. I said then that it was pointless and probably self-defeating to speculate publicly about specific measures of retaliation; that remains my view. However, it is permissible to examine the extent to which the abstract theory of terrorism has or has not been borne out by the events of the past three months.

All terrorism has a specific central feature, which is the ability to cause maximum mayhem with minimum effort. However, the brand of terrorism with which we are dealing appeared at the outset to combine three other deadly features: high-tech terrorism, stateless terrorism and suicide terrorism. I shall briefly consider each of those three.

High-tech terrorism is that which uses the assets of developed states as weapons against those states. That, together with the weapons of mass destruction that the terrorists would like to acquire, could constitute a form of military jujitsu, whereby the opponent's greater weight is turned into a weapon against him. However, it is interesting to note that although the attacks on New York's twin towers seemed to subscribe strongly to that principle—what else but something on the scale of airliners packed with fuel could have achieved such devastation—there seems to have been a failure on the part of that terrorist organisation to stay its hand long enough, until it had the more deadly weapons which, we understand from the Government's understandably limited comments, the bin Laden organisation has sought and continues to seek. We must be thankful that, in a sense, the attacks in America were premature—or so it can be argued.

What of stateless terrorism? That appears to be a possibility when one first examines the bin Laden organisation and the way in which its tentacles extend to so many countries. In fact, that has not been achieved either. Al-Qaeda is cross-border, but is dependent on what have been described as "failed states". The very fact that it has had to operate in states such as Afghanistan has turned out to be a weakness in its armour. It is significant that when things began to go wrong in Afghanistan, the indigenous people who had supported the Taliban turned against al-Qaeda and bin Laden to a considerable extent, continually referring to them as "foreigners" and surrendering themselves while leaving al-Qaeda fighters to try to save their own necks.

The third feature is the most worrying: suicide terrorism. At the outset, parallels were rightly drawn between the events in America and the attack on Pearl Harbour. The reason why that parallel is especially strong can be seen in discoveries made after the second world war about Japanese thinking at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbour. Any rational calculation would have shown that, however successful that attack might be, the Japanese were bound to lose in the end. Documents uncovered after the war revealed their attitude to have been along these lines—I quote from memory: "Sometimes a situation arises when all you can do is kick up your heels and leap into the gorge." Such was the degree of fanaticism consistently shown throughout the far east war by the Japanese, who often sacrificed themselves in the face of impossible odds and in impossible situations.

We have had to ask ourselves, would the same sort of remorseless self-sacrifice be shown on a large scale by the bin Laden organisation and the Taliban? The answer is, again, that that has not yet been proved to be the case—indeed, there are indications that it was not the case.

I was intrigued by the confirmation by the Secretary of State for Defence, in testimony to the Select Committee as recently as 28 November, that it appears that a significant number of the 19 hijackers on the four planes did not know that they were on a suicide mission. I see that the Minister is nodding. Therefore bin Laden had felt it was reliable to inform only a minority of those whom he was sending to their death that that would occur.

I noted in yesterday's *Evening Standard* the report by Jeremy Campbell about the video that has been discovered in Afghanistan. It shows bin Laden

> "'gloating and chuckling' on the tape".

It is said that he

> "seems amused by the fact that more than half the 19 hijackers did not know they would die, but thought they were on a routine hijacking."

It seems that the organisation is not exactly overwhelmed with people who are anxious to go to paradise with all the many benefits—the 72 virgins and all the rest of it—that their leaders tell them to expect.

I wish to give others a chance to contribute to the debate, so I shall curtail my remarks. Given uncertainty about the severity and the persistence of the threat, the correct approach to our undertaking necessary and, I hope, temporary infringements of some of our traditional liberties should be sunset legislation—legislation that will lapse automatically, unless specifically renewed, after an agreed period.

Democracy has always faced these problems in wartime. Churchill's chief of staff on the COS Committee during the war was Lord Ismay, who later became the first Secretary General of NATO. I shall conclude by referring to something that he observed in his memoirs, which is as true in relation to terrorism today as it was in relation to the more conventional threat that nearly destroyed the democratic systems of the west in the past. He said:

> "It is easy to criticise peaceful democracies for their habitual lack of preparedness when a war breaks out, but it is only fair to recognise that the dice are loaded against them. Dictators, bent on aggression . . . are masters of their own timetable. They are free to decide when to strike, where to strike and how to strike, and to arrange their armament programmes accordingly. Their potential victims, the democracies . . . with their inherent hatred of war, do not know when or where the blow will fall, or what manner of blow it will be."

We must bear in mind that if we are to win this war, as has been the case with previous wars, there must be no half-measures. We must use indigenous opposition and build coalitions. However, we must not be ruled by the fact that we build coalitions. We must do what is right, what is necessary and what is efficacious in eradicating the terrorist threat to modern civilisation.

6.13 pm

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Two weeks ago, the House bought me an aeroplane ticket as a member of the Select Committee on International Development, enabling me to visit the Afghan refugee camps on the Pakistan-Afghan border. One of the impressions that I came back with was of the huge burden that has been borne by Pakistan, which since 1979 has been providing refuge to refugees from Afghanistan. At the peak of the problem in 1990, there were 3.7 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Prior to 11 September, there were about 3 million. It is estimated that about 150,000 more refugees have entered the country since then.

The world community took a close interest in what was happening in Afghanistan in the 1980s when the mujaheddin were fighting the Soviets. However, in the 1990s, when that conflict ended, we lost interest. We left Pakistan holding the baby. Literally, it was holding hundreds of thousands of Afghan babies. The strain on Pakistan's infrastructure—it is a poor country—is considerable. We, the members of the Select Committee, were told that in Pakistan's North West Frontier province, half of all hospital beds are used by Afghan refugees.

Pakistan needs—and I am pleased to say that it is receiving it from the United Kingdom—considerable aid. We have increased our aid spend for Pakistan this year threefold, to approximately £52 million. It will not be enough to increase that spend for only this year. We must—I know that the Department for International Development plans this—maintain this level of support for Pakistan in future years.

We have also provided substantial aid for Afghanistan. The Department for International Development is extremely well respected in the region for the way that we use our aid money effectively. One example is the World Food Programme, which has done a magnificent job in maintaining the channels through which food has been brought into Afghanistan during the conflict. The WFP has told me that the UK's contribution, unlike that of most countries, came in the form of cash. That had two advantages. First, the WFP could use it quickly to buy food when it was needed. Secondly, the local region's economy was supported, the food being bought within the region. United Kingdom aid money has been buying wheat at $130 a tonne, an extremely good price.

We should congratulate the United States on its contribution to food relief. It is by far the largest contributor. It has contributed about 80 per cent. of all food aid taken in by the World Food Programme. It is giving its aid in kind. Representatives of the WFP told me that if the US is shipping this aid on US-flagged ships, the shipping costs are about $110 a tonne. That is hardly less than what we are paying for the wheat.

The United States has struck a good deal with the Government of Pakistan, in which Pakistan is surrendering its stocks of wheat, which are going into Afghanistan now. Those stocks will be replenished when the American food ships arrive in the new year.

I pay tribute to the truckers. That applies to both the WFP's employees and the Afghan private truckers, who have kept the aid moving during the conflict. I also pay tribute to the Afghan non-governmental organisation workers who have distributed the aid within the country. I met a man called Aziz Hakimi—an Afghan who works for Oxfam in Herat. He was there throughout the bombing until two days before it fell. He had to leave because of the opposition from the Taliban and people funded by outside organisations.

Aziz Hakimi said that most of the people of Herat welcomed the military intervention of the west. They saw that it would change the intolerable regime under which they were living. He described the Taliban to me as a foreign Government. I said, "What do you mean? Do you mean the Pashtun from a different part of the country, people from a different ethnic group, are foreign?" He replied, "No, I don't mean that at all. The Pashtun are Afghans and there is a place for the Pashtun in the Afghan Government. Indeed, there must be a place for the Pashtun in the Afghan Government. The Taliban is a foreign regime because it is one of Arabs, Chechens and Pakistanis. It is not an Afghan regime."

I pay tribute to the aid workers, who are real heroes. They have been able to ensure that the humanitarian aid that is provided by the west is delivered to the people who need it.

One of the refugee camps that we visited was called Kachagarhi. It has existed for about 20 years and is home to 78,000 refugees. We visited some of the schools, where there are more than 11,000 children in school. I suspect that that is about a third or a quarter of all the children. There are far more boys than girls in school. There are 15 boys' schools and three girls' schools.

One of the girls in class 7 asked rather pointedly, "Why is there no secondary class for girls? There are secondary classes for boys." The policy of UNHCR is to provide primary education to help us meet the development target of ensuring that by 2015 all girls and all boys throughout the world receive primary education. However, we must not ignore the need to provide secondary education to Afghan girls, both in Afghanistan itself and in the refugee camps in Pakistan, because women will play a key role in the reconstruction of the country, not least because they were not combatants. They should play an extremely important role, not just in national Government, although it is good that there are three women in the Cabinet of the interim Administration, but in villages and the regions.

Overall, conditions in the Kachagarhi refugee camp were poor. If one was trying to create a seed bed to nurture extremism and anger towards the west, one would create the conditions that we created by withdrawing

[Hugh Bayley]

support from Afghan refugees in the 1990s. We must not make that mistake again. We have got to stick with Pakistan until the refugees can and do return to Afghanistan. The key to their return is providing secure conditions so that people feel that they will be safe if they return home.

I do not want to detain the House so I shall conclude with a few words about the military campaign and whether the coalition should take it beyond the borders of Afghanistan. Our armed forces and intelligence services have been very effective indeed, but there are limits to what we can ask them to do. If they are stretched too far, they will be unable to deliver what we ask of them. We therefore need to address an essential question posed in a speech on Monday by Sir Michael Boyce, Chief of the Defence Staff, who said that

> "we will have to decide soon whether we make a commitment to a broader campaign (widening the war), or make a longer term commitment to Afghanistan."

If we have to make that choice and select one or other option, let us not make the same mistake that the west made in the 1990s by walking away from Afghanistan. If we do so, we will breed more poverty, despair, and anger; we will breed more extremists and create conditions in which terrorists can operate, leading to a risk of further terrorist attacks against this country or our allies.

6.22 pm

Patrick Mercer (Newark): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley). I regret some of the language used by the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) and, in a curiously political speech for a serving officer, the Chief of the Defence Staff. Both used the pejorative terms of the wild west to describe American actions or aspirations in Afghanistan. That is not helpful; in many ways it denigrates the efforts of the United States and ourselves.

I recently spoke to an English Muslim who was heavily involved in the Chechen affair. He was a man of enormously moderate views and left me with one or two interesting thoughts. He echoed the United States Deputy Secretary of Defence, who said:

> "enemies that are half defeated can be very dangerous".

My Muslim friend pointed out, in common with much of the evidence that we heard in the Select Committee on Defence, that much of al-Qaeda is still operating across the world, not least in many European countries, and that we still have enemies operating untouched in failed states such as Somalia and Yemen.

I echo Admiral Boyce, who said that our response cannot simply be military and must be proportionate, otherwise we will endanger the coalition, which is proving successful, and are likely to radicalise Arab opinion. My Muslim friend made two points. First, he said that he was glad that so far bin Laden appeared to have escaped because that would show him up for what he was—a man who was not prepared to stick with his troops or defend his ground to the last man and the last round, which may well undermine the fighting qualities of the remaining troops. Secondly, my friend said that actions such as the one carried out at Mazar-e-Sharif, regardless of their rights and wrongs, their morality or immorality, can be successfully spun by our enemies into something that looks similar, from their point of view, to the way that 11 September looks to us.

My Muslim friend made the trenchant point that the area in which our troops will serve, if they serve at all, is much more dangerous than places such as Kosovo or the Balkans because of the huge stores of available drugs, making for high tension and aggression, which we are unlikely to have experienced before. He was extremely reluctant for British troops to be dispatched until their mission, tasks and time limit were properly defined. Are we deploying or are we not? A small group of specialist Royal Marines have gone to Bagram airport. We thought that that was the start of the British deployment but, in fact, it was not. It seems that the Northern Alliance was less than keen to have our troops in the area.

Is it premature to talk about deploying troops in the area while fighting is still going on? We are a leading nation in the campaign and while we may have made friends across the world, there is no doubt that we have also made enemies. Perhaps ours are not the troops to use while the situation remains volatile. Other European nations may be in a position to form a stabilisation force. Both the Germans and the French were extremely keen to prove themselves in Kosovo, once the fighting had stopped. The Germans have been reluctant to deploy their excellent special forces, the Kommando Spezialkräfte or KSK, in the present theatre; interestingly, when it comes to other styles of operation, they are rather less keen.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones *rose—*

Patrick Mercer: Forgive me, I shall not give way because of the time limit.

We should remember that whatever happens to forces in that area, the benign atmosphere of Kosovo and Bosnia will not be duplicated. The Secretary of State for Defence recently told us about a new chapter in the strategic defence review. Interestingly, the Americans, having won a war in the Gulf in a non-traditional way, started to talk about manoeuvre warfare. The Americans, in their military doctrine, are now talking about more fire and less manoeuvre. An American diplomat, we are told, said, "We don't do peace" and the Americans have told us that they do not do mountains. What else do they not do? I choose to interpret their remark as, "We don't do low-intensity conflict" The British, however, do; we learned all about it in Palestine, Malaya, Oman, Northern Ireland and, indeed, on the north-west frontier, where we fought a low-intensity conflict from 1870 to 1940.

Britain understands such problems and has very experienced troops who are good at dealing with them. However, I urge the Defence Secretary to make sure that the apparent gap dividing our special and specialist forces from our less special forces—our line regiments of cavalry and infantry—does not grow. There is certainly a morale problem because soldiers are constantly deployed on tedious, undemanding and uninteresting operations, such as those in Northern Ireland, Kosovo and Bosnia. Of course, they have their moments, but resentment is building towards the forces that constantly get the good jobs; that is their phrase, not mine. There is no reason why those forces should not be trained to serve alongside the Royal Marines and the Parachute Regiment, as long as they can recruit and are kept properly manned.

I shall conclude by talking about the wider war. If we are serious about pursuing terrorism and taking the chances offered, we will pursue terrorism to the end: and we must pursue domestic terrorism in Northern Ireland as rigorously as we pursue terrorism abroad. The Foreign Secretary said:

"we will not rest until we have made sure that such an atrocity can never happen again."

We see American armed forces already forward: elements of the US third army in Kuwait and American special forces in Somalia, while the US State Department has a party in northern Iraq. We have a unique opportunity to root out terrorism. America needs our friendship, our experience, our excellent armed forces, and our balance and judgment, and we need to repay the debt to America that we incurred at least twice in the 20th century.

6.30 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): We are growing used to the salient points delivered by my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) in our debates. Once again, he distinguished himself today in a short speech. I ask the Secretary of State to take on board the issue of the morale of non-spearhead regiments. If the spearhead role is to be expanded, as he suggested in his speech last week, perhaps it might be rotated among a large number of regiments to maintain the morale of the entire British Army.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: I have little time and do not want to engage on that point.

It would be wrong to debate defence and international terrorism without paying tribute to Field Marshal Lord Carver, who died recently. He was one of the most controversial chiefs of defence staff and made many enemies as well as friends during his distinguished career. Nevertheless, he was one of the greatest military figures of the post-war period. Even after the strategic defence review, we see his imprint on the shape of our armed forces and on British military doctrine. The nation owes him a debt.

During this interesting debate, we heard a wide variety of contributions. The hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) made it clear that every inch of his being was against war, and in his case, that is a considerable number of inches. We enjoyed the guarded welcome that the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) gave his new colleague, who will add more to the variety and colour in his party than to its unity. I shall return to the substance of the speeches of the right hon. and learned Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson).

I enjoyed the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), who underlined the need for Europe to do more to support the campaign against terrorism, lest we become what Americans would see as ranchers with big hats and no cattle.

However valid some of the comments from the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews)—the House would be wrong to dismiss the need for a comprehensive approach to terrorism—he spoiled his case by some of the ludicrous over-statements that he made.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) made clear his grasp of military doctrine by referring to the successes of recent campaigns and how they were achieved. We should take seriously his thoughts about future doctrine against terrorism.

The Foreign Secretary opened the debate by underlining the military, diplomatic and humanitarian breadth of the campaign and how that has been vindicated by events—a point re-iterated by the right hon. Member for Swansea, East. That is why the Opposition have unequivocally supported the Government's conduct of the war against terrorism. In the words of the Prime Minister, addressed to the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, yesterday, the progress of the war in Afghanistan is a

"tribute to America's leadership over the past few months and . . . also to their outstanding courage and wisdom."

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that for there to be a cross-party consensus on how to prosecute the war against terrorism, it is important that those on the Opposition Front Bench come to a settled view among themselves? As the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) has said,

"Loose talk will undermine the coalition against terrorism."

Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the leader of his party, who wants to side with the US hawks, has said that "countries like Iraq" should not be "let off the hook", and who wishes to take a stronger stance and commit himself to action against Iraq? Or does he agree with the shadow Foreign Secretary, who said today that it is not helpful to speculate about what action may be taken in the future in relation to Iraq?

Mr. Jenkin: If the hon. Gentleman had been in the Chamber throughout the debate, he would have heard the exchanges that took place earlier. I shall deal with those matters later, but it is wrong for him to look for divisions when they do not necessarily exist.

We acknowledge the role played by the United Kingdom Government, which has been vital in ensuring that the campaign led by the Americans has been a genuinely international campaign. There are some in the House and many elsewhere, including many of our allies, who were faint-hearted or even opposed to the Afghan campaign. Like the Foreign Secretary, I hope that they will reflect on the jubilant scenes of liberation in Kabul last month, as well as on the successful destruction of the terrorists and their bases in Afghanistan.

We must also pay tribute to the role played by American and British armed forces. Our thoughts are particularly with those who have been injured or killed and their families, those who may still be involved in operations, and those who have been kept waiting on stand-by.

We continue to support the Government's wider campaign objectives for defeating international terrorism. Britain must continue its vital strategic role, binding American policy into a wider international framework and leading other nations in support of internationally agreed objectives. We applaud the Prime Minister, who assured Colin Powell yesterday that

"the battle against international terrorism does not end"

in Afghanistan. My right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) reiterated that point. The Foreign Secretary was a little shy of the point, but we know that he has given reassurances to the Americans.

[Mr. Jenkin]

I share the caution of the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife, but deterrence works only if one continues to show one's resolve to act and advertises it vigorously. Neither he nor the right hon. Member for Swansea, East ruled out the possible need for military action against Iraq or any other regime. That is the position of the Government and, in answer to the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale), of the Opposition. It ill serves the debate to present the US as some kind of Rambo itching to go on the rampage. We had all that blank-cheque talk at the beginning of the Afghan campaign and it was shown to be totally irrelevant.

The question facing the Government is how best to pursue their objectives. After much confused reporting and the inevitable diplomatic to and fro, I hope that the Secretary of State will clarify exactly how the Government intend to conduct British policy in the weeks ahead. On Afghanistan, the Prime Minister announced yesterday—not to the House of Commons, as Mr. Speaker indicated that he might have done—that the Government have

> "indicated in principle a willingness to play a leading role in any UN-mandated force to provide stability in Afghanistan".

We recognise that the Government may feel the need to back that statement with the deployment of a British peacekeeping force, but I am bound to reiterate that we have grave misgivings about a major deployment. After all, on Monday the Chief of the Defence Staff questioned

> "if we were required to trap our hands in the mangle of Afghanistan in order to facilitate the political process".

Underlined in his text are the words,

> "My aim, incidentally, is not to get fixed in Afghanistan."

There is a host of questions about a possible British troop deployment that I doubt whether the Government will be able to answer today. They include the role that the US will play in that deployment; whether the US will guarantee unlimited air cover, even if it has none of its troops on the ground; who will provide the strategic heavy lift for initial deployment and extraction in an emergency, if necessary; and how it will be possible to deploy armoured vehicles or helicopters to provide mobility, or artillery to provide necessary protection.

With such vast distances involved, only one airhead run by the US at Bagram and poor land communications, how could such a deployment be sustained and supplied, particularly if it becomes engaged in fighting? I do not invite the Secretary of State to respond to those points now, but merely raise them as questions. Some of them are very difficult, but they need to be addressed before he can make a decision.

I urge the Secretary of State to answer now the questions asked by my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary. In substance, they are as follows: what are the conditions that must be met before we can agree to deploy a peacekeeping force; what is the end state we expect we can achieve that will enable us to withdraw; and how long will it take to achieve that end state? The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife asked further questions that need to be addressed about the UN mandate, the role of the force in enforcing human rights and the rules of engagement.

I urge the Secretary of State to clarify three further substantive points, all of which were raised by the Chief of the Defence Staff in his speech on Monday. I am bound to say that it was a very substantial, if delphic, speech. Indeed, when I compare it with the Secretary of State's recent speech, I wonder which of them might be the real Secretary of State. First, the Chief of the Defence Staff warned of "loss of consent" during a peacekeeping deployment. How can we presume anything but the most fragile consent for the presence of British forces? We should certainly congratulate all the parties that contributed to the success of the Bonn conference, which has resulted in an agreement on the establishment of a provisional Government in Afghanistan. If the task of the force is to stabilise that Government, how difficult will that task prove to be? Has not General Mohammed Fahim, the Defence Minister, already made it clear that he will welcome only a force of fewer than 1,000 personnel whose purpose is to guard Government buildings? He said:

> "We do not need any international forces to establish our security. Our own soldiers can maintain security here."

We have already seen the flurry created by the initial deployment of the Royal Marines at Bagram. We could so easily become the intruder instead of the invited guest. Will the Secretary of State address the question of consent for a British deployment?

Secondly, why does the Secretary of State believe that UK forces are best suited to this role, given our long and unhappy history in Afghanistan and our current involvement in the war? I have no doubt of our forces' abilities and their keenness to get on with the job, but as other British forces continue to clear the caves of Taliban and al-Qaeda personnel, we are making enemies as well as friends in Afghanistan, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newark pointed out.

Thirdly, the Chief of the Defence Staff spoke about choices on Monday. He said:

> "We may have to decide whether to play to the strengths of our armed forces (and our corresponding value to the United States) in our ability and readiness to deploy highly capable forces quickly for offensive operations; or to commit to longer term nation building tasks that might reasonably be taken on by other, less capable, nations".

That is the point that I would make to the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley). It seems strange that the Chief of the Defence Staff should ask such fundamental questions the day before the Prime Minister announced his intention in principle to deploy a peacekeeping operation. He was emphatic that

> "we cannot dodge the UK's strategic choices".

Will the Secretary of State explain what the Chief of the Defence Staff meant when he said:

> "broader operations into regions that threaten UK policy goals will force us to choose between unconditional support to the coalition, conditional support and 'red lines' or selective support—or indeed lack of support."?

Hugh Bayley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: I am not giving way.

What did the Chief of the Defence staff mean when he said:

> "there will be some slight difference in emphasis in the approach between the United States and the UK"?

[Interruption.] Labour Members should stop muttering. It suggests that they are sensitive about some of the questions asked by the Chief of the Defence Staff.

I hope that the Secretary of State will clear up the confusion and make it clear that the Government have a clear strategy, and that he will be able to show that he can make the strategic choices to which the Chief of the Defence Staff referred. I hope also that he will make it clear that the United States and the United Kingdom continue to share the unity of purpose in the campaign against international terrorism that has served the whole world so effectively since 11 September.

6.44 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I thank the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) for his comments about the life of Field Marshal Lord Carver. I endorse them on behalf of the Ministry of Defence, which he served with such great distinction throughout his career.

It is now three months almost to the day since the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon and since we were forced to recognise what has become perhaps the greatest single challenge that we face: the threat posed by international terrorism. The House has rightly devoted much of its attention to how the Government and the international coalition have responded to that challenge. I especially welcome the expressions of support for the work of our armed forces. I shall return to their outstanding contribution to the continuing operations in Afghanistan in due course.

I should like in particular to thank the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) and the hon. Members for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) and for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) for their comments. I also thank my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) for his recognition that he is capable of error. *[Interruption.]* Indeed, he is capable of errors, which is still more significant.

There have been some real achievements since the coalition began military action in Afghanistan on 7 October. We have seen the collapse of the sinister, barbarous and fanatical Taliban regime, which provided shelter and support to Osama bin Laden and developed a mutual dependence on his al-Qaeda terrorist network—an organisation that provides one of the most destructive threats to the world's stability, peace and prosperity.

The Taliban regime that for so long kept Afghanistan in its oppressive grip has fallen and the Taliban have even been driven from their historical base in Kandahar. Only isolated pockets of Taliban and al-Qaeda forces now remain around the country, which is a vindication of the coalition's broad strategy of action in the diplomatic, economic, legal, humanitarian and military spheres to ensure that Afghanistan no longer harbours and sustains international terrorism.

The fall of the Taliban is also a tribute to the United States leadership of the coalition. While the attacks on 11 September were an attack on the whole world, it was the United States that suffered most. It is right that it should take the lead in an act of self-defence under article 51 of the United Nations charter. It has led wisely and well. Although the United States has military capabilities that are unmatched by those of any other country, it also recognised that it could not act alone.

Other countries also suffered on 11 September—not least our own; 78 British citizens died in New York. We, too, had to respond for our own safety and security, as well as to support our closest ally—and support her we have. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have played vital parts in building and maintaining the global coalition against international terrorism, and our armed forces have operated alongside those of the United States from the start of military operations on 7 October.

Few can doubt that the coalition's military campaign was essential in bringing about the downfall of the Taliban. Military action enabled the Northern Alliance, which was initially shocked by the assassination of its leader only two days before the attacks on 11 September, to go on to the offensive. With coalition help, the Northern Alliance drove back the Taliban on the ground.

The military campaign helped to make the Bonn agreement and all that it promises possible. The agreement represents the foundation stone for the reconstruction of Afghanistan and the basis on which that country, which has been almost destroyed by 22 years of war and the isolation that came with the Taliban regime, can be rebuilt and redeveloped. Our long-term aim was always to reintegrate Afghanistan as a responsible member of the international community. We promised that we would not walk away from it and we are keeping that promise.

At the start of the coalition action in Afghanistan, we set out what we were trying to achieve. Our specific short-term campaign aims were to bring Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders to justice; to prevent Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda network from posing a continuing terrorist threat; to ensure that Afghanistan ceased to harbour and sustain international terrorism and that it allowed us to verify that the camps where terrorists trained were destroyed; and, given that Mullah Omar would not comply with the American ultimatum, we required a sufficient change in the leadership to ensure that Afghanistan's links to international terrorism were broken.

Angus Robertson (Moray): I thank the Secretary of State for taking an intervention from someone who has not been called to speak in the debate. On 31 October, he wrote to my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond):

> "Our military action is focused on Usama bin Laden, the Al-Qaeda network and their Taliban allies. No further action is in contemplation by the UK Government at present and it would not be productive to speculate on hypothetical situations."

Bearing in mind the current situation off the Somali coast, will he explain whether the objective of the UK Government in their campaign against terrorism is being widened?

Mr. Hoon: I stand by what I said. That remains the focus of military action and the campaign's aims are the same as those set out in the letter. Matters have not moved on significantly since then.

Jeremy Corbyn: My right hon. Friend says that things have not moved on, yet the Prime Minister and the

[Jeremy Corbyn]

President of the United States have clearly stated that other countries are being considered for military action. Will the Secretary of State help us? Is the Ministry of Defence planning military action in Somalia, Sudan or any other country?

Mr. Hoon: Even before 31 October I said that a range of options and actions were being considered to deal with international terrorism. They are not only military. Obviously, military actions are my primary responsibility but, from 11 September, several actions have been taken against terrorist organisations. They include restricting their finance, ensuring that they cannot travel freely from one country to another and all sorts of pre-emptive steps in several different countries. They may well have frustrated terrorist activities; we may never know how many. However, significant action has been taken, and I emphasise to my hon. Friend the need to concentrate not only on military actions, important though they are in the context of my responsibilities.

Mr. Jenkin: I assure the Secretary of State of our continued support for his policy of not ruling out military action against any country that may harbour terrorists. That is consistent with the objectives that the Government set out earlier in the campaign.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful for that observation.

As I have made clear, we have taken action on several fronts. I have already mentioned diplomatic action to build international support for our task. We have also taken economic action to freeze the financial resources on which terrorists rely, legal action, which hon. Members have the opportunity to debate later, and humanitarian action. We never allowed ourselves to forget the need to help the ordinary people of Afghanistan, millions of whom have been forced to leave their homes and were facing famine. My hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) expressed that well.

My specific responsibility is for the United Kingdom's contribution to the coalition's military action in Afghanistan. The fanatical intransigence of the Taliban regime left us with no option other than to use force. Our use of military force had specific objectives: to destroy the terrorist camps; to pressurise the Taliban regime to end its support for Osama bin Laden; to enable us to mount future operations in Afghanistan; and to maintain that pressure.

The United Kingdom's armed forces have played a significant and essential part in the coalition's military action. They have done far more than many perhaps realise, taking part in direct strikes on terrorist targets and providing support for coalition partners. In the early days of the military action, the Royal Navy twice fired salvoes of Tomahawk missiles at terrorist training camps.

Today, we have a large naval force in the Indian ocean; it is second in size only to the element from the United States navy. Led by HMS Illustrious, the United Kingdom's contribution includes the assault ship HMS Fearless, the destroyer HMS Southampton, the frigate HMS Cornwall, and seven ships of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. Those ships form a base for operations by the 200 men of 40 Commando Royal Marines who have remained in theatre. We have also maintained a submarine presence in the region, which, with Tomahawk missiles, offers us another means, if needed, of striking at distant targets inside Afghanistan.

We have also deployed UK ground forces deep into the country. The House will understand that I cannot give details of those operations, but I can say that our troops are there, actively participating in the pursuit of Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda terrorists.

The presence of Royal Marines and, more recently, members of the Army and the Royal Air Force at Bagram airstrip has been vital. They helped to secure the airstrip for humanitarian aid and diplomatic flights. They also helped to secure our embassy buildings in Kabul. Royal Engineers, including explosive ordnance disposal experts, have been deployed to repair parts of the airstrip's infrastructure in readiness for the winter. I regret to say that it was one of those soldiers who was injured by a land mine last week.

The presence of those troops at Bagram was essential to the success of the Bonn negotiations; indeed, they could not otherwise have taken place. Securing the airstrip and confirming that it could be used by military transport aircraft made it possible for the Royal Air Force to fly the Northern Alliance's delegation to Bonn to participate in the conference.

The Royal Air Force has also played a major role. We have a number of fixed-wing aircraft in theatre. They include Tristar and VC10 air-to-air refuelling aircraft, Hercules transport aircraft, E3D Sentry airborne warning and control system aircraft, Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft, and Canberra PR9 photographic reconnaissance aircraft.

Patrick Mercer: I wonder whether the Secretary of State would answer some of the questions that were posed about timings, missions, mission creep and all the other problems that are giving us such a headache?

Mr. Hoon: I shall deal with those matters in due course if the hon. Gentleman will contain his impatience.

Mr. Jenkin: You have five minutes left.

Mr. Hoon: I have not got five minutes left. I want to set out in detail for the benefit of Conservative Members the extent of the contribution of Her Majesty's armed forces in the campaign—not all of it has been properly recognised, especially in the media. It is therefore important that Opposition Members listen with the patience for which they are renowned.

I want to stress the importance of our air-to-air refuelling tankers and their role in coalition operations. They are essential to the operations of the United States navy's strike aircraft, on which so much of the coalition's air campaign has relied. Operating from its aircraft carriers, the US navy cannot fly tanker aircraft as large as ours. The US air force has many tanker aircraft but it uses a different technique, developed originally to refuel its strategic bombers. The RAF has therefore stepped in to fill that capability gap. The United States has welcomed its support, which it values enormously.

A few statistics illustrate the importance of the RAF's tankers. They have flown more than 280 sorties, each lasting up to eight hours. They have provided coalition aircraft with nearly 10 million litres of fuel, which is no small task.

The United Kingdom has also made a major contribution to the coalition's command and reconnaissance capabilities. Nearly 160 such sorties have been flown, some of very long duration. The E3D Sentry aircraft have flown missions of up to 14 hours controlling and co-ordinating coalition air strikes. The Nimrods have ranged far over the Indian ocean in support of the coalition's maritime operations. The Canberras, though long in service, offer an intelligence gathering and reconnaissance capability unmatched by almost any other aircraft in the world.

We should not forget the work of our Hercules transport aircraft. I have already referred to their role in making the Bonn negotiations possible. Together with helicopters deployed aboard the Royal Navy fleet, they have flown sorties that provided essential support to our other operations, often in dangerous and demanding circumstances. Their success is a tribute to the skill and bravery of their crews.

When we send our forces to Afghanistan, we ask them to take significant risks. The campaign has not been without cost. A small number of the United Kingdom's armed forces have been wounded or injured in Afghanistan, including the member of the Royal Engineers who was injured by a land mine at Bagram last week. I am sure that hon. Members will join me in wishing them all a swift recovery. Of course, in thinking of our casualties, we should not forget that the United States, the Northern Alliance and the Afghan people have suffered many more.

It is inevitable that the continuing deployment of British armed forces, especially when they are engaged in offensive action, should give rise to questions and anxieties. They have not diverted us from our course. We remain focused on achieving the aims that we set ourselves when we began military action on 7 October.

We continue to work towards achieving our first and second campaign aims. Osama bin Laden and elements of al-Qaeda are still, as far as we know, at large and fighting. We have inflicted significant damage on al-Qaeda, but while it remains at large, in Afghanistan or elsewhere, it is a threat. We shall therefore continue our operations until that threat has been eliminated. I will not speculate about what that might mean, where future operations might take place or what form they might take. It would serve no useful purpose to advertise our intentions in advance. The focus of our activities remains Afghanistan, but no terrorists should assume that they can find safety anywhere around the world.

We have achieved the fourth objective—a change in the leadership of Afghanistan. The third—to ensure that Afghanistan ceases to harbour and sustain international terrorism—is certainly now within our grasp. The Bonn agreement paves the way for cementing both those objectives.

I have spoken about what the United Kingdom and her coalition partners have achieved so far. We must now consider how best to support the Bonn agreement. Twenty-two years of war have left their mark on Afghanistan. The destruction of much of its most basic infrastructure and the huge number of land mines laid during the war against the Soviet Union and in the civil wars that followed are obvious examples; less tangible, perhaps, are the effects on the Afghan people. A great deal of mistrust remains between the different peoples and political groups.

The Afghans who negotiated the Bonn agreement knew all that far better than anyone else. They recognised that the new interim authority would need to establish itself as independent and not be seen as a creature of one faction or another. That is why they have agreed to and welcomed the proposal to deploy an international security force to Kabul.

As the Prime Minister said yesterday, the United Kingdom has indicated, in principle, a willingness to play a leading role in any United Nations mandated security force in Afghanistan. No decisions have yet been taken. Before decisions are taken, we need to address a range of complex and detailed issues. We will be engaged in close consultations with the Afghans, the United Nations, the United States, and other countries that have expressed an interest in contributing troops to a security force. The detailed consultations and information gathering that we have in hand will provide the basis for decisions. That process will address the questions that the shadow Foreign Secretary very properly raised in his speech.

The new interim authority formally takes office on 22 December. We must help to convince every Afghan to have confidence in that authority and in the Bonn agreement. We must convince them that this is the beginning of the rebuilding process, because the interim authority is just that—an interim authority. In six months' time, Loya Jirgah will appoint a transitional Government. We must convince all parties that their future lies in joining the political process and not in seeking a solution through the use of force.

All this argues in favour of the eventual deployment of a UN-mandated force to provide the stability that is required for Afghanistan's future. We know that that will not be easy, and that many hurdles must be overcome. Not least of these is defining and agreeing with the Afghans what tasks would fall to a security assistance mission and, just as important, what tasks they would perform themselves. They clearly have responsibilities in all of this, too. In deciding to deploy an international security assistance force, the international community is offering a helping hand to a country and a people that have suffered too much for far too long.

The events of 11 September required action in the short term to remove the threat posed by al-Qaeda and the Taliban and to help ~~to~~ secure the new Afghan Government, but those events also represented a challenge to our approach to defence and security. The strategic defence review laid a solid basis for the future evolution of our armed forces and how we might use them. The action we are taking in Afghanistan is largely possible as a result of the work done during the SDR.

The United Kingdom now has significantly improved capabilities and is well placed to take on asymmetric threats, such as those posed by international terrorism, but it is only right that we should look further at the conclusions of the strategic defence review, in the light of the threat that is posed today by international terrorists. The House will be aware that we are doing just that.

We are engaging not in a new strategic defence review, but in a new chapter of the review, building on the earlier conclusions. We want to ensure that the United Kingdom has the defence concepts, capabilities and forces that we need if we are to deal with threats of this kind and this scale. We are therefore looking closely at our plans and programmes, to be able to add capability where it

[Mr. Hoon]

counts—where it makes a difference—because we must look beyond what is happening today and examine the possible longer-term implications.

The success that we have enjoyed in the campaign to date and the fact that we can look forward to achieving our remaining aims with confidence ultimately depend on one thing: the excellence of the men and women of our armed forces. I cannot overstate what they have achieved and the spirit in which they have achieved it. I said at the start of my speech that they deserved every word of the praise offered by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House. We owe a great deal to the men and women of our armed forces, as well as to their families. It is our responsibility and privilege to make sure that they are properly equipped and properly organised to do the excellent job that they do. We are determined to make sure that that continues.

Mr. Nick Ainger (West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

DEFERRED DIVISION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I now have to announce the result of a Division deferred from a previous day.

On the motion on the European Arrest Warrant and the Surrender Procedures between Member States, the Ayes were 333, the Noes were 146, so the Question was agreed to.

[The Division List is published at the end of today's debates.]

Orders of the Day

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill

Lords amendments considered.

7.5 pm

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I must draw the attention of the House to the fact that privilege is involved in Lords amendment No. 43, which is to be considered today. If the House agrees to this Lords amendment, I shall ensure that the appropriate entry is made in the Journal.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. For the convenience of the House, it would be helpful, given that we have groups of Government motions and amendments from the other place, if you could tell us what will happen when we reach each of the cut-off deadlines, in terms of what could be voted on, what must be voted on, what will be taken separately and what will be taken together. That would spare us the confusion that we, not surprisingly, got into last week, when we got into slightly difficult procedural areas.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I think that there could be quite an involved answer to the hon. Gentleman's question. May I suggest that he confers with the Clerk at the Table, so that we can proceed with the business of the day?

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I recognise your advice to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) to go and talk to the Clerk, but may their conversation be broadcast to the rest of us, so that we can have some understanding of exactly what voting there is to be and when, and what we are voting on?

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I might be able to help here. I hope that there is consensus on being able to vote on each collective part of the Bill as returned to us from the House of Lords, so that, on the cut-off points, we are able to vote on the substantive main amendment with those taken with it—so that there is an understanding of the terms in which we are doing that—rather than spend all the time having to vote on individual items. We would be very happy to accommodate that with all Members of the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker: All motions to disagree and Lords amendments will be voted on separately.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think that you might just have answered my point of order. However, although I am sure that the Home Secretary was trying to be helpful to the House, it is perhaps a failing on my part that I did not understand exactly what he was saying.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Could I perhaps clarify my response? All motions to agree will be taken together, and amendments to Lords amendments will be taken separately. Motions to disagree will be taken separately as well.

Jeremy Corbyn: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I understand the advice that you have just given to the House. Are those votes going to be taken at the conclusion of each section, or are we going to have a mammoth voting session at midnight?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Under the programme motion that was agreed, you will see that there are set times for those votes to be taken.

Mr. Fisher: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. So far as I can see, that means that there are potentially at least seven votes in the first section, which could take at least an hour and a half. We have only an hour and a quarter to debate the whole of the next section.

Madam Deputy Speaker: May I remind the hon. Gentleman that that is a consequence of the programme motion that was agreed to?

Simon Hughes: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is my last point of order. I am trying to be helpful to the House in responding to the Home Secretary's helpful intervention. Certainly, those on our Benches—and I think that I am right in saying the Conservatives, too—would seek to test the opinion of the House on an issue at the beginning of a group, rather than detain the House by voting on all the subsequent matters. We will choose—I hope with the compliance, as it were, of the Government—the substantive main point, and seek to divide on it, and then move on to the next section.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I rise just to confirm that that is also our intention.

Mr. Blunkett: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I had better confirm that that is my understanding as well.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I think that we are now all in agreement.

Clause 17

EXTENSION OF EXISTING DISCLOSURE POWERS

Lords amendment: No. 5, in page 7, line 7, after "authority" insert

"to a relevant public authority".

Mr. Blunkett: I beg to move, That the House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, we may take the following: Lords amendment No. 6 and the Government motion to disagree thereto, Lords amendments Nos. 7 and 8 and the Government motion to disagree thereto, Lords amendment No. 38 and the Government motion to disagree thereto, Lords amendments Nos. 39 and 40 and the Government motion to disagree thereto, Lords amendments Nos. 41 to 43, Lords amendment No. 44 and the Government motion to disagree thereto, Lords amendments Nos. 45 to 47, Lords amendment No. 48 and amendments (a) and (b) thereto, Lords amendments Nos. 49 to 64.

Mr. Blunkett: First, and in the interests of brevity, I shall describe the way in which we want to proceed this evening and subsequently in the House of Lords. Many things have been said outside the House, but the tone of debate on Second Reading and in Committee was one of constructive dialogue among people rightly querying, scrutinising and, where appropriate, opposing. Tonight and tomorrow, I want to proceed in the same spirit from the Government Front Bench to seek to allay fears and to find common ground where it exists, disagreeing only where we genuinely do so.

There have been misunderstandings from time to time, but the Human Rights Committee, the Home Affairs Committee, individual Members and parties have made suggestions here and in the House of Lords that we have taken on board, whether on sunset clauses or reviews or on reasonableness or links with terrorism. We have adjusted the justice and home affairs provisions. We have included consultation and, where appropriate, affirmative resolution. We have sought to accommodate where we can the genuine concerns of Members of this House and Members of the House of Lords. I intend to try to do so as we proceed tonight.

I must make it clear, however, that no one would understand a position whereby we failed to take the necessary action and, having so failed, were later proved to have failed to provide the necessary protections. That is the spirit in which I intend to proceed.

At the end of September, the Leader of the Opposition pointed out why, on part 3 and parts 10 and 11, we need to be clear about the interrelationship of one set of actions with another:

> "Global terrorism and organised crime are now inextricably linked. The boundary between terrorist activity and criminal activity has become increasingly blurred. The fingerprints of terrorism lie on the drugs dealt to our children on street corners as surely as they lie on the plans to destroy the World Trade Centre . . . We need to combat the link between international crime and terrorism."

I agree, which is why we ask that parts 3, 10, 11 and 13, with the provisos that we shall deal with tonight, be returned to the House of Lords in a form that restores the previous intentions.

I ask the House to reject Lords amendments Nos. 5, 6 and 8, because they would confine what is possible to what

> "directly or indirectly relates to a risk to national security or to a terrorist."

We do not believe that it will be possible for people to do their jobs appropriately if those confining mechanisms are put in place. Our law enforcement agencies, the services that provide support to them and our security services have given us a clear understanding that if the Lords amendments are approved by the two Houses, they will simply not be able to do their job. On part 10, the Lords amendments as framed would set the situation back rather than help people to do a better job. I give an example on part 3 in relation to the interchange of information, the knowledge that exists and the way in which people react.

7.15 pm

Take an employment agency that is being inspected. The inspectors come across information relating to an individual seeking to take up a particular, sensitive job. It is discovered that that person has claimed large amounts of benefit. Let us call him Mr. AQ, just as an example of someone who might seek to do that. According to the framing of the House of Lords proposal, it would not be possible for that information to be shared. No one outside the House would thank us if we so restrained information giving and the sharing of concerns that Mr. AQ continued to draw benefits. It would be illegal to pass on the information required.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I fail to understand the Secretary of State's reasoning. If it were suspected that Mr. AQ is involved in terrorism and a threat to national security, under the terms of the Lords amendment the information could be shared. On the other hand, if we wanted to investigate Mr. AQ for benefit fraud, surely the correct way to deal with that would be through benefit fraud legislation, not anti-terrorism legislation.

Mr. Blunkett: But we would not know; that is the point. A Mr. AQ is investigated for a range of activities, including massive benefit fraud, and discovered—he may be discovered, let us put it no more strongly than that—to be involved in or even wanted by security and intelligence services elsewhere. That is just a possibility, which even those on the Liberal Democrat Benches might concede to be fairly close to reality.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the Home Secretary not realise that a wide gate is opening, through which comes this proposition? Anyone suspected of any crime, or indeed anyone against whom there is evidence of any crime, may have applied to them the full rigour of measures that we could not justify for inclusion in normal criminal legislation. There is just a possibility, unsupported by evidence, that he might have a terrorist intention, but surely that is not the purpose of the Bill. Its purpose is to enable the authorities, if they have such a suspicion of a terrorist involvement, to bring into play powers not normally thought proportionate to the crimes involved.

Mr. Blunkett: I would not dream of doing to the right hon. Gentleman what Lord Ackner did to me on radio on Sunday—patronise him. Let me put it this way: the interchange described by the Leader of the Opposition on 26 September is the one that I am referring to, and I want to send it back to the House of Lords for reconsideration. I have described a tightening of the noose.

Take Customs and Excise rightly intervening on those who seek to smuggle, be it drugs, people or tobacco. It suspects that someone is undertaking a crime, but it needs to be able to share information, even if it has no proof. Remember that, in those particular circumstances, judicial review and the normal protections of the legal fraternity fall into play. There may be no suspicion of terrorist activity, but Customs and Excise needs to be able to share information with law enforcement agencies, knowing that a great deal of drug smuggling and other activity leads to the funding of terrorism, as the Leader of the Opposition rightly pointed out.

Mr. Fisher: Can the Home Secretary explain how a suspicion may be arrived at if there is no proof of any sort against such a person?

Mr. Blunkett: Obviously, it must be late in the day and late in the week, because I am struggling to understand why my hon. Friend feels that a body involved in such dealings—as Customs and Excise is day in, day out—that had a reason to pass material to the police would do so other than because it suspected that something was amiss. *[Interruption.]* No, no. The restriction being imposed, if my hon. Friend would kindly read what the Lords have done, restricts to the point where a body has to suspect that a terrorist act is in the offing.

Mr. Fisher: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Blunkett: In a second.

I know that my hon. Friend is trying to help me and to ensure that the position is clarified so that the law enforcement agencies can do their job effectively, irrespective of whether he feels that there should have been a separate Bill. I refer him to schedule 4, which contains a list of disclosure powers that would allow investigation, all involving a different time scale and a different premise. Before the Lords amended it, the clause sought to harmonise arrangements for the sharing of information in a way that would assist the apprehending of terrorists. That is where we started on Second Reading, and it is where we are today.

I think that we have made some progress, in that many who were worried are now less worried. In the Lords great confusion arose, rather than clarity, but we have sought to deal with that by discussing the data protection provisions that can be brought into play. It may help my hon. Friend and Opposition Members, however, if I say what I think we should also do.

As well as referring to the Data Protection Act 1998, we have indicated that the Human Rights Act 1998 would protect people from unjustifiable intrusion. Because—as has just been illustrated—there has been so much worry and suspicion, my colleagues and I feel that we should ask our colleagues in the Lords, when they consider these measures tomorrow afternoon and evening, to clarify what we believed, and still believe, to be automatically the position under the Human Rights Act: that proportionality should apply in relation to the use of the powers we are discussing, so that a judgment can be made on whether those using them have taken into account the proportionality of their suspicions.

7.15 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): Does the Home Secretary accept that there may be disclosures, or sharing, of information of which an individual has and can have no knowledge, and that that individual will therefore be unable to invoke the Human Rights Act?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes. That is why my amendment helps: rather than having to apply the Human Rights Act retrospectively, or rely on agencies' familiarity with the terms of the Act, people would be able to understand the meaning of "proportionality" if it were built into the legislation and the guidance issued to such agencies.

We want to ensure that the Bill stands the test of time, and later we will discuss how Members might be accommodated in that regard. Given that we are trying to be helpful, it would assist us if others were helpful to us. I understand the suspicion that is felt; I understand why it is right for every Member, whatever side he or she is on, to ensure that the Executive are challenged and scrutinised. Given that I am trying to be helpful, however, I hope that my efforts will be reciprocated, because tomorrow night we must make decisions that will indeed stand the test of time.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): The Home Secretary knows that I broadly support what he is trying to achieve in this regard, but I want to ask him a question that has, in part, already been asked from the Liberal Democrat Benches.

Lords amendment No. 6 concerns national security and terrorist activity, which, as the Home Secretary says, are frequently linked. However, it uses the word "suspects", rather than referring merely to evidence. I wonder whether the Home Secretary is not going too far in opening the gate wider, and whether his lawyers may not have lead him to believe that the word "suspects" is wide enough to encompass what he is trying to achieve.

Mr. Blunkett: As I have said, we are building the concept of proportionality into the Bill. There are many "suspicions"; the action taken on the basis of those suspicions is the crucial issue, given that we are authorising action through the law. I think that if we can coalesce in ensuring that the suspicion leading to such action is proportionate, we can allay some fears.

We are resisting amendment No. 38, which relates to part 10, and Nos. 40 and 44, which relate to part 11. Our reasons concern the interface between what is needed to tackle terrorism directly and the picking up, as it were, of lines that lead to an understanding of how to pursue terrorists through a knowledge of organised crime and the actions of our services.

Some Members have expressed concern about the extension of powers. As I said in Committee, we have reflected and have sought to allay their fears—for instance, in regard to the use of Ministry of Defence and British Transport police in areas outside their immediate jurisdiction. We have provided for the involvement of the Police Complaints Authority—in future, the independent Police Complaints Commission—in the event of problems, and the Bill already provides for considerable restraints.

The House of Lords—inadvertently, of course; no one would have done this intentionally—has made the use of the MOD and British Transport police even more difficult than it is now. This week a British Transport police officer went beyond his jurisdiction at Finsbury Park station to help a serving Metropolitan police officer who was being attacked by a man with a knife. Both were quite seriously injured. British Transport police helped to restrain the man, who is now in custody.

No one, whatever their feelings or suspicions, would want us to constrain the ability of British Transport police to take such action; nor would they want the MOD police to be constrained if an aircraft crashed outside their jurisdiction, and they were called upon to help. Those are the terms in which we describe what we seek to do in regard to the extension of powers. There will clearly be some restraint, and some reference to the jurisdiction of either the emergency or the local police force.

I feel that, in trying to ensure that people did not go too far, the House of Lords has gone much too far itself. Let me give another example relating to parts 10 and 11. Those who have investigated these issues have no doubt that credit fraud, for instance, is a favoured method of fundraising among the terrorists groups with which we are dealing: that is a simple, known fact. Under our proposals, someone who believed that fraud had been committed at a restaurant but had no reason to connect it with terrorism would be able to share information. The enforcement agencies and security services are familiar with such activities, and with the networks involved in them, and can immediately pick up what traditional forces cannot do without the passing on of such information.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I have the impression that the Home Secretary is digging a bigger hole for himself. The security services must liaise with the police. They must be able, in camera and in confidence, to give the police information. The police will then have a suspicion—a legitimate suspicion.

Mr. Blunkett: If the amendments were passed, that would be the case if they believed there was a terrorist threat, but not if they had suspicions that led to an understanding of a terrorist threat. *[Interruption.]* It is no use the Liberal Democrats giggling—*[Interruption.]* Laughing, then. I mistook a gurgle for something else. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Fisher: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Blunkett: Not for the moment.

It appears that the Liberal Democrats were not laughing, giggling or gurgling—in which case they were expressing amazement that it might actually be desirable to link one set of information with another in order to apprehend those whom we are discussing.

Simon Hughes: The Home Secretary knows that we are trying to agree on the terms of reference. We understand that credit fraud, for example, may be linked with terrorism. Our proposition is that the suspicion has to be that there is a direct or indirect link and that, provided it comes within that ambit, the amendment passed in the Lords would be sufficient. Will he consider that? We would reasonably consider the point that he has made that the Bill should not further restrict organisations such as the MOD or the transport police, although that has never been the intention. If he thought about the one, we would certainly think about the other.

7.30 pm

Mr. Blunkett: I am continuing to think. I have already indicated to both the shadow Home Secretary and to the hon. Gentleman that I will continue listening and thinking for the next 24 hours until we can secure agreement on the Bill between the two Houses, but it is not possible for someone dealing with the apprehension of and therefore the passage of information on drugs to know that there is an indirect or a direct link until that is investigated by the enforcement agencies. That is the nub. How can they have a suspicion that that particular activity leads back to the al-Qaeda, to the GIA or to one of the other major international terrorist outfits? They cannot

[Mr. Blunkett]

Amendment No. 48 relates to part 13. We seek to include paragraphs (d) and (e). The convention on mutual assistance in criminal matters would be a third pillar measure under subsection (1). It is a simple facilitation of the sharing of video information, making that easier and increasing the speed with which it can be done, paragraph (e); relates to the Schengen acquis, which includes Norway and Iceland as well as the European Union. I hope that over the next 24 hours we will be able to persuade both colleagues in this House and those in the House of Lords that those two additions, together with the sunset clause at the end of June, all the provisos that we have built in and the ability to test that we are not sneaking something through, get the matter right.

Let no one misunderstand what we are doing. I have read articles and heard speeches that have linked issues that are not in the Bill with what we are debating tonight and have debated over recent weeks. I have heard people link the Bill with the European arrest warrant time and again. Even the shadow Home Secretary, for whom I have much time and who has been honest on these matters, did that in his article in *The Guardian* on Friday. *The Daily Telegraph*—God bless it; it does not normally pick things up from *The Guardian*—seemed to repeat the calumny, although not in his name, on Saturday. An enormous amount of suspicion has been generated about what the Government may or may not be seeking to do. What we are certainly not trying to do is delude anyone tonight.

Mr. Letwin: I unreservedly welcome the tone in which the Home Secretary has addressed the House. We started these debates with six big issues, shared between the Liberal Democrats and ourselves. On at least two and a half, arguably three, the Government have made sensible movement and we have arrived, I think, at an acceptable solution.

We have three to go. Those relate to seven of the 126 clauses of the Bill. It is important to remind ourselves that we are arguing only about seven of 126 clauses. If we continue the argument in the spirit that the Home Secretary exhibited this evening, we are likely to arrive at a resolution.

I want to dwell on the logic that the Home Secretary was exposing and to try to demonstrate why Conservative Members are still unconvinced, but before I do so I should say that his offer to move towards the application of a proportionality test is taken in the spirit in which it was clearly intended: as a serious and constructive move. We will need to study whatever amendment is tabled to that effect in the Lords. There are present in the Lords people of great legal learning who will no doubt be able to advise that House and us about whether it will indeed have sufficient protective effects to make it an acceptable variant. If it is, we will accept it. We do not wish to press the Government to the point of breaking if we can avoid doing so.

It will help materially in advancing that debate if I expose as clearly as I can—many speaking in interventions have already begun to do so—exactly why we are unconvinced by the Home Secretary's logic. We absolutely accept that there are links between terrorism and other forms of crime. The Home Secretary has rightly quoted my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition's remarks about that. We also accept that when the security services, the police or both have a suspicion that someone is involved in terrorism. it may be extremely important to them to be able to trace through a daisy chain of minor circumstances patterns that will enable them to apprehend terrorist groups or particular individuals linked to terrorism.

Moreover, we accept—although this is not a point that the Home Secretary has made, it would be a legitimate one—that from time to time, the Al Capone strategy may be sensible. It may be sensible to apprehend a terrorist, a suspected terrorist or someone suspected of links to terrorism on the basis of some minor charge discovered by ferreting out some other aspect of that person's activities, even where it is not possible to prove that they are linked to terrorism. It may be possible to prove that they have engaged in some other minor felony. We accept a chain of logic that runs from the suspicion by the authorities that someone is in some way linked to terrorism to the disclosure of a wide range of information from 81 different agencies and quangos to the authorities about that person. Exceptional strains and risks demand exceptional measures.

The Lords amendments work on exactly that logic. As my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney) pointed out, the Lords amendments—I take the example of amendment No. 6 but many others are to the same purpose—say specifically that if the authorities believe or suspect that the disclosure may be of information that directly or indirectly relates to a risk to national security, the floodgates are open. They do not need to believe it. They need only to suspect it. They do not require the suspicion to be reasonable. They merely have to suspect it. They do not need to suspect that the person is a terrorist. They do not even need to suspect that the person is directly linked to terrorism. They merely need to suspect that the person is indirectly linked to terrorism. That is about as wide as their lordships could have cast the net.

I still fail to understand what must be genuine logic on the part of the Home Secretary's advisers, otherwise I cannot imagine why he would be going to an awful lot of fuss and bother to defend the proposition. I genuinely cannot understand how, if the trigger for opening the doors to such massive disclosure is merely the necessity that the authorities suspect an indirect link to terrorism, there can be any real restriction on their activities.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): I have some sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman is arguing, but in all fairness the Home Secretary asked a question towards the end of his speech, I think in relation to amendment No. 6 and the word "suspect". It may be difficult, or so the argument goes, for a public authority that is not involved in the murky world of pursuing terrorists and suspected terrorists. That public authority may not have any information at all on the basis of which to suspect anything. Is that not the problem that the Home Secretary was trying to point out?

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, with whom I have had many arguments about constitutional points; we have mainly been on the same side. He needs to look at the next passage of amendment No. 6. It does not require the authority that holds the information to engage in the disclosure voluntarily. It rightly permits relevant authorities—the security services and the police—if they have such a suspicion, to request the information; indeed, it gives them the right to demand that information in circumstances in which they have that suspicion. Whereas the Home Secretary would be right if only the first part of Lords amendment No. 6 existed, the argument does not run in the light of the second part.

I do not make that argument in an attempt to create a confrontation where one may no longer exist. If the Home Secretary, regardless of the validity or otherwise of his logic, can produce a proportionality test that fully convinces their lordships and ourselves that no individual will suffer a trawling exercise by the authorities when he or she is being pursued for a minor offence, possibly committed in another country, we may be willing to accept the clause—despite not understanding the logic. However, it would be helpful if between now and tomorrow the Government could for the first time explain why the logic that I have just exposed is not fallacious.

The Home Secretary made the argument that the amendments made by the Lords to part 10 would have the effect of restricting the powers of the Ministry of Defence and British Transport police more than was the case before the Bill was introduced. If that is so, it is unintentional and I accept that it is not something that we wish to legislate to do at present. I hope that over the next 24 or 36 hours we will find a solution to that problem.

The Home Secretary did not rehearse the history, which is well known to him, of how we came to this set of amendments on part 13. I shall briefly rehearse it, in order to explain our current position. We began with a proposition that any decision reached at intergovernmental level on criminal justice under the framework of the third pillar of the EU could be enacted in British law through an order subject to a 90-minute debate in Committee. The Home Secretary is right to say that I have argued in public that that could have meant that the European arrest warrant was adopted by those means. I have always tried to acknowledge that the Home Secretary gave us an assurance that the European arrest warrant would not suffer that fate, because it would be introduced in the extradition Bill. What concerned my colleagues and me was that the Home Secretary would have taken a reserve power under this Bill and, if we were to seek—as we will—to amend the extradition Bill to restrict greatly the scope of the European arrest warrant, he could have told us that we were being naive because he had that reserve power to enact it in a 90-minute debate and that, if necessary, he would use it. That position would have been intolerable. Luckily, the Attorney-General has now given an assurance from the Dispatch Box in the House of Lords—which is as binding and solemn an assurance as one can get from the Government—that that will not happen. As the Home Secretary said, clauses 110 and 111—as they appeared in the Lords—have been limited to June 2002 and our fears about the future are removed. That is a major step forward.

Since that time, the Government have introduced amendments to Lords amendment No. 48 that would have the odd effect of reintroducing, in paragraphs (d) and (e), the convention on mutual assistance and certain of the Schengen acquis provisions. I was not sure that I fully grasped the full implications of the Home Secretary's statement, although on the basis of intimations in the other place I hope that I have rightly discerned that when the Bill returns to the Lords we may see paragraph (e) removed and/or some firm assurance from the Dispatch Box that the Schengen acquis will also be brought in through the extradition Bill instead of by order and a 90-minute debate. If that assurance is given, we would not seek to overturn the amendment in the other place. If that assurance is given tonight, we would not seek to overturn it tonight—not that I suffer from any illusion that we could overturn any amendment in this House—so we would not seek to vote against it.

7.45 pm

It is critical that we should have an equal assurance on the question of the Schengen acquis to the one we have had on the European arrest warrant and on all decisions that may be made under the third pillar beyond June 2002. If we can rest easy on that point, we will have achieved a major improvement in British law from the position we faced on Second Reading. I hope that we will also be able to achieve such improvement in relation to the disclosure provisions. I do not want to have been part of a Parliament that brought about a situation in which a British policeman had the capacity to obtain every record on an individual because of a traffic offence that could have been committed in Baltimore, Ohio. That would not be tolerable and we need to change it. If the Home Secretary finds a way to change that, we will accept it.

Norman Baker: I, too, welcome the Home Secretary's constructive comments and the approach that the Government have taken to the Bill in the past 48 hours. It is welcome that he wishes to find common ground and we and, I believe, the Conservatives share that aspiration. The Home Secretary said that he has tried to be helpful and I hope that he will feel that we are also trying.

The Government are entitled to respond to the international situation and to introduce legislation to deal with unexpected and emergency threats from terrorism. That is common ground. If the Home Secretary can achieve a Bill that will do that, he will have the support of the House and the country. The dispute, as the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) pointed out, is on a relatively small area of the Bill. The question is whether in the legitimate and correct pursuit of legislation to deal with terrorism it is appropriate to include provisions that would effectively give a green light to excessive state interference in the lives of ordinary citizens. Seeking to suspend some of them is an odd way in which to seek to protect our civil liberties. I ask the Home Secretary to reflect on that paradox. The drugs taken to cure an illness sometimes cause complications worse than the original illness. Reactions must be proportionate—and the Home Secretary used that word himself tonight.

I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) and the hon. Member for West Dorset a failure to understand why the Home Secretary is determined to introduce measures that do not deal with terrorism or the threat to national security directly or indirectly—which is a wide target—but would address any criminal activity. For example, clause 102 states that the code of practice could contain provision

"for the purposes of the prevention or detection of crime".

[Norman Baker]

It does not refer to terrorism or threats to national security, or even to serious crime, which might deal with people who smuggle cigarettes.

Mr. Blunkett: I have two questions for the hon. Gentleman. Have we not now agreed to the code being made on an affirmative order so that it can be examined automatically by both Houses? Secondly, have we not tried to show that data cannot be held—held, rather than just exposed—on the presumption of the holders that they can distinguish whether it will be required for terrorism or for crime? The provision is as broad as it is because the data have to be accessed when there is a suspicion of terrorism. If the data were not held, access would not be possible.

Norman Baker: We welcome the Home Secretary's approach with regard to the affirmative order, as I hope I made clear earlier. However, in respect of the right hon. Gentleman's second question, the Bill states that part of its purpose is the detection of crime. The use of the word "purpose" has wide connotations.

I thought that the Bill's purpose was to deal with the terrorist threat, not the threat of crime. That is the difference that divides Government and Opposition Members. The Government want to reverse amendments made in the Lords, but there are serious worries that the Bill would place us in contravention of article 8 of the European convention because of the range of offences covered and the lack of statutory criteria to guide decisions. Another problem is the lack of procedural safeguards.

The Home Secretary mentioned the proportionality test. It was a helpful suggestion, and shows that he recognises that proportionality has to apply in these matters. However, the human rights legislation already contains the necessary proportionality, so with the best will in the world, I cannot believe that the Home Secretary is adding much to the existing arrangements. At best, he is spelling them out.

It has already been said that the Lords amendments are quite wide ranging. Amendment No. 6 states that the information

"may relate directly or indirectly to any risk of national security or to a terrorist."

In an intervention, my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) asked what reason there might be for taking advantage of the measures that the Home Secretary wants in the Bill if there is no suspicion.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I am confused by the argument about disclosure. If there is no question of suspicion of terrorism, what is the trigger for disclosure of information? If organisations and people properly investigating terrorism act on the precautionary principle, might not they be unnecessarily swamped by disclosures if the trigger is not inserted in the Bill?

Norman Baker: I absolutely agree. The Home Secretary should be seeking a rapier, but he appears to want a blunderbuss. That may lead to the intelligence services being swamped, and require them to undertake inquiries with police forces that will detract from their proper work of dealing with terrorism. The proposal may therefore be counterproductive and ineffective.

Last week, the Home Secretary challenged the police service to improve its performance and raise detection rates. The worry is that the police, in looking for every means to do that and ensure that criminals are brought to justice, will be tempted to fish for information from various authorities if they do not have enough evidence otherwise. No hon. Member would support such fishing expeditions. Moreover, there is a possibility that other authorities, including the security services, will be asked for data without much justification.

Simon Hughes: Last year, when we debated the Bill that became the Terrorism Act 2000, we agreed to give the authorities much wider powers than normal to deal with serious activity. Many people outside the House are worried that it would be unhelpful and invasive of citizens' liberty to equate serious crime that is terrorism-linked with the motoring offences referred to by the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), or with sex offences or public drunkenness. All such matters are subsumed under one head, but does my hon. Friend not agree that they should be distinguished one from another and placed into categories such as "serious", "terrorist-related", and so on?

Norman Baker: My hon. Friend is right. Everyone wants to deal with the threat of terrorism. People are prepared to accept that that may require measures whose impact on civil liberties is in excess of what we would normally condone, but they are not prepared to accept measures which go far further and which might impact on people with no connection with terrorism whatever.

The Home Secretary must find a way to ensure that people who need to be apprehended and prevented from carrying out acts of terrorism or from posing a threat to national security are dealt with effectively. However, he must do so without infringing those civil liberties that the House is seeking to defend by introducing the Bill in the first place. I do not think that the Home Secretary has got that balance right yet.

Mr. Allan: I am very interested in my hon. Friend's argument, but the question of workability was raised earlier and it is important. Does my hon. Friend share the concerns about clause 102 that have been raised by communication service providers? They fear that the Government will end up with legislation that will be unworkable for the security forces, as it would require very close co-operation between technicians and Government in dealing with large amounts of data. Under the present proposals, that co-operative spirit does not exist.

Norman Baker: The Government have proposed a code of practice and changed the terminology used in the Bill. It is sensible to produce a draft code of practice in advance, and I give the Home Secretary credit for that. However, it is worth noting the many objections expressed by the communications industry, and the Confederation of British Industry. The CBI is normally the Government's best friend, but it objects to some parts of the Bill. It is unusual to receive representations from the CBI in connection with a Home Office Bill, so it is clear that the matter is one for business as well as for the civil liberties groups that have contacted us at great length.

The worry is that, without any suggestion that national security or terrorism is involved, almost anyone suspected of any activity can trigger the type of investigations involving data sharing that more properly relate to national security and terrorism.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes): I am listening to the hon. Gentleman carefully, but will he confirm that he realises that we are talking not about the power to access information, but about clarifying the legal position of the communication service providers in retaining data? As for workability from the point of view of the communication service providers, will the hon. Gentleman explain how the link with national security will work to help those providers decide to retain certain data? How will they distinguish data that might be shown to be linked to a national security inquiry, and other data that might be shown not to be so linked?

Norman Baker: Opposition Members do not draft legislation. We draft amendments and point out faults in the Government's proposals. It is for the Government to produce measures that are proportionate and meet the objectives that they have set out. Opposition Members' duty is to point out disproportionate measures that could have a huge impact on civil liberties. It is up to the Government to respond to the concerns expressed in this debate, among Labour Back-Benchers, in the other place and elsewhere that the Bill is disproportionate and could have deleterious effects.

Beverley Hughes: I should like to press the hon. Gentleman a little further on the second question that I put to him. Representations received by the Home Office from communication service providers deal with the question of how they could make work measures that are limited only to national security. The Bill gives service providers a legal power to retain data, but their problem is how to distinguish data that might be shown to be linked to national security from data that are not. The providers say the amendment is not workable.

Norman Baker: The Minister advances an odd proposition. The Government must produce a code, and they must consult to ensure that it meets the objections that the Minister has expressed. She proposes that, because one person may be caught in a particular net, we should catch all information relating to any person who happens to be near that net because that person may fall into the category that the she has set out. That is an odd suggestion. It confirms the unease felt by many hon. Members that the Government are less than focused when it comes to the question of who should be caught by the Bill.

Simon Hughes: Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan), I am a lay person on this issue. However, if I were a user and transferrer of data, I might one day send entirely innocent communications that were totally unrelated to crime and the next day send information that might be related to crime. How would the providers be able to distinguish between what I do today and what I do tomorrow? It is not a practical proposition to expect them to be able to do that. The burden on the Government is to show that their proposal is practical, but we have not been persuaded that it is.

8 pm

Norman Baker: My hon. Friend makes the point very well, and the Government have to respond to it over the next 24 hours or so if they are to convince us and others that theirs is the right way forward.

I do not wish to take much more of the House's time, because I know that other Members wish to speak. However, the House of Lords has done us a favour by considering the Bill in rather more detail than we have had the time for. If the House authorities had provided more time for Second Reading and the Committee stage in this House, we would not have had to consider the range of amendments that the Lords have made to the Bill. I hope that the Government will learn the lesson that they should give the Commons more time for Second Readings and Committee stages and should not rely on the House of Lords to do the work that should be done initially in this place.

I hope that the Government will also reflect on the fact that the new and modified House of Lords, which is the Prime Minister's own creation, has inflicted a huge number of defeats on the Government in relation to this Bill. Even though there was agreement on the principle as to where we want to get to, it inflicted those defeats by very large majorities. I hope that the Government are listening to that—I think they are—and will reflect on the specific, focused points that the House of Lords has made. We are not convinced that it is appropriate to have such a wide-ranging definition in the Bill. We therefore support the Lords amendments and we hope that the Government see their merit.

We welcome the movement that the Government made in the House of Lords on third-pillar matters and particularly on sunset provisions and on the improved and more specific wording. We, too, are at loss as to why the Government have tabled amendments to the Lords amendments and, in particular, want to insert paragraph (e) to Lords amendment No. 48. Such provisions are too far reaching and are not merited under the emergency provisions in the Bill. As the hon. Member for West Dorset said, I hope that the Government will consider withdrawing that provision.

We support the Lords amendments. We hope that the Government will take a few more steps towards making the Bill the one that we all want it to be—one that deals effectively with terrorism, but without taking away our civil liberties.

Mr. Fisher: I join others in thanking the Home Secretary for his constructive and courteous attitude. It set a helpful tone for the debate and recognises that both sides of the House agree with his objective, which is to get at terrorists and ensure that they do not go undetected. That aim unites us all.

When the Minister responds to the debate, will she say something more about the relationship between suspicion and disclosure? Surely, for a variety of reasons, if suspicion is to be targeted on the objective that we all share, it has to be based on evidence. If it is not, it will

[Mr. Fisher]

be a loose and free-ranging suspicion that will lead to many of the unfortunate and ineffective consequences that other hon. Members have described.

Such an approach involves not only a good principle of legal practice but, as Opposition Members have said, makes good practical sense. Of course, the Home Secretary made the perfectly fair point that the relationship between crime—and sometimes even misdemeanour—and terrorism is complicated and that the one may lead to the other. We all agree that there is a link that may be helpful in detecting terrorism and in bringing terrorists to justice.

When the Home Secretary gave the example of credit card fraud, he appeared to encourage the idea that anyone who identified such fraud should bring it to the attention of the security forces. As the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) pointed out, that would lead to the most absurd situation in which the police and the security forces would be deluged with unhelpful and unfocused information that would all have to be sifted just in case those committing fraud were involved in terrorism.

Surely, to provide practical help to the security forces and to the police, there must be a more evidential base to suspicion than simply the existence of a misdemeanour or crime. Unless we support the Lords amendment and focus more on the problem than the Bill's wording does, we will not assist the security forces and the police to focus their concerns on the things that matter and not on generalised suspicions.

I may have misunderstood the position. As the Home Secretary knows, I am not a lawyer. However, because of that real danger, I intend to support the Lords amendment unless he can reassure the House and those of us who still have reservations about, as the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) said, relatively few aspects of the Bill. We need to be reassured that the provisions for suspicion focus on the main objectives and will not lead to a trawl through many types of crime in a way that will not help the security forces to achieve the aim that we all share of identifying terrorists and bringing them to justice.

Mr. Burnett: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we cannot live in a Stalinist world in which every Tom, Dick and Harry reports this, that or the other? Something must precipitate the inquiries. There must be suspicion and that suspicion will almost always be related by the security forces to the police, who will then be able to act according to the terms of the Lords amendment.

Mr. Fisher: I concur entirely with the hon. Gentleman. However, as I have nothing more to add, I shall draw my remarks to a close.

Beverley Hughes: I wish to reply to some of the points that hon. Members have raised. Clearly the common thread in these Lords amendments is the extent to which there is a link between terrorism and non-terrorist crime. However, the fettering of the proposed powers in the Bill to deal with only those crimes that relate to national security or terrorism would be a serious impediment to the police and the other law enforcement agencies getting at terrorists.

Simon Hughes: We just do not accept that the current terms of the Bill, with the width of the door through which people can go, can be fettered in the way that the Minister suggests. When we considered the Terrorism Act 2000, the Government never made the case that any crime could be linked to terrorism. It is a totally new argument that does not appear to be supported by the facts.

Beverley Hughes: The Government disagree with the hon. Gentleman on that. The key issue is the point at which public authorities, communication service providers or the police have to make the decision about using the powers in the Bill. They will or will not be able to foresee a link between terrorism and crime. The point that the law enforcement agencies strongly stress is that, at that stage, faced with information or a body of evidence, an assessment is often extremely difficult, until pieces of information from different sources start to be put together and the picture of the jigsaw that might point to terrorism can emerge.

Simon Hughes *indicated dissent.*

Beverley Hughes: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but the amendments would prevent the pieces of that jigsaw from being put together. They would prevent the accumulation of data that would allow the authorities to begin to see a link with terrorism.

Mr. Fisher: Surely the Minister is simply describing good police detective practice—something that already happens in criminal law and in the detection of other terrorist acts. It happened throughout our attempts to prevent terrorism in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. It is good detective practice to bring together disparate pieces of information. From what the Government have said, they have not demonstrated that new powers are necessary.

Beverley Hughes: My hon. Friend is correct: that is the premise of good detective work. However, without access to the information—or if the information is not volunteered, as many of these provisions would allow—the piecing together of that information and the execution of that detective work cannot take place, or cannot do so within a time scale that would be beneficial in the investigation of terrorism.

In relation to the disclosure powers in part 3, I remind Members that the provision merely harmonises existing provisions in the Acts listed in schedule 4. Some of the provisions relating to three particular Acts already allow for disclosure for criminal investigations: the Utilities Act 2000, and two measures passed under Conservative Governments—the Water Resources Act 1991 and the Chemical Weapons Act 1996. Those measures already allow for disclosure at the investigative stage for criminal investigations.

The provision is not new; it merely provides that the measure will pertain throughout those gateways. Instead of having to wait for the start of proceedings—as is the case with some of the other provisions in the schedule—it will be possible for information to be passed throughout all the gateways. The matter will already have been debated by the House and agreed procedures will already have been laid down in statute for the passage of that information. There will be a process of harmonisation, enabling those Acts to be used to share information—not necessarily at the proceedings stage, but at the investigation stage.

Mr. Letwin: Will the Minister tell us whether the Government's proposed paragraph (e) to Lords amendment No. 48 on the Schengen acquis will be removed to the extradition Bill?

Beverley Hughes: We have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said. We are considering it carefully, and we may be able to make some progress on that point that we can announce tomorrow.

In relation to parts 10 and 11, I refer again to some of the points I made to the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) and remind Members that we are not talking about access to communications data but the power of the providers to retain that data and—

Mr. Allan: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Beverley Hughes: I am sorry I cannot; I have only one minute to conclude my remarks.

Providers need the assurance that if they decide to retain data, the data will be legally retained, so the Lords amendment is not workable because it will create confusion, and communication service providers will not have the legal assurance that they need and that the clause is designed to give them.

In relation to part 10, we want the police to have the judgment of hindsight. It is not possible for them always to know where something will lead, so it is important that they have powers to investigate and identify criminals even when they cannot be absolutely certain that there is a terrorist link.

It being fifteen minutes past Eight o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Orders [19 November and this day].*

Lords amendment disagreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Lords amendment No. 48 and Government amendments (a) and (b) thereto agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in their amendment No. 6:—

The House divided: Ayes 320, Noes 213.

Division No. 107] **[8.16 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin

Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Mr. Tony McNulty.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Andrew
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fisher, Mark
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McDonnell, John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen

Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waller, Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Stunell and
Mr. Charles Hendry.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 8, 38, 40 and 44 disagreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 7, 39, 41 to 43, 45 to 47 and 49 to 64 agreed to [one with Special Entry].

Clause 21

SUSPECTED INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST: CERTIFICATION

Lords amendment: No. 9, in page 10, line 38, leave out "an international" and insert "a".

8.30 pm

Mr. Blunkett: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this, it will be convenient to take the following: Lords amendments Nos. 10 to 20, Lords amendments Nos. 21 and 22 and Government amendments (a) to (f) thereto.

Mr. Blunkett: Part 4 rightly received a great deal of attention in Committee in this House and in the House of Lords. It has also been debated publicly at considerable length, and understandable concerns have been expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House during the Bill's passage.

Considerable progress has already been made in clarifying the role of the Special Immigration Appeals Commission, and its relationship with other aspects of the judicial process and with the Home Secretary's role in certification. We seek tonight to find a way forward to complete the unification of the two sides of the House and secure the good will of those of all parties about the way in which the procedures should operate.

All parties have expressed the wish to see the threat of terrorism and those who pose a threat internationally and whom this country currently hosts dealt with decisively. We have disagreed about how far we should go in deratifying the European convention and on the removal of people to countries where their lives and well-being might be at risk. Concerns have been expressed that any kind of detention, as an alternative to removal, is a threat to human rights. We have sought together to try to find a process that gives sufficient guarantee of due process to enable people to feel that, in the difficult circumstances that we face, we have found a suitable avenue for achieving the proportionate balance that we have talked about over weeks and months.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Part 4 rests on the derogation from article 5 of the European convention. Has the Home Secretary read the comments of David Pannick QC, one of the country's leading barristers, that the derogation from article 5 is unlawful because, first, the European Court of Human Rights is unlikely to accept that we face a public emergency threatening the life of the nation and, secondly, even if it did accept that, the Government will not be able to establish to the Court's satisfaction that detention without trial is strictly required by the exigencies of the situation? Can the Home Secretary assure us that David Pannick is wrong in his interpretation of the law, because if he is correct part 4 is at serious risk of collapsing?

Mr. Blunkett: I have seen David Pannick's comments. I have a great deal of respect for his judgment and the Home Office has made use of it on several occasions, but we do not believe that he is correct, nor do any of the lawyers we have consulted. Subject to the passage of the Bill in the next 48 hours, we shall, as we said we would, deposit the derogation at Strasbourg. We believe that that step will complete the necessary process.

In two sets of discussions with United States Attorney-General John Ashcroft today, it was made wholly clear that the international threat remains. Although we have made enormous progress on Afghanistan and al-Qaeda, we have not undermined that network, the tentacles of which stretch across the world. John Ashcroft described the process as stretching from those who have a conception of an idea, through those who plan based on the idea, to those to execute it. All three steps can involve different groups, in different parts of the world, operating in different spheres and at different times. That is why we believe that the threat that became apparent immediately after 11 September has not diminished.

Jeremy Corbyn: No one in the House is in favour of terrorism or terrorist attacks, but many of us believe that the criminal law should be used to apprehend people who commit or who are planning to commit criminal acts. Will the Home Secretary explain why this country, almost alone in Europe, is proposing such draconian measures and derogation from human rights conventions when other countries believe that their criminal law is sufficient to deal with the threat?

Mr. Blunkett: As I said on Second Reading and in Committee—I regret the need to repeat myself, but doing

[Mr. Blunkett]

so is necessary because we must take a measured approach this evening—not only do we accept that there is an international threat and that we are in danger of hosting, as many have accused us of doing, those who engage in organising, funding or perpetrating international terrorism, but we believe that we are at greater risk than many other countries because of our declared and clear alliance with the United States, for which that country's people are deeply grateful, and because in the minds of those who have engaged in terror we are associated with the international action taken against the terrorists.

We need to update our preparedness, our legislation and our actions against terrorism—even in a way that has been denounced by other countries, including those to which my hon. Friend refers—and to reflect the nature and the response to the threat to the United States and elsewhere, albeit not to the extent that the United States has found necessary. On Second Reading, in Committee and on several other occasions the House has reflected on the fact that we have not suggested the sort of measures that the United States has felt it necessary to take in terms of detention or military tribunals in order to deal with the perceived threat.

Mr. Fisher: Members on both sides of the House agree that we are under threat from terrorism—the whole world is under threat from terrorism, this country perhaps more than most others apart from the United States. We were under threat from terrorism before 11 September, and that threat may have increased since, but that is not the test for derogation. Mr. Pannick and others who support him say that the test is not whether we are under threat from terrorism, but whether the threat is so severe that it threatens the life of the nation. Nothing the Home Secretary has said on Second Reading, in Committee or tonight takes that necessary step to extend the threat of terrorism, which obviously exists, to a threat that threatens the life of this nation. That is a far more severe test, and not one that the Home Secretary will find it easy to demonstrate.

Mr. Blunkett: I say with great sadness that I fear that I shall not be able to convince my hon. Friend. We know what happened on 11 September, and I think that most people are aware of the time that it takes to organise acts of terror, some of which have been detected. I have mentioned previously those in Jordan and the proposed attack on the American embassy in Paris. There are also the well-known Tanzanian and Kenyan US embassy attacks in 1998. Such attacks take a long time to prepare. They are organised and funded on the basis that they will disrupt, as we saw at the World Trade Centre, both the economic life and activity of a nation. There is not simply the act; there is also the knock-on or spin-on effect on the life of the nation.

If people do not believe that what happened on 11 September has not had a dramatic effect on the life of the United States, on its economy and on the economy of the world, they have been living in a different world from the one that the rest of us inhabit. It has had that effect, and everyone knows that. It has changed the perspective.

I cannot guarantee that there will not be an attack on the United Kingdom—nor can I say that there will be such an attack. We started the debate on the basis of whether we take decisive action of the sort that is proposed. It behoves us to consider whether we believe that we would find what we are proposing acceptable if a major attack took place.

Norman Baker: The test that has to be satisfied to allow derogation to be justified is a high one, as the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) has said: the essence of the life of the country must be under threat. The right hon. Gentleman said on 15 October, more than a month after the terrorist attack on New York, that there was no immediate threat to the United Kingdom. Of course terrorism exists, but there is not an immediate threat to the essence of the country.

Mr. Blunkett: I am in a cleft stick. In seeking to ensure reassurance, which I have done to the best of my ability over the weeks after 11 September, and to ensure that the life of the nation was not immediately disrupted by a change in people's behaviour, it should not be assumed that people did not believe that there is and remains a threat to the life of the nation.

I am posing the question whether people believed on the 12th, or believe it now, that there was or is a threat. I believe that the threat has not diminished. I take the same view now as I took the day after 11 September. The question that must be answered is whether people think that what we are seeking to do under part 4 is justified if a substantial attack took place now. I suggest that they would. Taking action to preclude that threat to the life of the nation has to be the right thing to do, rather than taking the action after the life of the nation has demonstrably been threatened.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): The only issue on which I voted against the Government in this context is judicial review. I shall listen with great interest to what my right hon. Friend has to say about that. Is he aware that in the previous Parliament I asked his predecessor a number of questions at meetings of the Select Committee on Home Affairs about those who are alleged to have been much involved in terrorism abroad, who were using Britain as a safe haven, but who for various reasons could not be tried? It would be naive of us not to accept—there is one such case in the United States—that there remain a number of people who, in my view, are certainly a danger to communities abroad and to Britain itself.

8.45 pm

Mr. Blunkett: I agree entirely; that is why we must take the action that we are proposing. In two seconds, I shall deal with the issue of judicial review, which has strongly exercised my hon. Friend and many others, including Members of the House of Lords.

First, however, we are endeavouring to answer the question of how to deal with the situation, either by withdrawing—temporarily or otherwise—from the European convention on human rights and taking action to remove people elsewhere in the world, or by removing the power to detain or remove people in circumstances in which the usual court proceedings, because of the risk posed to the security and intelligence services and those working for them, do not allow us to present that evidence. We are dealing with that tonight.

We have chosen the road of proportionality and the middle ground. People have accepted that the Special Immigration Appeals Commission, unanimously set up by both Houses, was an appropriate avenue for presenting such evidence in the circumstances that I have just described—it would not be appropriate to present such evidence in open court—on the certification of the Home Secretary, to remove someone, either on security grounds or because their presence was not conducive to the public good. Now we are having to decide whether, when we cannot remove someone without putting their life at risk, that mechanism is appropriate to detain them, albeit with constant reviews of the position and given the fact that that the individual can leave the country, should they find a safe place to go.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I wish to raise two matters with the Home Secretary. First, Government amendment (a) states that the Special Immigration Appeals Commission will be deemed

"a superior court of record".

What does that mean, other than that some proceedings will be subject to recording? Secondly and more substantially, the Home Secretary will know that, under the Special Immigration Appeals Commission Act 1997, there are special procedures that, for example, enable the tribunal to hold that some parts of the evidence should be withheld from the detained person and, indeed, that he or she may not necessarily be present during the proceedings. Is there anything in the Government amendments that changes the position under the 1997 Act? I am not aware of any such provision.

Mr. Blunkett: I was about to deal with the issue of making SIAC an administrative court and superior court of record.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman described the situation correctly. Elements of presented evidence are withheld, but not from the advocate appointed on behalf of the individual.

Mr. Hogg: He is appointed, not chosen.

Mr. Blunkett: He is appointed for that purpose, although the individual can choose legal representation. As I have said in previous debates, the individual can, if they wish, retain that advocate in the Court of Appeal and the House of Lords.

I have it on good authority that those who have expressed the gravest concern about judicial review—Law Lords and ex-Law Lords in the House of Lords—believe that the designation of SIAC as a superior court of record and administrative court will meet their concerns because its procedures will provide the equivalent of judicial review.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): May I assist? A court of record simply means that the proceedings are recorded with a view to them subsequently being subject to scrutiny on appeal or by way of precedent. As there is no appeal from SIAC except by way of law, and as it is not a court of precedent, what is the point of making it a court of record?

Mr. Blunkett: It establishes—beyond peradventure, as Lord Heseltine would have said—the position, the status and the record, which can be carried forward. My hon. and learned Friend is always helpful to me. I know that he comes into the Chamber for that purpose alone. I look forward to his being helpful to me again and again, for many years to come.

The right of appeal on those aspects that would be appropriate to the Appeal Court of the House of Lords will be granted. I take the word of those who, over many generations, have been engaged in the law that that overcomes their concerns in respect of the issues that we have debated at length—for example, how we deal with a review of a review, where the evidence that must be adduced and presented must be in the same form, with the same complete security, as in the previous review.

That is why we argued the case in terms of whether the Special Immigration Appeals Commission needed a new SIAC to review it. If that means designating a superior court of record and confirming the level of the judiciary involved, as in a Crown court, so be it. In other words—just to show my hon. and learned Friend that I have some grasp of the law—the Crown court cannot be judicially reviewed as a Crown court.

Mr. Weir: In Scotland any decision by a Government Department can be subject to judicial review by the Court of Session. Under the new legislation, will the matter be decided only by SIAC, and will the Scottish court no longer be able to carry out a judicial review?

Mr. Blunkett: On that very issue, I was pleased to help one of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues, who participated in the debate in Committee, having missed Second Reading because she was in her constituency. I hope that the hon. Gentleman was not otherwise engaged at the time, as it would be a shame to go over the explanation again. I explained at enormous length the operation of the Special Immigration Appeals Commission and its jurisdiction. I do not want to be unhelpful, but as any hon. Member who was present on Second Reading and in Committee will recall, we took every intervention. Whatever else hon. Members disagree about, they cannot deny that we have spelled out in words of one syllable how SIAC works.

In the present context, we are seeking to deal with the situation of people who would otherwise have been removed on the certification of the Home Secretary, who appeal through SIAC, and who are to be detained if they cannot be removed. We are trying to ensure that the process works.

Mr. Letwin: I hope that the Home Secretary will accept my question as genuinely helpful. Does he agree that when the noble Lord Donaldson accepted the amendment, the view that he took—he holds a special position in our judiciary—was that the effect of denominating SIAC as a superior court of record would be to turn it into a clear part of the High Court and give it all the powers of judicial review that would otherwise pertain to the High Court, but with the special procedures of SIAC in place, so that the information made available by the security services would not be compromised when it was given to the court?

Mr. Blunkett: That is entirely correct. I am grateful for the succinct presentation, as ever, of the way in which Lord Donaldson and others who have examined the

[Mr. Blunkett]

provision understand it to work. It is on that basis that we are resisting amendments Nos. 21 and 22 and seeking to gain agreement on the way forward on this specific issue. I know that some hon. Members on both sides of the House will remain convinced of the position that they held from the beginning, which is that this part of the Bill should not be proceeded with. We must continue to have a genuine disagreement on that point. However, we have done our utmost to secure the agreement of those who understood the reasons for the provisions, but were concerned about the nature of the process.

Simon Hughes: With regard to court procedures, first, does the Home Secretary accept that it is possible at any level for courts to sit in secret and that the Government can at any stage issue a public interest immunity certificate, which means that some evidence or information may not be revealed? Secondly, one of his concerns may be that judicial review will often be used or often be successful, or that it will be abused and cause delay. The evidence is that it succeeds about one in 100 times, and it has never succeeded in relation to SIAC so far. If he has that concern, does he accept that one could time limit a period by which a judicial review could be made, in order to deal with any possibility that it might be used as a delaying tactic?

Mr. Blunkett: Of course, the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question relates directly to the second part, as one would agree to the second only if one accepted the first, which involves the holding of proceedings in camera in a normal court and the evocation of public interest immunity to the point where not only the evidence that is presented would be protected, but those presenting it and those working on behalf of the security services. The security services made it absolutely clear to me—I do not think that I am breaching any confidence in saying this—that they would bring no cases forward if we used the normal court system and attempted to use public interest immunity.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: Blackmail.

Mr. Blunkett: It is not blackmail. If I am asked about why we are not using public interest immunity and the potential for part of the evidence to be considered in camera, there is no point in shouting from the Back Benches when I give the answer. The security services do not believe that it is possible to hold in camera a case in which those who have not been designated under security legislation to be able to hear and take evidence would inevitably have to do so. In the past, evidence on public interest immunity has led judges to rule that those who were prepared to give evidence—such people will often have been working on behalf of the security services at tremendous risk to their lives in circumstances that none of us would ever want to experience—had to present themselves and be exposed to the accused person. In such circumstances, those people can be committed to almost certain death.

Jeremy Corbyn: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall do so, because I hear total disbelief from behind me. I do not hear that in front of me.

Mr. Hogg: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I have provoked that question, but let me be provoked by my own side for a moment.

Jeremy Corbyn: There is some disbelief on the Benches behind the Home Secretary. I find it astonishing that he should tell the House that the security services are not prepared to bring forward evidence if there is any danger of it being heard in a court, even if it is in camera. It is extraordinary that the security services, which are largely unaccountable to anybody, should decide what the policies of this country should be. Apparently, they are now even deciding what its law should be.

Mr. Blunkett: First, the security services did not determine the law. They indicated to me the circumstances in which they would be able to present particular types of evidence, which is precisely why we have been debating this whole issue. We have almost gone full circle. If somebody does not accept that there are circumstances in which evidence that has been adduced cannot be presented in a court, even if it is under a public interest immunity, and if they do not accept that view in respect of the level or threshold of evidence and the way in which it is presented, in relation to what was adduced in the Rehman case that we debated previously and affirmed by the House of Lords in the middle of October, they will not believe me. They will not be committed to following that process. Some hon. Members would like to undo the result of the vote on establishing SIAC. It was established on the basis that it could take evidence in the way in which I am describing—on appeal against certification by the Home Secretary, whoever he or she may be, in relation to removal on ground of security or because a person's presence is not conducive to the public good. The evidence, to be adduced and presented in precisely the way in which I am outlining, was acceptable for those purposes. That was demonstrated by the Mullah Rehman appeal and affirmed in the House of Lords. Those who believe that all that is wrong will believe that I am wrong.

9 pm

Mr. Hogg: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall, but I want to finish the point. Let us consider the difference between what has already been agreed and carried through and my proposals. We will use the same process but the outcome is not removal in cases where the person's life would be at risk, but detention with review. The process, with the sort of evidence and advocacy that has already been established, has only one different feature. We cannot remove people because, rightly, we will not breach article 3 of the European convention on human rights, and we must therefore detain them.

Mr. Hogg: I am sorry, but I must revert to a point that genuinely troubles me. The amendment designates SIAC as a court of record. In answer to my hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary, the Home Secretary said that that effectively gives SIAC the powers of judicial review. Clause 26 properly and fully sets out the commission's powers. They are not the same as the power of judicial review. It is therefore difficult to reconcile the statement that SIAC will have the powers of judicial review with the statutory powers for which the Bill explicitly provides. How does the Home Secretary reconcile those positions?

Mr. Blunkett: The process is to review the certification signed by the Home Secretary. Those who seek judicial review of SIAC are trying to review the decision of a court. The decision to designate SIAC as a superior court of record affirms that. I shall rest my case so that other hon. Members can speak because we have only one fundamental disagreement. The process is already laid down, albeit that the outcome—detention rather than removal—is different from the original intention. Our disagreement is about the process. I understand why people do not believe that it is acceptable, but I disagree with them, because it is the only way in which to deal with the current circumstances.

Mr. Burnett: Is the Home Secretary minded to extend the rights of appeal from SIAC to the Court of Appeal so that matters of fact and law can be appealed against? In such circumstances can the Court of Appeal sit in camera and use the special advocate procedure?

Mr. Blunkett: I am confining the amendment to the designation of SIAC. The right of appeal on a point of law remains, as described earlier.

Ultimately, we are debating whether hon. Members believe, in the circumstances, that it is appropriate to detain people using the evidence, the threshold and the process of SIAC in the way that was intended for removal and will now be used for detention when we cannot remove.

Simon Hughes: One of the terrible consequences of this procedure is that we have an hour in total for this debate. It is no criticism of the Home Secretary to say that 35 minutes of that hour has been taken up by his explaining the Government's view and answering questions. However, with the best will in the world, it is impossible in an hour for the House to do justice to the arguments about the fundamental issue of keeping judicial review, or to consider the alternative before us in the form of a Government amendment whose genesis lies in a proposal by a former Lord of Appeal and Master of the Rolls. One of our complaints is that, because of the speed of the process, this legislation has needed to come back so that this issue can be revisited—as the Government now accept—and many other interrelated issues as well.

This group of amendments covers three issues, the last of which is judicial review. Government amendments (a) to (f) offer an alternative to the Lords' removal of the original provisions stating that one could not go to judicial review in relation to detention without trial. In relation to amendments Nos. 9 and 13, we are grateful that the Government have accepted the amendment tabled by the Conservatives with the support of the Liberal Democrats and of Irish Members of Parliament, which defines terrorism in the same way, whether it is national or international. That concession is gratefully received. It would have been nonsense to define separately whether someone's motive was connected to activity within or outside the UK or part of it. We also welcome the improvements in the procedure relating to the timetable for review and other matters contained in amendments Nos. 14 to 20.

The nub of this issue, however, is judicial review. I want to tell the House why we should agree to accept the Lords' decision to remove the provisions that suggest that one cannot go to judicial review, and not to accept the alternative. I do so respectfully and carefully, conscious that the amendments come from Lord Donaldson, whom I respect. This is his attempt, supported by others, to find a way through the middle, but I do not accept—I believe that hon. Members on both sides of the House share my view—that it meets the test, or that the amendments satisfy the concerns that have been voiced abroad in the House and beyond.

We would be wrong to derogate from the European convention on human rights and from the Human Rights Act 1998. Nothing that the Home Secretary has said about the issues on which we agree—for example, that there remains an international threat, which I accept without qualification—persuades me that that takes us into the criteria for qualifying for derogation.

The two tests have been set out: there has to be a public emergency threatening the life of the nation, and the resultant action has to be action strictly required by the exigencies of the situation. Like David Pannick, whom we all respect as an authority, the Liberal Democrats' view is that those tests are not met. I honestly believe that, if the Government proceed, they would be at risk of being found to have breached their qualifications for derogation, if it were tested either in a domestic court or in the European Court of Human Rights.

The Home Secretary has been both courteous and conciliatory today, as he has on almost every other occasion that I can remember. I hope that he will accept that, just because my colleagues and I have a different view, it does not mean that we are not of good will on these issues. We shall, I anticipate, reach a different conclusion, but I hope that he accepts that we do so for the same reasons that the Labour party in opposition, on many occasions, perfectly honourably reached a different conclusion on emergency legislation from the Tory Government.

So that there is no doubt, I repeat that we do not accept that detention without trial for people who are not British is a necessary step when others have not been attempted. We should first try to charge and prosecute. Secondly, if the security services cannot proceed because of the rules of evidence, we could amend those rules. Thirdly, we might consider the procedures of the court. Only when we have tried and failed with those, and they have not been considered in the context of the Bill, should we contemplate the further step. We are not persuaded.

We do not go along with the Conservative view that it would be right to have a reservation in relation to the European convention on human rights—that is one of our few disagreements on the substance of the Bill—so we offer a different solution, which we think could be achieved by procedures in the domestic courts.

One reason for believing that our case is justified is that no signatory country to the ECHR, which goes wider than the EU, has yet seen fit to say that it must go down that road. I am not privy to whether those countries might do so, but it is significant that, three months after 11 September, not one other ECHR signatory—that includes all Council of Europe member countries—has changed its position on detention without trial. For me, that is not the persuasive argument, but it is additional strong evidence that we should take into account.

[Simon Hughes]

As I want to allow other colleagues to speak, I shall list my reasons for hoping that the House accepts that SIAC, even as amended by the alternative suggested in the Government amendment, will not work. If hon. Members have any doubts, I refer them to the first day of debate on Report in the House of Lords and the speeches of Lord Mayhew of Twysden, the former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my noble Friend Lord Goodhart and Lord Donaldson. I quote Lord Mayhew, but each speech includes such phrases:

> "My submission is that in the Bill we should not be driven to surrender a precious safeguard against the abuse of power, especially when there is no need for it. If one did so, one could be sure that such a precedent would soon be followed because, in my experience, all departmental Ministers resent judicial review. That in itself is a good reason why it should be cherished."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 6 December 2001; Vol. 629, c. 997.]

That may apply in only one case in a hundred, which is Lord Donaldson's view, and Lord Mayhew may accept that the SIAC amendment route is the right way forward, but that does not pass the test of principle. We must not remove judicial review not only because that in itself is wrong, but because it would make for a better argument for removal in lots of other cases, at home and abroad.

Mr. Letwin: We agree on so much, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that Lords Donaldson and Mayhew are minded to accept the Government amendment because it does not preclude judicial review? Indeed, amendment (a)(4) specifically provides for a superior court to question the legal proceedings and makes it possible by denominating SIAC part of the High Court. That is precisely why, in the opinion of Lords Donaldson and Mayhew and of my party, the amendment no longer constitutes a devastating precedent of the kind that so many noble Lords rightly referred to in that debate.

Simon Hughes: I welcome the way in which the hon. Gentleman has approached the Bill and I understand the argument, but we have not reached the same conclusion for the following three reasons, which I shall describe.

First, it strikes us as illogical to try to exclude judicial review in this case, outside the new process that is being suggested, when it was not excluded in the earlier "concept in use" context of SIAC. Secondly, as was said by many speakers on the Cross Benches and on both sides of the House of Lords, one can never tell what procedural or other irregularity one might wish to question. It might be an executive decision by the Home Secretary to issue a certificate to detain someone, or—although I accept that this would be much less likely if the proposal were accepted—a procedure further up the chain. Certainly, however—my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) asked about this—it cannot be the case that a process that might preclude an appeal on the basis of fact and allow it only on the basis of law would not allow an adequate remedy.

9.15 pm

Finally, we think that, for reasons of precedent and principle, if the measure adds nothing it will either never be used, or be used so rarely that it will exist merely as a reserve power to be employed in exceptional circumstances. It cannot be necessary to preclude an eventuality that we may or may not be able to anticipate.

Mr. Letwin: That is the nub of the issue. Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that in that same debate in the Lords, which I attended myself, Lord Donaldson agreed that a judicial review by the High Court—not SIAC—would necessitate the adoption of SIAC rules, because it would otherwise be impossible for the security forces to reveal to, for example, a barrister appointed by al-Qaeda, who might be an al-Qaeda adherent, information on which the reasonableness of the Home Secretary's decision could alone be judged? Did it not become clear at that point that the distinction between the High Court's adoption of SIAC rules and the redenomination of SIAC as the High Court was, in fact, no distinction?

Simon Hughes: If the amendment would make SIAC a court rather than an administrative tribunal—it appears that it might do so, but I put this neutrally—that is certainly an improvement. It is interesting that we are creating what is effectively a new administrative court, or at least a new administrative division of the High Court, at this stage rather than next year, when we shall look at the review of the court system—although the process is not entirely satisfactory.

Colleagues in the other place who are more eminent than me in terms of practice in these matters—including Lord Thomas of Gresford and Lord Lester of Herne Hill—have suggested to me that there may be circumstances that are not covered by the new, enhanced power of SIAC to review cases. It is also felt that the onus must be on the Government to show that there is a public interest against an ability to opt for the conventional occasional judicial review.

Mr. Fisher: Will the hon. Gentleman help me to understand what Lord Donaldson proposes? Is he saying that, having been designated a court of record, SIAC will be able to constitute the location for judicial review of decisions that it has already reached? Is that not legally tautologous?

Simon Hughes: Courts can do that. If the hon. Gentleman, who is very assiduous, reads the speech made by Lord Donaldson on Report, he will see that the Court of Appeal has sometimes been called on in the middle of its hearings to perform a sub-exercise involving judicial review of an issue raised in another court. Bizarrely, that can happen.

There is a wider point, however—the point on which our analysis differs with that of Lord Donaldson. For reasons given by the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews), merely conferring a power to record proceedings, and conferring greater status, will not necessarily deal with every eventuality. Furthermore, it will not confer all the powers that may be needed to check the decisions of the Secretary of State in regard to detention, and the processes thereafter. It will not cover all the safeguards connected with human rights that a citizen might need—safeguards relating to time, language translation, legal aid and advice and, most important, the certainty of knowing the case against him or her at every stage. We believe that that can be dealt with adequately either by the court going into secret session—my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon asked about that too—or by the issue of a public interest immunity certificate or the like.

Mr. Hogg: As the hon. Gentleman would accept, one of the problems is that SIAC has a power to withhold from the detained person pieces of evidence. As I understand the procedure contained in the Bill, no one will be in a position to review whether SIAC's decision to exclude bits of evidence from the detained person was good or bad. That seems to be fundamentally unjust.

Simon Hughes: The right hon. and learned Gentleman's point is strong. As the Home Secretary said, one court will not judicially review another court, so it cannot do that. An important evidential point about the defendant meeting the case against them may never be able to be looked at again. Those seem to be among the reasons why the procedure does not give assurance.

I am conscious of the fact that normally the reviewing court, whether it has examined local council decisions or other decisions, has accepted the view of the initial court, but just occasionally it intervenes and says that that court got it wrong: procedurally and evidentially, there was an unfairness. It is that overriding final judgment that is being limited, which seems unjustified, even in exceptional circumstances.

Mr. Letwin: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is at least the proposition of Lord Donaldson, who I repeat is in a privileged position in talking about this matter, that under subsection (4) of Government amendment (a) to Lords amendments Nos. 21 and 22, the court of appeal could question the proceedings of the commission in respect of the matter raised by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg)? That is critical.

Simon Hughes: Again, we are showing the weakness of the timetable. There is a limitation in subsection (4) of the amendment to the original Act setting up SIAC, which I shall read into the record:

> "A decision of the Commission shall be questioned in legal proceedings only in accordance with"

the appeal provisions set out in the original Act, or as to whether derogation was acceptable or not. Those are the two cases.

The fact that we are arguing about whether the alternative gives the guarantees is in itself a final argument for asking the House to reject it. Is it worth risking being found in breach of European law, being out of step with all our other European colleagues and someone being treated unjustly to devise a new procedure? Existing procedure perfectly adequately answers the question. As I hinted earlier, we are willing to accept that judicial review could have a time limit, and that evidence can be protected so that secrecy can be maintained, but the Liberal Democrats are not persuaded that, for this occasion and in this way, either for precedent or principle, judicial review should be written out of this part of British legislation. In the most extreme cases, we need the greatest protection most.

Denzil Davies: I shall be brief. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will be surprised to hear that someone who is sitting behind him and who is a lawyer supports him in the belief that he has gone as far as he possibly can in a very difficult situation. I promise him, and my hon. Friends around me, that I will never do it again.

Jeremy Corbyn: It is the last time.

Denzil Davies: It is indeed.

I find myself in some difficulty in that I appear to be at least indirectly endorsing the views of Lord Donaldson. I was in the House a long time ago when he existed in a different incarnation. Perhaps he was not quite the civil libertarian in those days that he has become since, especially when he was made Master of the Rolls.

I shall not follow the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) down the by-ways of the European convention. If the matter goes to court and if Mr. Pannick represents those who take it to court, the matter will have to be considered. In any case, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has gone as far as he can. Judicial review is a splendid procedure and nobody can be against it, especially lawyers, but it is not perfect. It cannot consider the merits of a case, merely whether a decision is lawful or unlawful. It can also consider whether a decision is reasonable, in the sense of whether a reasonable person would have come to that decision.

The difficult immigration case of Chahal went eventually to the European Court of Human Rights, which trenchantly criticised the UK system of judicial review. However, I do not suggest that that case is on all fours with the present situation. Nobody likes special tribunals but SIAC was set up to try to deal with the real problems of the Chahal case. On balance, I am not sure about the court of record and from my law exams, I seem to remember a concept that lawyers called an error on the face of a record. If SIAC had experienced a procedural problem—for example, evidence had not been properly considered—but not a problem of substantive law, that would be an error on the face of the record and could be considered by the Court of Appeal, which may only consider appeals on points of law. That applies also to errors on the face of the record, which could mean a procedural or evidential error on the part of SIAC. I do not like that approach, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary probably does not like it either.

Mr. Hogg: Is not the right hon. Gentleman conceding, broadly speaking, that even if there is a process of judicial review, that would not address the question that I raised with the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) of whether the decision of SIAC to exclude evidence from the detained person was a reasonable or unreasonable decision? That decision, which goes to the root of justice, could not be the subject of any justiciable appeal.

Denzil Davies: One would have to consider each particular circumstance, but the exclusion of evidence could well be seen to be a considerable procedural defect and would constitute an error on the record.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey cited Lord Donaldson's speech in the other place. One of the most interesting speeches in the other place was made by Lord Lester of Herne Hill, who has

[Denzil Davies]

considerable experience in these matters. I read his speech carefully and he concluded that judicial review would "do no harm" and was of "symbolic value". Symbolism is important, as is doing no harm, but we are legislating in a difficult area and we should not put into legislation, even with the best will in the world, something of which the best that can be said of it is that it would do no harm. I apologise for saying so, especially as a lawyer, but on this occasion my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has just about got it right.

Mr. Letwin: It is absurd that we are left with a minute to discuss this point further, but we are. I shall ask my hon. Friends to abstain in the Division on this matter. We shall see what the other place makes of the proposal. The debate there will be longer, and there are people in the Lords who know more about this subject than any others in the kingdom.

I hope that it will turn out to be true that this is an adequate form of judicial review. On that basis, we shall abstain.

It being half-past Nine o'clock, Mr. Deputy Speaker *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Orders [19 November and this day.]*

Lords amendment agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker *then put the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that at that hour.*

Lords amendments Nos. 10 to 22 agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, That Government amendments (a) to (f) thereto be made—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

The House divided: Ayes 294, Noes 85.

Division No. 108] **[9.31 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*

Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*

Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Don *(Bath)*

Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark

Öpik, Lembit
Paisley, Rev Ian
Price, Adam
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sedgemore, Brian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*

Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Wareing, Robert N
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Tom Brake and
Bob Russell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 39

RELIGIOUS HATRED OFFENCES

Lords amendment No. 23: Leave out Clause 39.

Beverley Hughes: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this we may take Government amendment (a).

Beverley Hughes: The provisions in part 5 of the original Bill would create an offence of incitement to religious hatred. I shall rehearse some of the arguments in favour of such a provision and consider some of the reasons advanced in both Houses against it.

In relation to the original reasoning behind part 5, I remind hon. Members that, contrary to some contentions, the clauses were included because they had a clear connection to the events of 11 September. Many hon. Members are now aware—perhaps more so, since they have read the appendix to the report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs—of some of the reactions that many Muslim people in this country and other parts of the world have had to endure since 11 September. There have been incidents of harassment, threats and incitement. Leaflets claiming that Islam is responsible for things such as intolerance, looting and molestation of women have been published. Websites that make similar claims are proliferating.

Those Members who have argued that the clause has no place in the Bill need to think about the behaviour that has been precipitated against Muslim people. It includes not only individual acts against Muslim people—there have certainly been crimes such as assault—but the growing emergence of propaganda inciting hatred against a religious group.

9.45 pm

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): All hon. Members are interested in what the Minister is saying, but can she help the House by explaining how she would draw the line between proper discussion of the influence of Islam on the treatment of women in many countries and what she feels would be an offence under such a law? I understand where the extreme lies, but many of us ask where the line will be drawn. Given that religion cannot

[Mr. John Gummer]

even be defined in the Bill, what hope is there of drawing that line in a way that will not lead to very considerable restrictions on perfectly proper discussion?

Beverley Hughes: I shall certainly come to that more general point later, but I can tell the right hon. Gentleman now that one of the things that we have been trying to remind Members of during these debates is that the provision arises from the Public Order Act 1986. It will not inhibit rational discussion of any kind, including discussion of the premise or tenets of a religion but deals with the kind of threatening, insulting or abusive words and behaviour that will, or are likely to, incite public disorder. It deals with public order, not the limit of reasonable expression and discourse.

Mr. Hogg: Building on the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) and bringing the Minister directly to Government amendment (a), as I understand it, the Attorney-General will issue guidance on the circumstances in which he will bring proceedings. In reality, does not Government amendment (a) constitute a definition of the law? That guidance, which is not subject to debate or amendment in the House, will be issued by an Attorney-General—I make no personal criticism of him—who is not even a Member of this House. Is that a democratic way to proceed?

Beverley Hughes: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is entirely wrong in his interpretation of what the Attorney-General is proposing. Neither we nor the Attorney-General propose that he take the power to decide the law. With this offence, as with offences involving incitement to racial hatred, the Attorney-General is required to give his consent before a prosecution can proceed, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman will know. The Attorney-General does not determine the ingredients of an offence and he cannot make something criminal that is not a crime under statute. There is a requirement for consent to filter out cases, and I shall expand on that point when I explain Government amendment (a) and the provision on the guidance that the Attorney-General will define.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I be forgiven for being very puzzled as a non-lawyer? Why is it necessary to include this measure—virtuous, or not—in this emergency Bill? I really do not understand.

Beverley Hughes: I started to set out what I thought were the reasons why the provision has been included. One of the reasons is that, as I have just elaborated, it has a direct link with the events of 11 September in terms of not only the features of those events, but some of their consequences for people from some religious groups, particularly Muslims.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Is the Minister not aware that other religious groups feel equally under attack? People from the Hindu community have told me how they feel that they have been threatened by the Muslim community. She suggests that the Government are simply reacting to one form of outrageous activity, but they do not accept that that activity takes other forms as well.

Beverley Hughes: That is not what I am saying. I am explaining why there is an opportunity, precipitated by the events of 11 September, for including the provision in this Bill.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): My hon. Friend has been challenged about what the clause is doing in a Bill on terrorism, and up to now she has not given us a satisfactory response. May I suggest the motivation? The clause has been tacked on as a sop to certain sections of Muslim opinion that have long wanted such protection. It is an anomaly and it should not be in this Bill—wrong clause, wrong Bill. The Lords were right to strike it down.

Beverley Hughes: Once again my hon. Friend is entirely wrong, and I shall come to the reasons why she is wrong in a moment.

The second reason for including the provision in this Bill is the current anomaly in the law, of which hon. Members will be aware. Legislation on incitement to racial hatred protects two religious groups: Jews and Sikhs. Taking the opportunity to expand the provisions on incitement to racial hatred to include religious hatred will extend that protection not only to Muslims but to other religious groups, including Christians. The clause therefore both corrects an anomaly and extends protection.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Government amendment (a) says:

"The Attorney-General may issue guidance".

Will we see the guidance before the Bill completes its passage through both Houses?

Beverley Hughes: I understand that point entirely, and if the hon. Gentleman is patient, I will answer his question.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Unlike the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), I am four-square with the Minister in wanting to give protection to the Muslim community because I understand that this has been a great source of hurt to them for many years. However, like the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), I cannot see why it is necessary to include the provision in this Bill.

Having studied all the case law, in which High Court judges have described race relations legislation as being, among other things, rubbery, I do not understand why the Government do not amend that legislation to make incitement to religious hatred an offence. Why are they introducing a wholly new offence in this Bill? The public mischief that Ministers and others want to deal with is a race relations issue, and the only reason why Sikhs and Jews are protected, and Muslims are not, is that judges have ruled in case law that the legislation does not protect Muslims. May I suggest to the Minister that the Home Office—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is making a speech.

Beverley Hughes: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was in the Chamber during the Committee proceedings when my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) made a powerful speech that addressed the nub of the argument, but he set out the opposing point of view, which the Government and I share, that the route suggested by the hon. Gentleman would not deal with the fact that people are attacked and discriminated against on the basis of religion. There was considerable debate about whether the cause of discrimination is ethnicity, culture or religion, and we came to the view that it is religion. I agree with my right hon. Friend in that regard, and I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman missed that speech.

Mr. Gummer: The scientologists dignify a pyramid selling ramp with the word "religion", but when I say that, many scientologists will feel that I am stirring up hatred against them. Frankly, I am not trying to stir up hatred; I just do not want people to be led astray by that invention by Lafayette Ron Hubbard, who, as I understand it, made a lot of money out of it. If the Bill is passed in its present form, a lot of other people will call a lot of other ramps religion and protect themselves accordingly. I do not think that the Government know what they are doing. They are restricting people's right to point to sheer, outrageous, unbelievably wicked dishonesty.

Beverley Hughes: I do not accept that. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the provision contains operational safeguards, as do the provisions on incitement to racial hatred. The clause establishes a public order offence; it will require the Attorney-General's consent. I do not share the right hon. Gentleman's fears that cults such as scientology will be the subject of offences under the provision.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Beverley Hughes: I shall further explain why the clause should be in this Bill before giving way again.

First, there is a connection between the events of 11 September and the consequences that have flowed from that. Secondly, there is an anomaly in law whereby two groups are protected and other religious groups are not. Thirdly, despite the dissent voiced here and in the other place, there is widespread support for the provision. The view of the Church of England was expressed by the Bishop of Southwark in the other place. The Muslim Council of Britain, the Law Society and the Joint Committee on Human Rights acknowledge the "pressing social need". The United Nations Human Rights Committee noted the increase in harassment after 11 September and pressed the need for reaction.

Since 11 September and subsequent events, we have seen the need to protect vulnerable religious communities. We can—

Ms Abbott: Will the Minister give way?

Beverley Hughes: I am going to complete—

Mr. Hogg: Your hon. Friend wants to intervene.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is giving the Minister a hard time. I will not allow that.

Mr. Hogg: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was not trying to give the Minister a hard time. I was merely trying to bring to her attention the fact that her hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) wanted to intervene.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the right hon. and learned Gentleman should let me chair the proceedings while he sits quietly.

Beverley Hughes: In the operation of the law on incitement to racial hatred offences, we saw a small but important deterrent effect on some of the worst excesses of extreme racist groups. I have no doubt that the provision on incitement to religious hatred would have a similarly significant deterrent effect on the groups that seek to extend their violent and distressing propaganda to Muslims and other religious groups. That is another important reason why it should be included in the Bill.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Will my hon. Friend not concede that she is confusing ethnicity, which we cannot change, and belief, which we choose? I cannot escape from being a middle-aged white English person, but I choose my socialist beliefs and I want them to be challenged and open to discussion.

Beverley Hughes: I acknowledge that view. It is not one that we share.

I refer again to the powerful speech made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton who used his own experience to illustrate the fact that people respond to him in terms of his religion, not his ethnicity. That is the view that we have taken.

Ms Abbott: For the avoidance of doubt, I, too, stand four-square against discrimination against Muslims. One of the problems with the clause is that it does not provide protection against discrimination; it is about incitement to religious hatred. Furthermore, I believe that 99 per cent. of what it is now fashionable to describe as Islamophobia is either an offence under racial hatred legislation, or a straightforward public order offence.

10 pm

Beverley Hughes: There are gaps in the legislation. If Members think about why we need the incitement to racial hatred offence in addition to the other provisions in the Public Order Act 1986 and in addition to the racially aggravated offences provisions, perhaps they will apply that thinking to why we need the incitement to religious hatred offence. Current provisions do not cover every eventuality. They do not cover incitement as it is defined in the Bill: the use of threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour intended or likely to result in public disorder. That is the difference. It is not covered in other parts of the Public Order Act, nor is it covered in the other legislation to which my hon. Friend referred.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): We on the Liberal Democrat Benches are extremely sympathetic to those in vulnerable communities who may be victims of incitement, which extends beyond Muslims and race to, for example, homophobic attacks. We support legislation covering a much wider range of people. Why did the Minister and her colleagues vote against an

[Dr. Evan Harris]

amendment in 1998 that would have included a much wider range? Why does she not introduce such a provision in a wider Bill that covers all vulnerable communities?

Beverley Hughes *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are discussing the amendment that is before us and nothing else.

Beverley Hughes: As I have said, the Bill follows the events of 11 September. The issue of homophobia does not readily spring to mind as something that follows on from that.

A number of arguments have been advanced to demonstrate why the provision should not be in the Bill. I understand that there are concerns about limits to freedom of expression that might result from having an offence of incitement to religious hatred. The Government do not underestimate the concerns that have been expressed by many Members of this place and of the other place that a person should not be prosecuted for expressing their legitimate religious beliefs and for having legitimate debate on and scrutiny of those beliefs.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary undertook to consider the amendment that was tabled by the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), who is in his place, to determine how best to ensure that that limitation on expression did not occur. I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's co-operation. We have closely examined the amendments tabled in Committee that sought to provide that protection. We have also closely examined the amendments that were moved in another place. After careful consideration and the involvement of the right hon. Gentleman, we have concluded that the amendments would not be effective in addressing the concerns that have been expressed—legitimate as those concerns are.

The difficulty is that creating an exclusion from prosecution, or creating a specific defence where, for example, a person cited a religious text, would create a loophole that could and would be exploited by those who deliberately seek to incite hatred. Those are the very people whom we need to catch by this legislation.

Groups have lifted quotes from the Bible out of context and used them as headlines on their literature in order to incite religious hatred. We therefore propose to reinstate an amended clause on incitement to religious hatred—a guidance provision that will provide reassurance on this specific point.

Mr. Hogg: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Beverley Hughes: I will finish my point.

The amended clause will provide guidance from the Attorney-General on the legitimate expression of religious belief that is not likely to amount to an offence of inciting religious hatred.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. If I catch your eye later, Mr. Speaker, I shall make some comments in response to what she has said.

The amendment says that the Attorney-General "may" produce guidance. I would like to see that guidance before any commitment is made, but why does the amendment state that he "may" produce guidance, and not that he will produce guidance? Alternatively, when the Bill goes to another place, will the Minister change the wording so that the Attorney-General will produce guidance?

Beverley Hughes: For reasons to do with legal advice that we received, the word "may" was included in the amendment, but we have made it clear, and the Attorney-General has made it clear on the record, that that guidance will be produced, so there is no difficulty in changing the word "may" to "will". I am happy to tell the right hon. Gentleman that we shall do that when the Bill goes to another place.

Mr. Hogg: That brings us to the nub of the matter, which I have already put to the hon. Lady. The amendment requires the Attorney-General to

> "issue guidance as to conduct in respect of which he will not institute proceedings".

In other words, his guidance will define conduct that may result in proceedings, as well as conduct that will not result in proceedings. That is a form of legislation, to be introduced by guidance from the Attorney-General—I am not criticising him—who is not a Member of Parliament. The guidance is not subject to amendment or even debate; that is not a proper way to operate in criminal law.

Beverley Hughes: In tabling the amendment, the Attorney-General and the Government were responding to the legitimate concerns of Members that the provision should not limit legitimate expression or discussion of religious beliefs. We agree with that. I do not accept the right hon. and learned Gentleman's interpretation of the guidance. As he has outlined, the guidance will exclude legitimate expression and make it clear that such behaviour will not be regarded as criminal; it will not be regarded as inciting hatred or public order.

Mr. Cameron: Is that not the point? Here we are, almost at the 11th hour of the 11th day, discussing the Bill. The Attorney-General may issue guidance; we do not have that guidance and do not know what it will include. This is a complicated area, as the Home Affairs Committee said in its report. Why is it being included in an emergency Bill and why is it being legislated for in this way?

Beverley Hughes: I have gone through the reasons why we think that it is right to include it in the Bill; I am now trying to deal with Members' arguments against that.

Denzil Davies: The amendment refers to conduct consisting of

> "the legitimate expression of religious belief".

What is meant by a legitimate expression, and will that be defined when the guidance comes along?

Beverley Hughes: To answer that question and that of the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron), the Attorney-General is trying his best to make sure that the guidance will be available tomorrow. I cannot commit him to that, but that is his intention. I am fairly confident that Members will be able to see a copy of the guidance tomorrow.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Beverley Hughes: I must respond to the question that my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies) asked about the word "legitimate". We all know what we mean by that. [HON. MEMBERS: "No we do not."] Members will have to wait and see the Attorney-General's guidance. However, the intention, as I have made clear in response to Members' concerns, is that debate and statements about beliefs that are scrutinising, discursive and do not incite hatred—

Mr. Hogg: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you advise us whether such guidance is debatable or amendable?

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter for debate, and the Speaker cannot get involved in debate.

Beverley Hughes: The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) knows that the guidance is a matter for the Attorney-General, if the provision to enable him to issue guidance is enacted.

Mr. Fisher: Does not the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham have a good point? The guidance will create offences. Should that not be written into the Bill? If the Attorney-General is producing guidance, why cannot it be included in the Bill? That is where offences ought to be created, not in guidance.

Beverley Hughes: The intention is not to create offences, but to clarify the kind of behaviour in relation to freedom of expression that the Attorney-General, in consenting to prosecutions going ahead, will not regard as criminal and will regard as a legitimate expression of—

Jeremy Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you help us? The Minister has just referred to the nature of the guidance to be given by the Attorney-General, which clearly has serious implications for the interpretation of the Bill. Is it in order to proceed with the debate about a part of the Bill, when we know that it will be interpreted by the Attorney-General in a way that we are not allowed to see?

Mr. Speaker: Of course it is in order. The hon. Lady is in order. If she was out of order, I would have made that known to her.

Beverley Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Simon Hughes: Does the Minister accept that we are in a nonsensical position? I do not attribute blame to her personally. The House has decided, at the Government's behest, that we must complete the legislation tomorrow. That is the effect of the order that we were made to pass. We are a little more than 24 hours from that. We are discussing the definition of an offence that we have never had. Guidance may be issued, but it can never be debated subsequently and it may be seen by only one House, a couple of hours before the end of proceedings. Would it not be better for the Minister to take the measure away, consult widely and come back, as many of us suggested, when we will try to do what the hon. Lady wants—pass a law that works and in which people have confidence?

Beverley Hughes: No, it would not be better. The guidance is a matter for the Attorney-General. If he is given the power in the Bill to produce the guidance, he will produce it. I cannot give a commitment on when it will be produced, as I am not writing the guidance—the Attorney-General is. I know that it is his intention to produce it as early as possible tomorrow.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies) made a good point. What constitutes a legitimate expression of religious belief is highly subjective—it is capable of innumerable definitions. The hon. Lady is presenting us with a huge power to be conferred on the Attorney-General to define a legitimate expression of religious belief. That will make his life intolerable and give him unwarranted powers. The Bill is not the place for such a measure.

Beverley Hughes: That is nonsense. The Attorney-General has the power. He must give his consent for any offence of incitement to racial hatred. That power of consent will be applied to the offence of incitement to religious hatred, if approved by both Houses. The Attorney-General will be applying the power that he already has. In response to hon. Members' concerns about any limitation on freedom of expression, the Government have offered in the amendment that the Attorney-General will clarify the circumstances that he will not regard as incitement—as public order offences. That is certainly within his power. The provision in the amendment goes a long way to answering the legitimate concern of hon. Members to ensure that we do not limit discussion or scrutiny.

10.15 pm

Denzil Davies: My hon. Friend has spoken about the power of the Attorney-General. As she knows, other measures provide for a discretion that he exercises in the public interest. I suggest to her, however, that the Government are fettering that discretion in respect of the guidelines. If that is the case, should not those guidelines come before the House so that we can debate them?

Beverley Hughes: The provisions do not fetter the responsibility of the Attorney-General to take into account the public interest, which my right hon. Friend mentioned. In addition to that responsibility, the Government amendment clarifies the fact that the guidance will simply say what sort of words and behaviour the Attorney-General will regard as being outside the offence of incitement. That will include legitimate expression of opinion and scrutiny and discussion. In conjunction with existing safeguards, the amendment will reassure people who feared that those expressing their truly held beliefs could inadvertently find themselves being prosecuted for an offence.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): The problem of the Attorney-General and his role in giving guidance is wider than has been suggested. The Bill states that religious hatred is

"defined by reference to religious belief or lack of religious belief."

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

What will be required, therefore, is guidance on what can be said in expressing religious or anti-religious views. The definition of what is legitimate in religious debate will be determined by the Attorney-General and not by us in this House.

Beverley Hughes: In so far as the Attorney-General already has the power to consent to a prosecution, and to the extent that he uses that power, he is required to give his consent. The Government amendment adds nothing new in that respect. This is a matter for the Attorney-General. He is not defining offences, but setting out by way of clarification the behaviour that he will regard as outside the remit of an offence of incitement to religious hatred.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Is not it fair to say that the specific reason why the amendment was tabled is the problem that was presented to us in Committee by the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B Mawhinney)? It related specifically to the question of how he might accidentally, in stating his own Christian faith as a Catholic—*[Interruption.]* I should point out to hon. Members that there is no discourtesy in confusing one denomination of the Christian faith with another; none the less, I apologise to him. Would it not be fair to say that the amendment has been tabled precisely to meet a very specific objection and not to turn the provisions into some sort of pseudo-blasphemy law, as others seem to be suggesting?

Beverley Hughes: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend, because he has taken the argument back to the point at which I started. I reminded hon. Members why the Government amendment was tabled and of the process that had occurred since the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire and others expressed their concerns about the limit on freedom of expression. The amendment is a response to those concerns.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: It is certainly right to say that it was my intervention that caused the Government to think again. I am grateful to them for having done so, although the House must understand that I am not responsible for the answer that they have provided. Given the disquiet on both sides of the House, does not the hon. Lady understand that, as it was peers from all parts of the other place who threw out clause 39, all that is happening now is that we are reinforcing their determination to throw out the clause again tomorrow? Perhaps she might provide them with some encouragement by giving an indication of the view the Government might take if they were to throw out the clause a second time.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury (Ms Hilary Armstrong): She is not that naive.

Hon. Members: Oh!

Beverley Hughes: We believe, for the reasons that I have tried to outline, that the Bill should include the offence. We believe that it is important to protect vulnerable religious communities. The Bill affords an opportunity to put such a provision on the statute book, and we want it to be enacted so that those religious communities can be protected. We are committed to that.

Mr. Bryant *rose—*

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak) *rose—*

Beverley Hughes: I want to make some progress because time is passing.

Simon Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. More than half the debate has been spent on the Minister having to answer questions. As the Chief Whip is in her place, may I make an appeal through you for Government Front Benchers to consider introducing a proposal to extend the time for this debate and the remaining debates? The current position is nonsensical.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that the House has already decided on the matter.

Simon Hughes: Ask her to reconsider.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman can ask the right hon. Lady, but I am not going to do that.

Beverley Hughes: Other hon. Members want to speak and, as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) said, time is moving on and I wish to conclude.

Lynne Jones: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Beverley Hughes: I must make some progress. I have been generous and I hope that hon. Members will understand if I draw my remarks to a conclusion. I know that other hon. Members want to speak.

The limit on freedom of expression is an important argument, to which we have tried to respond. It was also argued that the power should be debated for longer to get it right. I remind hon. Members that the provision is an extension of existing law, not new law. Hon. Members are familiar with the operation of the current law on race hatred. It has worked for years, despite similar arguments against it when it was introduced. We have debated the subject for some weeks. If the mythical better version of the provision genuinely exists, where is it? The Attorney-General recently asked that question. I do not believe that it exists.

Mr. Cameron: Will the Minister give way?

Beverley Hughes: No, I must conclude.

The third argument is that the provision is inappropriate to an anti-terrorism measure. I began my remarks by pointing out the link with 11 September, especially the consequences for some Muslim people. It is therefore appropriate to include it in the Bill.

Sometimes politicians must be prepared to seize the moment and the opportunity. The events of 11 September offer us the opportunity to put the provision on the statute book. Hon. Members here and in the other place must decide whether they are prepared to seize the moment, to correct an anomaly, and to protect vulnerable religious groups from pernicious and vile abuse that fractures communities. We have that opportunity now, not tomorrow or at some vague future date. No one should be under the illusion that another Bill will be presented in a reasonable time to include the provision. It is now or possibly never.

It is evident that almost everyone who has spoken on the matter, whether for or against, in either House, has been united in their condemnation of the words and behaviour that would constitute incitement to religious hatred. Now is the time to ensure that the provision is on the statute book, given the opportunity that the Bill affords.

Mr. Letwin: Let me begin where the Minister left off. She is absolutely right to say that there is consensus in the House that there are grotesque abuses of our social freedoms involved in the victimisation of members of particular religions. We are united in this House—and, I suspect, in the other House, too—in wishing to prevent those abuses. There are also grave problems of religious discrimination. As I understand it, it is lawful in this country at present to put up a sign outside a pub, stating: "No Muslims here" or "No Hindus here". That is a grotesque lacuna in our law, and changes are needed. We are at one in wishing to see those changes made. That is not, however, the issue that we are debating now. The Minister has not introduced a serious and considered Bill on religious discrimination. Indeed, she has not addressed that issue. The Bill addresses a different question.

In the last 43 or 44 minutes, the Minister has illustrated better than we could ever have hoped to do the reasons why this clause does not belong in the Bill, and why the amendment is not a sufficient answer to the problems raised. In her description of the clause, she mis-stated its intent not once, not twice, not thrice but four times—except that, on the fourth occasion, she mis-stated her mis-statement. She described the incitement as an incitement to "disorder". It is not so. Were it so, the matter would be easier to address. It is an incitement to hatred. The record will show that she used the word"disorder" three times. On the fourth occasion, she used the term "order". *[Interruption.]* This is not a matter of being too clever by half. It is a matter of attending to the issue that we are meant to be attending to: the words of the statute. Labour Members appear to believe that we can legislate without attending to the words that we use. We cannot do so. Our tradition of law insists on the ability of a judge to observe what is written. The duty of this House and of the other place is to write the right words. The duty of Ministers is to represent correctly what is intended to be written.

The problem with the clause is that it seeks to prevent an incitement which may occur through the statement of all sorts of propositions that are matters of legitimate belief, and that it seeks to make unlawful a hatred which may be engendered by the expression of those legitimate forms of belief. It does not provide us with an adequate means of distinguishing between those circumstances and the circumstances in which loathsome individuals engage in loathsome acts intended to create public disorder. That is the nub of the issue, and the Minister systematically obscured it.

Mr. Hogg: Is not another very offensive part of this procedure the fact that we are giving to the Attorney-General powers of legislation, yet the House has the opportunity to hear only four or five speeches on the proposition, at the very most? That is not a proper way for us to discharge our responsibilities.

Mr. Letwin: I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend. That is the next problem that the Minister's speech so admirably, if unintentionally, illuminated. The Government have made a genuine attempt, for which we give them credit, to address the problems raised by my right hon. Friend, the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), Protestant as he is. In so doing, however, the Government have merely illustrated the underlying problem of the clause.

It is true, as the Minister repeatedly said, that under the clause as it stood, the Attorney-General would have had the power to adjudicate on which matters he would prosecute. It is, in principle, an advance that, before exercising that power, he should state on what principles he would exercise it. But my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire is right to say that if that is the method chosen for acting in such cases, it is one that will allow of arbitrary and uncertain action.

The Minister illustrated that so pellucidly that she cannot possibly have understood what she was doing when she told the House that the Attorney-General intended to produce the guidance tomorrow. The clause and its amendment were first conceived approximately 48 hours ago. So, in some 72 hours, the Attorney-General will have produced law for this country. What is to guarantee that, 72 hours later, he will not produce some other law? *[Interruption.]* If the Home Secretary is saying that the Attorney-General contemplated producing the guidance much earlier, that information is helpful.

10.30 pm

Mr. Blunkett: I shall be brief, as I merely want to say that the Attorney-General put down on paper the illustration of his guidance in response to requests to do so, including some from Conservative Members, who wanted to see the nature of the beast before voting on it. Far from being awkward, he tried to help, to illustrate what it would be and to respond to suggestions regarding inadequacy.

Mr. Letwin: I accept entirely that the Attorney-General tried to be helpful, but he has produced guidance in a very short time. What is to guarantee that, a short time thereafter, he will not see fit to alter the guidance? What parliamentary check will there be on continuous alteration of the guidance? To what extent can we possibly hope that religious relationships in this country will be given a firm and certain basis in law if he can repeatedly change, without parliamentary check, the basis on which the law is to be enforced? This cannot be the right way to proceed in a matter so subtle, so delicate and so dangerous.

Mr. Bryant: In which case, what parliamentary check is there on the Attorney-General when he or she makes a series of decisions, which amount to case law, about when to proceed or not to proceed in respect of incitement to racial hatred?

Mr. Letwin: As a matter of fact, that is not case law, but let us leave that aside. The point is well taken.

[Mr. Letwin]

On incitement to racial hatred, the Attorney-General makes decisions about whether to prosecute. However, the burden of the argument made not just from those on these Conservative Benches, but from those on the Labour Benches; not just in this House, but in the other place; and not just in Parliament, but outside, is precisely that there is a great distinction between incitement to racial hatred and incitement to religious hatred, as the quality of decision that it falls to the administrator to make in the one is far simpler than in the other. That is precisely the problem that has repeatedly been drawn to the Government's attention, and it will not do to argue as if that difference does not exist.

It is not the duty of the House this evening to rehearse the arguments for or against Government amendment (a), which I believe are strong among Conservative Members and weak on the Government side, although we have inevitably been forced to do so. We are considering purely whether the decision of the Lords, who not just by a majority, but by an overwhelming majority consisting of Labour peers, Cross-Benchers, Liberal Democrats and Conservatives, voted to throw the proposal out, should be reversed in an attempt to reinsert in emergency legislation a provision that is, at very least, highly controversial. Surely anyone who listened to the Minister cannot conclude that the case is made for taking that extreme action.

Lynne Jones: May I reinforce the hon. Gentleman's point? The Minister said that Members will make up their own minds, but the fact is that the majority of Members on both sides of the House who are in the Chamber are concerned about the legislation. Those who will vote with the Government are not here to listen; those who are concerned are present, and Members on both sides share his anxieties.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that remark, which illustrates the point.

Close to the conclusion of the Minister's remarks—I think I quote her reasonably accurately—she said that it is sometimes right for politicians to seize an opportunity. That is true: it is sometimes right for politicians to do that. This is the moment for the Government to seize an opportunity, or rather two.

First, the Government have the opportunity to establish an unremitting cross-party consensus for the fostering of a proper Bill dealing with religious discrimination and religious tolerance that will set the country on the right track for many years—an opportunity that should not be wasted. Secondly, they have the opportunity to enable the two Houses to reach the consensus that we all seek on this necessary Bill by removing from it a wholly unnecessary, ill-considered and damaging clause.

Mr. Fisher: The Minister was right to say that Members in all parts of the House find religious hatred repugnant, and the shadow Home Secretary was right to say that this was about words rather than actions.

The Minister was very complimentary about my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), but his speech on Second Reading was misconceived, because it was entirely about actions and not about words. Here we are dealing with hatred, not the consequences of hatred. The Minister is, however, entirely right to suggest that this is a serious matter. The words of hate can be as vicious and damaging as actions to individuals and communities.

We need only consider the debate about "hate speech" in the United States, which has considered the issue in far more detail over the past 20 years than we have even begun to. We need only recall what happened in Germany between 1927 and the beginning of the second world war, when words galvanised by the Nazis set up all the appalling events of the 1940s. Words are of course damaging, and they need much more consideration than we are giving them here.

These are complicated issues. We talk of joined-up government, but the Government's own position on faith schools in the context of legislation of this kind shows that these are confusing, contradictory areas in which a great deal of nuance and paradox must be dealt with. We cannot legislate at such speed, and in such an ill-considered way. As the Home Secretary and the Minister have said, these matters are vitally important, but they require calm, reflection and time. The measures should not be rushed through like this; they will stand for a long time.

This is not, in itself, an emergency, in that religious hatred, regrettably, has been with us for a long time. We must get the provision right. We can easily return to it later in the current Parliament, or at some other time, but we should return to it in a much subtler, calmer and more considered fashion. This is not the right time, and I cannot support this part of the Bill.

Simon Hughes: I shall be extremely brief, as only a couple of minutes remain.

There are huge issues on the national agenda. There is the issue of how to ensure that people do not suffer discrimination on the basis of their faith. The Bill does not deal with that; nor should it. There is the issue of how to bring people together to respect and value each other, and the issue of faith schools—a linked issue, but one that, properly, is not dealt with here.

We are dealing with one item on a wide agenda—an item that has always been recognised as being hugely controversial. How do we achieve the right balance between free speech and the ability to criticise, whether the criticism is of scientologists, Protestants, Roman Catholics or any world or local faith? How do we ensure that people are respected?

As the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) said, we are trying to achieve that within the narrow confines of concepts such as public order and incitement to hatred by words or actions. Whole issues are left undebated, such as how it can be established that someone has such action in mind—whether it is part of his or her intention. There is a bizarre tautology in the Attorney-General's suggested guidelines, which deem such conduct acceptable if it consists of a legitimate expression of religious belief. By definition, we are trying to establish what is such a legitimate expression.

For a long time, we have argued that it is proper for that issue to be on the national agenda. Long before 11 September, it was an issue. All the people who might have been persuaded that it is now or never have said that they would rather it were debated, if possible, in the context of wider legislation about the blasphemy law, religious discrimination and incitement to religious hatred. The Minister said that it is now or never. That is absolutely the wrong approach. The Scottish Executive have said, "Let us take it out, come back to it next year, talk to people about it, get views around the country and then legislate carefully with maximum consensus."

We are offered guidelines as the concession, as it were. To change from law that is difficult, even if it is in the Bill, to law that will be defined by something not in the Bill and that could change, is to substitute uncertain law at best for less certain and even more difficult to define law at worst.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: Does the hon. Gentleman at least recognise that it was the Government's willingness to address some of the legitimate concerns that were raised on Second Reading that has produced the amendment, which is causing so much difficulty? In that sense, there was a response. Will he press the Government to pursue that response further, rather than this evening?

Simon Hughes: The right hon. Gentleman and colleagues throughout the House and in the other place are right. The Government need time to respond. Issues have been raised by the right hon. Gentleman and colleagues. The other place has only just begun to grasp and grapple with those issues.

The Liberal Democrats are unanimous. Whatever our different faiths or lack of them, whatever our different nationalities, we ask the Government to join with the consensus among Conservative Front Benchers, their colleagues and people around the country and say that this is not the time, this is not the place, and this is not the way. We can protect people in the meantime but we must legislate properly. We must not do it with our faces against the wall and the clock ticking away, resulting in law that no one will be satisfied has adequately met the task. These are huge issues and they cannot be resolved properly in the next 24 hours.

Ms Abbott: The Lords struck out the clause. I rise to urge the House not to reinstate it. The House needs to reflect on the genesis of the demand from the Muslim community for protection against incitement to religious hatred. I know what the genesis was because I was in the House at the time. The genesis of that powerful demand was the debate around Salman Rushdie. It is all about the issue of freedom of speech. If Members had been in the House at that time and had had the debate with the Muslim community that I had, they would know why the clause must be phrased much more carefully.

Furthermore, the powerful speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) was wholly misconceived because he dealt largely with racial discrimination rather than incitement to religious hatred as such. Of course, every hon. Member is against discrimination against Muslims and believes that all religions should be given a measure of protection, but it should be in a properly thought out Bill introduced at the right time. It is the wrong clause. It is the wrong Bill. It represents a serious threat to freedom of speech. I urge the House to support the Lords in striking it down.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: I appreciate the fact that the Home Secretary took seriously the concerns that I expressed in Committee. He was as good as his word. He made arrangements for me to see his officials and we had a constructive discussion. It would be fair to say, without revealing the content of those private discussions, that I alerted officials to the dangers of going down this route, and tried to persuade them of the merits of the way that I thought was best.

The Government have now introduced this legislation. I am grateful to the Minister for saying that the Government would table an amendment to substitute the word "will" for "may" in the amendment, but I have also let it be known that without having sight of the guidance—never mind the issue of guidance itself—there is no way that any responsible House of Parliament could endorse—

It being fifteen minutes to Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Orders [19 November and this day.]*

The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 236.

Division No. 109] **[10.45 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fitzpatrick, Jim

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Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barnes, Harry
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Best, Harold
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fisher, Mark
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George

Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McDonnell, John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malins, Humfrey
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wareing, Robert N
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Tom Brake.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Government amendment (a) agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 65 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 66: After clause 124, insert a new clause—"Expiry"

11 pm

Mr. Blunkett: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this, we may take Government amendment (a) in lieu.

Mr. Blunkett: The cries of astonishment when the last vote was announced reminded me of "phone a friend" in the television programme. I hope that there will be a few friends around tonight—[HON. MEMBERS: "Not a chance!"] I think there will be—there may even be one or two on the Opposition Benches as well as one or two on the Benches behind me.

The amendments relate to the moonlight clauses, or rather the sunset—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There are too many conversations going on in the Chamber. The House must come to order.

Mr. Blunkett: I promise that I shall not try to crack another joke, Mr. Speaker.

On sunset clauses, the Government have taken several measures in response to the Select Committee on Home Affairs and to the wishes of individual Members and to debates held earlier on part 4. Those measures include a sunset clause after five years, review after a year and other provisions that reflect the will of the House.

I want to make it clear—so that there is no doubt in the other place—that we strongly resist any further move on sunset clauses. We shall not allow the Bill to be dismembered by the indiscriminate application of sunset clauses to different parts of it. Having voted on those matters when the Bill was before the Commons for the first time, and after having those provisions overturned by the House of Lords, it is clear that we have listened and responded to concerns on the main clauses of the Bill. It is not possible for the Government to decide that a Bill should be completely taken apart—nor has that been true for any other measure—with different timings for individual provisions; and that proceedings should be repeated and the measure brought back to the House.

Mr. Hogg: The right hon. Gentleman will, of course, speak to Government amendment (a), which proposes that the review should be undertaken by

"not fewer than seven members of the"

Privy Council. Would he be so good as to tell us by what criteria he will select those members of the Privy Council?

[Mr. Hogg]

Why should we assume that they will not be carefully picked nominees? Would he further give an undertaking that the report will not merely be laid before the House

"as soon as is reasonably practicable",

but be debated by the House, preferably on a free vote?

Mr. Blunkett: The right hon. and learned Gentleman manages to ask a perfectly reasonable question in the most aggressive manner possible, but I have to say that he can rest easy—the one thing that we will not be selecting on is past Cabinet Ministers' competence in doing their jobs. If we want a little bit of a roust at this time of night, we can have one.

Of course, we shall consult the Opposition parties on the committee of review's make up, so the House should agree to the Government amendment in lieu of the Lords amendment to provide a review committee, which would report within two years. That report would be laid before the House of Commons, and both Houses would hold a full debate on it. I am prepared tomorrow to consider the suggestions that the Opposition parties are putting to me to strengthen that proposal. Clearly, the review committee's recommendations on individual parts of the Bill would be taken forward by the Government. We will propose further refinements tomorrow that might—*[Interruption.]* I hope that right hon. and learned Gentleman had a very good dinner.

Mr. Hogg: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: No, I will not give way; I have given way several times to the right hon. and learned Gentleman on a number of issues this evening.

The review committee will be made up of Privy Councillors precisely to allow it to take evidence from the security services and then to compile a report that will, therefore, carry weight because it can cover everything in the Bill.

Simon Hughes: First, will the Home Secretary accept that we have no intention of wishing to dismember the Bill, as he suggests our proposals would do? Secondly, does he object to the sunset provision accepted by the House of Lords because there would be different time limits for different parts of the Bill; or does he object to the fact that an emergency Bill contains a sunset clause at all? If he objects to the latter, I hope that he will accept that that is unusual, if not unprecedented, in the case of such emergency legislation.

Mr. Blunkett: I accepted the recommendation of the Select Committee on Home Affairs on the sunset clauses that relate to the updating of the Terrorism Act 2000, precisely to meet the requirements that hon. Members requested. We have sunset clauses on the justice and home affairs provisions for the end of next June. We have the equivalent of a sunset clause on data holding in the form of the two-year provision relating to the code of practice.

We have done our utmost to ensure that, because of speed and complexity, the review body, whose report will be debated by the House, can reflect on those aspects that it thinks require further consideration after the operation of the measure. That goes further than Governments have gone in the past in attempting to accommodate the genuine concern that exists because of the way in which we, by necessity, have introduced the Bill just over three months after the events of 11 September.

Mr. George Osborne: So that the House can be well informed on the need for a sunset clause, will the Home Secretary explain what further refinements he will propose tomorrow and, indeed, whether they will include a response to the widespread opposition on both sides of the House to the religious hatred clauses, which we have just debated?

Mr. Blunkett: I was talking about the review of the whole Bill and about any identified aspects of the Bill that the review committee finds to be working inappropriately or not in accord with the wishes of both Houses. We could reach a reasonable measure of agreement on that—if not wholly tonight, then certainly in the next 24 hours. That is an attempt not to end up with a Bill that is fragmented, or with this House and the Lords constantly repeating proceedings on the Bill, which, I have to remind right hon. and hon. Members, has had eight days in the Lords. [HON. MEMBERS: "But not here."] No, not here. Let us be clear: we originally agreed a timetable, and I have always accepted that it is extremely tight. *[Interruption.]* There are a few grumbles. Some people accept the agreements that have been reached, and some do not.

I hope that it does not finish his career altogether, but I have to praise the shadow Home Secretary, the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), who, despite considerable disagreement with me about parts of the Bill and fundamental ideological differences, has always kept his word. That has made it easier to do business with him. We shall continue to do business over the next 24 hours and, I hope, for a very long time to come.

Mr. Letwin: I thank the Home Secretary for his remarks, and his hopes are reciprocated. Moreover, I hope that he will accept from us, and I think from the Liberal Democrats, that if he comes forward with proposals that will genuinely make that review bite, we will look at them constructively and discuss them with him, if he so wishes, and with our colleagues in the other place, in a genuine effort to come to a consensus on this vexed question.

Mr. Blunkett: I am deeply grateful, because the two Houses, the working of our Parliament and the response of people outside to the way in which democracy can operate will be enhanced if we can achieve that in the hours ahead. If we end up making a mess of this, I can see no value or gain for any of us or for our reputations or the reputation of Parliament. If we are able to act swiftly but carefully, people will be encouraged to view our democracy in the way that we would like.

We have rightly had robust and difficult debate and scrutiny of the Executive. I believe that we have listened and responded, and I have certainly learned a great deal over the past few weeks. I hope that by dealing with the Bill as we have, we will be able to present the House of Lords with a programme to which they can now agree. I hope also that despite the harsh words that have sometimes been spoken in the other place, as they have here, they will respect the way in which the Commons has responded, and we in turn will respect their rights to scrutinise and return to us certain measures, which we, in turn, have deliberated on. It is in that spirit that I propose that we reject the Lords amendments and agree to the Government amendment in lieu.

Norman Baker: I pay tribute to the Home Secretary for the constructive way in which he has approached this matter and others. I welcome some of his positive responses—"concessions" sounds too dismissive—and the way in which he has changed the wording of the Bill accordingly. However, we are not convinced that enough progress has been made on sunset clauses, and I shall be asking my colleagues to agree with the Lords, not the Government, when we come to vote in 17 minutes or so.

The Home Secretary mentioned a review, and it would be helpful if tomorrow some flesh were put on the bones of that. If the review would result in a sunset clause of a different nature, we would be willing to hear about it, as, no doubt, would the Conservatives. If, however, the intention is simply to tart about with the panel of Privy Councillors that he has suggested, that will not be enough.

Sunset clauses are necessary in this Bill for three reasons. First, by common consent, this is emergency legislation, and it is far reaching. Secondly, most Members feel that it goes beyond what is necessary to deal with terrorism, and deals with subjects that are way beyond that, including ordinary criminal activities.

11.15 pm

Thirdly, the Bill has not been properly discussed. Insufficient time was given to Second Reading and the Bill's first consideration by the Commons, and tonight there is insufficient time to deal with a range of important issues raised by the Lords amendments. When this 125-clause Bill was first considered by the Commons, 86 clauses were not debated in Committee and only two of those were subsequently discussed on Report, leaving 84 clauses undiscussed. None of the schedules were debated in Committee save schedule 5, which had less than five minutes' discussion, and schedule 1 was briefly debated on Report. Of the clauses that were debated, 19 were debated for less than five minutes in Committee. No one could possibly claim that the Bill has been properly debated by the Commons.

In those circumstances, and given the nature of the Bill, it is impossible to say that it should be passed without a proper review being established. With due respect to the Home Secretary's proposals, that body of Privy Councillors does not constitute a proper review. It is a body comprising the great and the good who will consider the legislation and may comment on it, but in no way is their judgment to be binding on the Government. When Lord Rooker was asked whether the recommendations of the review would be accepted, he replied:

> "That cannot be said at this point."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 10 December 2001; Vol. 629, c. 1204.]

In other words, he gave no undertaking that the comments made by that body of Privy Councillors would be accepted by the Government.

Mr. Hogg: Will the hon. Gentleman make the point that amendment (a) is not the amendment that will be enacted? We now know that the Government are to table amendments to amendment (a), so we are not debating that which the Government expect to become the law.

Norman Baker: The right hon. and learned Gentleman makes his point well.

I welcome the Home Secretary's willingness to consider what might be done, but the fact is—

Mr. Blunkett: Let me make it clear that Lord Rooker could not give that assurance because we had not agreed it at that time. However, I have just given it, and if I say from the Dispatch Box that that is what we are going to do, that is what we are going to do.

Norman Baker: I am not quite clear what the Home Secretary is saying, but if it is that whatever the recommendations made by the review body, the Government will automatically accept them, that is not what was said in the House of Lords. If that is what he is saying, it is welcome, but it is not a substitute for a proper sunset clause that limits emergency, far-reaching and draconian legislation. Previous legislation of this nature—prevention of terrorism Acts—have contained clauses whereby a statute is expected to "die" or to be subject to renewal orders. That is not the case with the Bill and we must know why not.

We have not been given sufficient time and it is dangerous to enact such far-reaching legislation in such circumstances. Lord Rooker said:

> "the speed with which this legislation is being passed must be recognised by the Government."

He seems to recognise it—do other Ministers? He also said:

> "We are rushing the legislation and there are no gaps between the stages allowing for mature consideration of the issues raised."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 December 2001; Vol. 629, c. 1203-04.]

In circumstances in which a Minister acknowledges that legislation is being rushed, the least the Government can do is ensure that there is a proper sunset clause covering the entire Bill—apart from part 12, on which there is common agreement. By so doing, if there are mistakes and if the Opposition points are well-founded, the Government can get themselves out of the hole and restore the civil liberties that I fear will be taken away under the Bill.

A sunset clause is an essential defence. I hope that the Home Secretary will reflect on that.

Mr. Hogg *rose—*

Mr. Letwin *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I call Mr. Douglas Hogg.

Mr. Hogg: I see that my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) wants to speak, so I shall be brief.

I object to the motion to disagree with the Lords amendment and to substitute amendment (a). To begin with, I am a strong supporter of the sunset clauses in the form that the Lords approved them, and I strongly oppose any attempt to derogate from them. Furthermore, I oppose in particular the proposal in amendment (a).

We are told that there is to be a review. That is very nice of the Home Secretary, but a review by whom? The record of the current Government suggests that it will be a packed review body, comprising nicely and carefully chosen Privy Councillors who will do what they are told

[Mr. Hogg]

to do by the right hon. Gentleman. I have no confidence in that sort of review. What will happen when we have the review, which is to be laid before the Houses of Parliament as soon as reasonably practicable? That is jolly nice of the Government. But what then? We are told that the Government will implement the proposals. Why is that not in the Bill? That is because the Home Secretary does not want it in the Bill. Why is that? It is because he wants to be in a position not to do that which he has just said. If not, it would be in the Bill.

What procedure will there be for ensuring that the report is speedily debated? The answer is none. The truth is that weasel words have been brought forward by a Government who are in a fix, trying to find a mechanism to smooth over the effectual injustice of that which they are about. *[Interruption.]* The Home Secretary is chuntering away. The truth is that we should not have a Bill. However, if we are to have a Bill, we should have a proper sunset clause, and the present proposal is no substitute for it.

Worse, we are told that amendment (a) is not in its final form, because tomorrow, there will be further amendments. We are being asked to approve tonight a solution to a problem that is no solution. Further amendments will come back to the House and we shall have five, six or seven minutes to discuss them. They will then be put through the House on a Government vote. This is a profoundly undemocratic process and we should have no part of it.

Mr. Letwin: I shall certainly not attempt to emulate the unbelievable eloquence of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg). I share many of the reservations that he so potently expressed. Moreover, I share also many of the reservations that were expressed by the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker).

The Opposition seek, as does the Home Secretary, to achieve legislation that will protect the United Kingdom from terrorism. As we have always reminded ourselves and the House, that is a joint aim. We have adopted what we continue to believe to be a responsible and sensible approach to resolving the problems that the hon. Member for Lewes accurately described. There is the problem that is engendered by the Home Secretary's desire to see the Bill enacted so rapidly, which is that we have not had an opportunity sufficiently to scrutinise the uncontentious parts of the Bill to determine whether they will work in practice.

If we had our way, and if there were not a problem of urgency, I would wish that we insist permanently on our sunset clause, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham, with the gay abandon of the Back Benches, so splendidly calls for. However, we need a Bill, and as I understand it the Home Secretary has offered—I take seriously his point that when he says these things he means them, and he has shown that repeatedly—to consider how the decisions or views taken by the committee of Privy Councillors could be given real bite and made to bear on parliamentary debate and parliamentary revision.

I am sure that the Government will bring forward such proposals. I do not guarantee that they will in their entirety meet immediately with our approval, but we shall engage with them. We will work with the Government to ascertain whether we can crack this problem so that the clauses do not prove an obstacle to achieving the passage of the Bill. We need to see the removal of the clauses on incitement to religious hatred, and we have dealt with that. Many of the other items that were most objectionable have been removed or amended by the Government. The item before us should not be a sticking point. Let us hope that in the next 24 or 36 hours we can achieve the desired result. If we fail to do so, it will not be for want of trying on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Blunkett: I do not welcome the continuing opposition, but I welcome the measured and sensible approach that has been enunciated. Everyone in politics has to make decisions about what is possible as well as about what is desirable. In the past few weeks, each of us has endeavoured to do just that. If, in the next 24 hours, we can find a way forward, people will thank us.

In response to those who are sceptical and believe that we are packing the measure or are being elusive, if we were prepared to take seriously what was said by a committee that undertook a review and could take security evidence but, after debate in both Houses, we were not prepared to respond to it, we would be making a rod for our own backs. Making sure that what we say and do is credible is a matter of both will and necessity; there should be trust that that will happen.

The shadow Home Secretary illustrated the necessity even in opposition to recognise that the Government must govern; we have to lead and find a way forward. I urge Liberal Democrat Members, if they aspire to be a major Opposition party, to be prepared to do the same. I have heard the spirit of co-operation tonight, but I have not heard any words about being prepared to give as well as take. If I am prepared to give as well as take with a majority of 165, Liberal Democrat Members might do so as well.

Simon Hughes: I hope that the Home Secretary will reflect that in all the conversations that I have had with him and his ministerial colleagues, and in debate on the Floor of the House, I have always said that there is scope to improve the Bill in both Houses by amendment. There are principles at stake, and there may be some that clash. I hope that the Home Secretary will not confuse a difference of view on the right outcome with willingness to see if we can reach an agreement. We are certainly willing to reach an agreement; if we can agree, we will, but I cannot promise that we can.

Mr. Blunkett: I understand that no one in opposition can promise that. However, I simply make the point that, at the end of the process, people will judge what we do by watching how the Opposition and the Government conduct themselves. In my position, I have to be mindful of that. The shadow Home Secretary has indicated how he sees the way forward and I hope that the Liberal Democrat spokesman will find it in his heart to be big enough to do so as well. If we can find a way forward together, there will be some credibility for all of us. If we cannot, people will make a judgment about those who are unwilling or unable to do so.

Question put:— That this House disagrees with the Lords amendment No. 66:—

The House divided: Ayes 322, Noes 215.

Division No. 110] **[11.28 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George

Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. John Heppell.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McDonnell, John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McWalter, Tony
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Tom Brake and
Mr. Charles Hendry.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Government amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 66 agreed to.

Clause 11

PROCEDURE FOR MAKING CERTAIN AMENDING ORDERS

Lords amendment: No. 1, page 5, line 24, leave out
"further order states that the Treasury"
and insert "Treasury reasonably".

Beverley Hughes: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 4, 24 to 37 and 67 to 70.

I ask hon. Members who are leaving the Chamber to do so as quickly as possible.

Simon Hughes: We have reached the part of our debate that proves that some aspects of the Bill are non-controversial. I can help colleagues from all parties by saying that my hon. Friends and I do not intend to divide the House again tonight. I hope that that encourages those who do not feel obliged to stay for the remaining few minutes that have been allocated to our discussion.

Mr. Letwin: In a spirit of cross-party amity, we do not intend to divide the House if that permits the Whips to let people go home.

Simon Hughes: That leaves only two options: Labour or Conservative Back Benchers or our friends from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland will press the button. However, I sense that we may be reserving the contest for tomorrow.

I want to raise three points on the amendments. They have evidently been put through the Lords with agreement, and there is therefore no attempt to reject them in the Commons.

Lords amendments Nos. 33 to 35 relate to the nuclear industry, and raise some important issues that we had barely a moment to discuss earlier. Lords amendment No. 33 covers the regulation of security of the civil nuclear industry. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. If hon. Members want to hold conversations, perhaps they should leave the Chamber.

Simon Hughes: The Government have not had the chance to explain, in the context of their justification of part 8 of the Bill, how they reconcile clause 78, which allows the Secretary of State to

"make regulations for the purpose of ensuring the security of—

(a) nuclear sites and other nuclear premises",

which is unarguable, and clause 80—which is the subject of Lords amendments Nos. 34 and 35—with their freedom of information legislation intentions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) proposed, during our brief Report stage, that we ought to be able to know where nuclear waste and nuclear materials were travelling throughout the country. We would argue strongly that the reason for that is to reduce—and not increase—fear, suspicion and concern. Can we have some reassurance, either tonight or tomorrow, on those two clauses, by way of further amendments, that freedom of information will apply in relation to these matters in the Bill that we have not had the opportunity to raise before?

Norman Baker: Is not the issue that the Government are reducing the amount of information being given on the transportation of nuclear material? I understand that specific movements must, of course, be kept secret, but the generality must be available for public discussion. Would it not be more sensible if the Government, for reasons of security and to deter terrorism, sought to reduce the number of nuclear movements? At the moment, they are increasing.

Simon Hughes: That seems a logical addition to what I was seeking to persuade Ministers of. I hope that they will offer an explanation that such measures are behind some of the amendments or, if not, that further amendments are possible.

Of course it is important that the nuclear industry is secure, and the Liberal Democrats have supported, in general terms, the sections of the Bill that deal with weapons of mass destruction, security of pathogens and toxins, and security of the nuclear industry. We believe that their inclusion is appropriate.

Lords amendment No. 37 relates to clause 88, in part 9, which deals with aviation security. It would insert a new clause that would allow powers originally incorporated in the Civil Aviation Act 1982 and the Aviation Security Act 1982 to apply outside the United Kingdom. Conservative Members have often raised the issue, perfectly properly, of when it is appropriate to enact extra-territorial legislation.

We are clear that improving aviation security is a right and proper part of the Bill, but we are disturbed that we have barely been able to debate the matter. Colleagues with airports in their constituencies, and other hon. Members, would have liked such an opportunity. My hon. Friend's proposal for a sunset provision on the issue has strength, because it would give us the chance to do that. On Lords amendment No. 37, will the Minister tell us why our courts need extra-territorial jurisdiction only in relation to these matters, and not to others?

The non-controversial matters in the Bill will be concluded tonight, because they have come from the Lords to us, and if we agree with them, that is the end of that business; they will not go back to the other place. There are, obviously, matters on which we have taken a different view from the Lords, and those matters will go back tomorrow.

The hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and I have said that we shall collaborate and participate in discussions to get maximum agreement. The House of Lords has no time limit on its debates tomorrow, so it can give those issues more consideration than we have been able to give. I hope that, as it does so, the Government respond to our concerns—we want this to be the last time that we have to raise them—and to concerns expressed at the other end of the building.

Norman Baker: Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the Lords may make radical amendments that address concerns expressed in this Chamber and that we shall have only an hour in which to discuss them?

Simon Hughes: That is certainly true. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, will be aware that the business motion passed just after 3.30 pm, although it was opposed by my colleagues, Conservative Members and others, gives us an hour to deal with everything that comes back. We object to that, as an hour is not enough and we have no idea how many amendments there will be.

I tell the Minister that we are willing to be constructive, but we are absolutely clear about the fact that we will have the parliamentary opportunities at both ends of the building to require the Government to come back with alternatives that meet the principles involved. These matters are being debated at this stage in only 15 minutes, and they can be discussed in less time at earlier stages, so if ever there was an argument for being able to limit the Bill and for having it back for proper review, that is it.

[Simon Hughes]

We expect a proper review. We also hope that the Minister will respond constructively to the specific points raised tonight and that, tomorrow, the Government accept that such legislation should last for a limited time. That will enable us to do our job properly, however soon the Government want to give us the opportunity.

Mr. Hogg: I must briefly comment on Lords amendments Nos. 1 to 4. The House will have noticed that they are detailed, but as we had no opportunity for proper debate in Committee, we could not consider their desirability. The fact that the other place introduced four important amendments on the reviewability of the statutory order procedure suggests how unwise the House is to enact this Bill rapidly.

The truth is that if the other place had needed to, it could, with difficulty, have found more time. We could not, and there are many aspects that we would wish to have debated more fully. Had we done so, we would have been in the business of introducing detailed measures designed to reinforce civil liberties. We have been denied that opportunity and the other place has had insufficient time, but the fact that the four amendments were introduced and accepted demonstrates the lack of wisdom shown by the Government in this regard.

Simon Hughes: The right hon. and learned Gentleman may not have added up the figures, but by my calculation the Government did not disagree on 40 uncontroversial amendments from the other place, although they disagreed on 10 substantive amendments. Many involve matters that were never debated here, which confirms his point and argues strongly that we must not go down this road again.

Mr. Hogg: Absolutely. As you will recall, Madam Deputy Speaker, scores of clauses passed through this House undiscussed. That is not a proper way in which to legislate. Even the non-controversial clauses demonstrate the force of what I am saying.

Mr. Letwin: I do not want to say much about the amendments, which are uncontroversial, except to seek an assurance from the Minister that the Government know what they are doing in accepting the removal of white pox from the list of viruses. I do not mean to be impolite, but some of my hon. Friends asked me why it is being done. I must admit that I do not understand why, though there may be a perfectly good explanation.

I thank the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), with whom we have co-operated long and hard, as much has been achieved. I also thank the Government for their co-operation in removing much that was offensive. I echo his sentiment that, as tomorrow progresses—and it may become tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow—we must not merely briefly debate, if I may use that term without abusing it, and then vote on whatever comes to us from the Lords, but, much more importantly, continue a dialogue over what may be many hours to resolve issues that remain outstanding.

The Home Secretary was right: if we fail, the country will look askance. If we succeed by giving too much, neither the Government nor the country will benefit. It is a delicate balance. We must achieve resolutions that genuinely protect civil liberties; we must ensure that what passes into law is a Bill about terrorism rather than a Bill about other matters, and a Bill that is workable rather than a Bill that causes trouble for the Government as for others. If we can achieve those goals, our discussions today—and discussions that I suspect will take place at much later hours tomorrow—will have been worthwhile.

Beverley Hughes: I shall have to return to the points made by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) tomorrow. I commit myself to providing him with details then. I can tell him now, however, that Lords amendment No. 37 is technical. Its aim is to ensure that Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man will be able to use the aviation security powers, and it was specifically requested by Jersey and Guernsey.

The hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) raised another technical question. Lords amendment No. 70 removes white pox from the list of viruses because it is regarded as a form of smallpox and, like smallpox, is covered by the "Variola virus" entry in schedule 5.

Simon Hughes: I am grateful for the Minister's helpful answer about aviation powers, but is the provision limited to the three places that she mentioned? If so, that is perfectly acceptable. May I also ask whether it is the only provision in the Bill that extends to those places, and whether they had to legislate as well?

Beverley Hughes: According to my recollection it is the only provision that extends to those places, but by tomorrow I shall have established whether the information that I have given off the top of my head is correct.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the hour that we will be given tomorrow, in the first instance, to receive the Lords' response to our messages. My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire), the Whip who has been dealing with the Bill, tells me that that was discussed with him, and that it was not questioned by him or his colleagues during the discussions between the usual channels. I am surprised that he raised the matter, because we have tried to respond not just to the substance of many Members' concerns about various parts of the Bill but to Opposition requests about how the Bill should be managed, within the limitations imposed on us. I know that my hon. Friend has tried to do that. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to explain now, I should be pleased to hear his explanation.

Simon Hughes: I will happily do so, very briefly.

The hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and I were indeed consulted. We presented a counter-proposition relating to all the other matters, which the Government accepted; but we had to take into account the fact that we had already passed a business motion committing us to finishing on Thursday. It is because of that constraint, on which the House had already voted, that we tried to be practical and arrange for time to be provided. We do not like it, but we put our hands up because we were against the "end-stop".

Beverley Hughes: I understand that the part of the motion relating to the initial hour was not challenged during the discussions.

Let me make a general point. The time scale applying to the Bill is by no means out of kilter with time scales applied by past Governments to similar emergency legislation. If anything, the time has been more generous than that provided for other emergency legislation.

Norman Baker: Does the Minister accept that on previous occasions emergency legislation has been far narrower and tightly defined, and has not included a lot of other stuff that is not much to do with terrorism?

Beverley Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is not taking into account the point that—

It being Twelve o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair pursuant to Orders [19 November and this day].*

Lords amendment agreed to.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 4, 24 to 37 and 67 to 70 agreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to certain of their amendments to the Bill: Paul Goggins, Mr. Dominic Grieve, Beverley Hughes, Simon Hughes and Mrs. Anne McGuire; Beverley Hughes to be the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to certain Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

CONSOLIDATED FUND BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 56 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith, and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

JOINT COMMITTEE ON CONSOLIDATION, &C., BILLS

Ordered,

That Mr. Russell Brown, Mr. John Burnett, Mr. David Cairns, Mr. Martin Caton, Mr. Colin Challen, Sir Patrick Cormack, Mr. Jim Dobbin, Mr. Paul Farrelly, Mr. Barry Gardiner, Mr. John MacDougall, Mr. Nicholas Soames and Mr. Anthony Steen be members of the Select Committee appointed to join with a Committee of the Lords as the Joint Committee on Consolidation, &c., Bills.—*[Mr. Stringer.]*

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

PETITIONS

Travellers

12.3 am

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): It gives me great pleasure to present this petition, particularly as the travellers concerned have now moved to Withington, a village that is deeply distressed by that development.

The petition states:

> To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.
>
> The Humble Petition of the concerned residents of Leominster sheweth
>
> That the travellers currently residing in Leominster and Withington should be removed to one of the sites in Herefordshire that is specifically dedicated to travellers where they will be welcome and safe, as Leominster residents have been caused considerable distress. Also that the Government considers releasing funds in order to increase police numbers in Herefordshire to protect citizens of that county from crime,
>
> Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will urge the Herefordshire council to relocate the travellers in Leominster to a dedicated travellers site and increase police funding.
>
> And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Policing (Rugby)

12.4 am

Andy King (Rugby and Kenilworth): I wish to present a petition of some 3,000 signatures:

> The petition of residents of the villages in the south sector of the borough of Rugby
>
> Declares that police staffing levels in the area are numerically inadequate given rising crime levels
>
> The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for the Home Department to take such action as lies within his power to increase the number of bobbies on the beat in the southern sector of the borough of Rugby.

To lie upon the table.

Foundation Stage

12.5 am

Bob Russell (Colchester): The petition of Margaret Edgington of Colchester, schoolteachers and parents and others from many parts of the country deals with the introduction of the foundation stage of the national curriculum. The petitioners are concerned that some practitioners are being hindered in their attempts to implement the principles of the foundation stage. They feel that there is a lack of continuity of approach and of expectation from the new foundation stage to key stage 1; and that the expectation for children's achievements in years 1 and 2 are incompatible with the early learning goals set for children at the end of the foundation stage.

The petition states:

> The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to require all Primary Headteachers, Advisers and Consultants to receive specialist training

on the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage; to release the Foundation Stage from any requirement to implement the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies; to promote the extension into Key Stage 1 of the learning and teaching approach advocated for the Foundation Stage, and to remove pressure on schools to achieve limited academic targets at the end of Key Stage 1.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Social Services (Bedfordshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

12.6 am

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to introduce this debate on what I believe to be the issue of greatest concern in local authority funding. So great is my concern that I count it small cost to have waited here until 1.50 am last Thursday and to be here at six minutes past 12 this morning for the debate. I wish to consider the problems and the consequences of, and the solutions to, the issue of social services. I am keen to draw attention to that issue in Bedfordshire, but it is a national issue and the problems are no worse in my area than in the rest of the UK, and are probably better because of the careful financial management of the council over the past few years.

I am grateful to the Minister for attending to respond to the debate and I hope that she will respond to the points I make, given that I telephoned her office with an outline of my speech last week.

Social services spending has not been the political priority that it should have been under both Labour and Conservative Governments. There has been a long history of local authorities spending over their standard spending assessments. This year, Bedfordshire will spend 15 per cent. more, or £7.8 million, than the sum that the Government say we should spend, according to our SSA. That is in line with the average overspend of all counties in the south-east of England. Nationally, the overspend above SSA is £916 million, or 10.2 per cent. In addition, local authorities spend a further £200 million over and above those budgets to meet the demands placed upon them.

The publicity that the issue receives is usually in connection with the care of the elderly, but the greatest financial pressures relate to children's services. The Association of Directors of Social Services estimates that 64 per cent. of the total overspend will be a result of the increased demand for children's services. Between 1997 and 2000, the number of children in need nationally rose by 6.8 per cent. to 381,000. The number of children in care has increased from 49,300 in 1994 to 58,100 in 2000. The number of children looked after under court orders has doubled since 1993.

In adult services, reduced infant mortality and enhanced survival rates for children with disabilities impact on parents and siblings and on carers' ability to provide care as the carers themselves get older. In elderly care, we know that by 2007 the number of pensioners will have overtaken the number of children under 16. In the 12 months to June 2001, Bedfordshire social services received 5,969 referrals of older people in need. Many of those related to patients who should be discharged from hospital, but cannot be. In some cases, clients have died in distressingly inappropriate care.

It is time that the recruitment for the 2,000 vacancies in child protection units nationally had the same national prominence as recruiting teachers and nurses currently receives. The 50 per cent. reduction in students applying to join the social work profession is also deeply worrying.

The Government are often too keen to legislate without supplying the necessary funds to local authorities to implement the new laws. The result is that less care is provided on the front line. I shall give a recent example. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 came into force on 1 October, but the extra funding is insufficient to meet the additional responsibility placed on local authorities.

Nationally, we know that we have lost 46,000 residential care beds over the past four years, and the Care Standards Act 2000 has hastened that decline, because it requires modifications to create larger room sizes and places new restrictions on room sharing. The quality of care and not the dimensions of the room should be what matters.

There is also a lack of flexibility of funding between the NHS and social services. The close connection between the work of social services departments and the NHS means that there should be greater flexibility to spend the money between the two. The NHS has passed the lead responsibility for many services over to social services. For example, it has removed itself from the disability care field, leaving provision to be met through personal social services.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): Is not one of the real problems that the boundaries for social services and the NHS are different? Consequently, it is in the interests of hospital doctors to keep people in possibly inappropriate care under the social services. The obverse is also true. As a result, people do not get the best form of care appropriate to their need.

Andrew Selous: My hon. Friend makes a very valid point. The difficulty that he describes certainly compounds the problem in Bedfordshire.

A genuinely joined-up approach is needed, rather than buck-passing between the various agencies over which picks up the bill. The consequence of the problem that I have described is that vulnerable children in Bedfordshire will be at risk unless a further £4 million can be found.

That is not a statement that Bedfordshire county council makes lightly. Its social services require an extra £10 million overall to enable them to give the necessary support next year, principally to children but also to people with learning disabilities, and to older people.

Over the past few years, the county council has propped up social services budgets from its own resources. As a result, it has no reserves left to augment social services spending. Already, people on low or fixed incomes are telling me of their alarm at the size of the council tax rises that they will face to enable the council to meet its statutory undertakings.

What is the solution? There is an urgent need—in Bedfordshire and nationally—for the Treasury to make a realistic assessment of funding requirements, based on actual and projected expenditure and not on outdated standard spending assessment formulas. The extra £223,500 a year for the next two years that was given to Bedfordshire in October is welcome, but it is a drop in the ocean compared to what is needed to tackle the scale of the problem.

Finance officers from Bedfordshire county council have told me that last week's provisional local government settlement for 2002-03 still leaves the council well short of the sums needed to protect the vulnerable next year. Services for children will receive only £0.5 million of the £4 million needed, and the overall shortfall on the projected social services budget for 2002–03 will be around £7 million. That is a huge sum for England's second-smallest county, with a population of only 380,000, to find.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has kindly given leave for this intervention. Does not he agree that the burden for Bedfordshire would be rather easier to bear if the health authority's budget was not so low? Doctors calculated that the budget was some £19 million short. There has been an injection of funds recently, but it goes nowhere near making up that shortfall. It would be much easier for social services and the NHS to combine if the budgets for Bedfordshire were more commensurate with need.

Andrew Selous: My hon. Friend makes a further valuable point. I referred earlier to the NHS and social services working together, and his point is valid in that respect.

Ring fencing must be allowed so that local authorities can direct money to areas of greatest need. Social services for children, for example, are excluded from benefiting from the £223,500 given to Bedfordshire last October. Greater partnership between the NHS and local social services is also needed. It is crazy, for example, that there is a difference between a "social services" bath and a "medical" bath and even crazier that the former is charged for and the latter is free.

Governments of all persuasions must stop legislating without passporting the necessary funds for implementation. We must do all that we can to raise the status of social workers to encourage more people to enter the profession. We hear a lot about those who fall short, but little of the dedicated work of the vast majority of social workers who daily assist the needy and the vulnerable. I am sure that Bedfordshire colleagues would want to join me in paying tribute to the work of Lyn Burns, Bedfordshire's strategic director of social services, and her dedicated team for all the excellent work that they do.

Bedfordshire social services has recognised the importance of working with user groups. It has agreed, for example, that the Multiple Sclerosis Society in Leighton Buzzard can help to train the department's social workers and other professionals, such as occupational therapists and care workers, in understanding the implications of that disease for clients and their families. That is an excellent and possibly unique initiative that will result in great benefit to multiple sclerosis sufferers and their families throughout Bedfordshire.

We need to allow social workers to be included in the key worker accommodation that is currently concentrated on nurses and teachers in the high-cost south-east. We should also have a massive national campaign to promote fostering to attract more foster parents. Bedfordshire, like many counties, could do with more of these wonderful people. It is a scandal that only 2,200 children were adopted nationally last year compared with 20,000 in 1970. Let all children be considered for adoption and place a legal duty on social services to provide this. The stability and security given to our young people by an adopted family will often give them the best start to life.

Given that the lion's share—some 64 per cent.—of the social services overspend is on children's services, we need to step back from the year-on-year budgetary

[Andrew Selous]

implications and ask what is happening in our society that means that so many more of our children are in the care of social services. National and local government, schools and the media and voluntary and faith groups all have a significant role to play in supporting and upholding family life and promoting loving, responsible parenting.

Southern European nations, such as Italy, with their strong sense of family solidarity, which leads to much lower rates of homelessness than the UK experiences, have much to teach us. I also urge the Government to study the social policies of states in America, such as Oklahoma, where non-judgmental, practical guidance to promote marriage is beginning to turn the tide. The work of the Institute for Responsible Fatherhood in Washington DC has also had success in reinvolving absent fathers with their partners and children. Its work goes way beyond that of our Child Support Agency to address the emotional and relational poverty, as well as the material poverty, facing families.

We must not think that there is a tide of family breakdown that we cannot turn. Family life can be strengthened with the necessary will.

12.18 am

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I congratulate the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) on raising the important matter of social services in Bedfordshire and being willing, along with me, to stay up late on two separate occasions to discuss this issue.

The hon. Gentleman is clearly keen to see high quality social care being provided for his constituents. That is what I want, too. I am pleased to have the opportunity to describe what the Government are doing to achieve that aim in Bedfordshire and throughout the country.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the fact that Bedfordshire social services is facing difficulties this year as a result of financial pressures. I understand that the council's financial problems have been primarily related to children's services and services for adults with learning difficulties. In both these sectors, the council has had to fund external placements that have proved expensive.

I am pleased to learn, however, that following staff changes and recruitment, the council is now developing a five-year children's strategy. This strategy, in which the voluntary sector—including NCH—is expected to play a key role, will aim to reduce the council's level of external spending and make a bigger shift to family support. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that that is an important area of work.

Bedfordshire has been trying to alleviate its financial problems in a number of ways. When the current director of social services took up her post about 12 months ago, she recognised that the council was heading for a significant overspend and took immediate action that has led to a clearer picture of the budget position. I understand that there has also been a review of financial systems to ensure clear accountability for budgets.

I am also pleased that decisions about children's and adults' placements are now dealt with by a county panel, and that joint work has been undertaken with the health authority to make the best use of joint purchasing services for children. I shall return to the important issue of partnership work—with the health service in particular.

The hon. Gentleman has made much of the amount of additional funding that Bedfordshire county council estimates that it needs next year. The timing of this debate is such that we are able to make reference to the very latest information about the considerable investment that the Government are making in social services. That investment has been growing substantially in real terms under the Government.

Bedfordshire has benefited from that investment. This year, the council received an increase of more than 9 per cent. in its total personal social services resources, and will receive substantial extra funds for personal social services next year.

The resources that we are making available next year for social services were announced in the statement on the local government settlement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. We announced that Bedfordshire's personal social services standard spending assessment will increase by a further 6 per cent. The carers' grant will increase by a further 22 per cent. and the children's grant by a further 14 per cent. Increases of that size demonstrate the Government's commitment to social care and to making up previous underspend.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the position for older people. His figures on care place losses are wrong—like those of his colleagues. However, the Government are concerned about maintaining sufficient capacity in our care homes sector for older people, so I am sure that the hon. Gentleman welcomes—indeed, I think that he did so—the £447,000 made available in early October to assist Bedfordshire county council in providing capacity and in ensuring that older people in the county have care where and when they need it. Bedfordshire will, of course, receive its share of the £200 million being made available in the next financial year for that purpose.

The hon. Gentleman made much of the need for further resources for personal social services. I agree with him: social services departments need more resources. That is why those resources have increased by 20.7 per cent. in real terms between 1996–97 and 2002–03—an average real-terms increase of 3.2 per cent. per annum. Although there is still more work to be done, I am proud that the Labour Government have achieved that. I ask the hon. Gentleman to compare those figures with the average annual real-terms growth of 0.1 per cent. per annum between 1992–93 and 1996–97 under the previous Government.

The hon. Gentleman may believe that the extra investment that the Government are making available for social services is a drop in the ocean, but it is nevertheless money that his party failed to pledge to match at the June general election.

Mr. Sayeed: Does the Minister agree that since the Government came to power and changed the rules for SSAs county councils have lost £700 million due to those changes?

Jacqui Smith: No, but I recognise the significant extra investment in some of the key local authority functions, such as education and personal social services, and those increases in investment did not occur under the previous Government. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that the SSA regime introduced under the Government of whom, I believe, he was a member is flawed and needs to be reformed, I agree with him. That is why this Labour Government are pledged to reform that system in time for the local government settlement next year.

The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire also referred to the support given to families, which is an important factor. The Government recognise that early intervention and family support is key to tackling child poverty and social exclusion. We have therefore set out a wide-ranging programme to support parents and families, which concentrates on five main areas: better services and support to parents; better financial support to families; helping families balance work and home; strengthening marriage; and better support for serious family problems.

Some 1.2 million children have been lifted out of poverty, as a result of the Government's tax and benefit changes. Child benefit has increased by 26 per cent. in real terms, to £15.50 a week for the first child. Some 1.2 million families now benefit from the working families tax credit. We have established new rights to help people balance their work and their home lives, better maternity entitlement, the right to paid holidays, paternity leave and protection against working excessive hours.

The new National Family and Parenting Institute has been set up to provide quality advice to the Government, the voluntary sector and parents themselves on the very difficult task on parenting. We have created the first ever national child care strategy, and 295,000 child care places have already been established, helping 540,000 children.

The first Minister with responsibility for young people has been appointed, and a new children and young people's unit has been created to develop an overarching strategy for children and young people's services.

A wide range of family support services is provided by local authorities, but the hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that our children's services needed more investment. Those services include advice, guidance and counselling, day care, home help, family centres and so on. That is why the Government introduced the now five-year, £885 million quality protects programme in England, with the aim of improving the management and delivery of children's social services.

Government objectives to improve outcomes for children and young people in need have been set and local authorities are expected to show, and have shown, steady improvement towards the achievement of those objectives in their annual quality protects management action plans.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the important issues of fostering and adoption. The Government have supported national fostering recruitment campaigns, and I agree with him that it is crucial to attract more people. The Adoption and Children Bill, which is being considered by the House, represents the first opportunity for 25 years to modernise the legislation on adoption. It will place a duty on local authorities to provide adoption support services, backed up by £66 million of extra investment. More children have already been adopted out of care under this Government, but, of course, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need to meet the Government's target of 40 per cent.—or even 50 per cent.—more children being adopted out of care by 2004.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the important issue of recruitment and retention in Bedfordshire. The Government are aware that there are problems in recruiting social workers throughout the country, and I agree with him that we must all ensure that we praise the excellent work that many social workers do, day in day out, to protect the most vulnerable people in our communities. We take the issue of recruitment and retention very seriously, which is why on 10 October, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health launched a national recruitment campaign aimed at informing the public about social work and social care and at encouraging recruitment and retention. I am very pleased that there have so far been 13,198 responses to the campaign, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that 123 of those are from the Bedfordshire area.

We are also introducing a three-year degree-level qualification in social work to replace the current two-year diploma courses. That represents a unique opportunity to transform the status, image and position of social workers and to build on the best of social work education and training. The degree-level qualification will come into effect in England from September 2003. In addition, the Secretary of State last year announced extra investment in training for social workers and social workers currently in employment, because it is important that we not only recruit more social workers but retain those who are already in the service.

The funding of social services is, of course, important, as is the way in which councils use the funding that they receive. We are determined that the money for social services should be used to improve and modernise them. Improvements are happening. We recently published the latest set of performance indicators for the 150 councils with social services responsibilities. There is overall improvement, and steady progress is being made towards the Government's priorities.

To build on that progress, the Secretary of State recently announced that we would set about devising an overall assessment methodology that will allow us to analyse all the performance information available to us, and to generate an overall performance score. The aim is to introduce, by next spring, an overall assessment system similar to that announced in September for the NHS. Not only will that information be helpful for service users and their carers but it will be vital for the Government and local authorities, improving their ability to spot problem areas and to take appropriate measures to generate improvements where these are needed.

Of course, those improvements cannot always be delivered by social services departments alone. It is important that the various responsibilities of councils, whether in education, leisure or other services, are co-ordinated with those of social services departments to ensure that we meet, in the round, the needs of the people served by those departments. Of course, as the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues pointed out, it is crucial for older people, those with learning disabilities, people with mental health problems and children that departments work properly with health authorities.

This Government have, in the Health Act 1999, introduced the flexibility necessary to ensure that local authorities and health authorities can work together more effectively. That flexibility is currently being considered in Bedfordshire; for example, in the commissioning of joint equipment stores, which will utilise a pooled budget, and in the development of a joint commissioning agency for learning disabilities, for which a strategy is being developed throughout Luton and the rest of Bedfordshire

[Jacqui Smith]

with the health authority. Organisations are moving towards primary care trust status. The ability to work more carefully together will ensure that the extra funding going into health and social services is used in the most effective way for the benefit of the hon. Gentleman's constituents and everybody in the country who needs to benefit from those services.

I have spent some minutes describing those major developments because they all contribute to the Government's vision of social services in the 21st century. Those initiatives, backed up by significant extra investment, provide a coherent framework for improvement. People who use social services, in Bedfordshire as elsewhere in the country, deserve and expect high quality services. We have set ourselves a challenging agenda, but we have shown ourselves willing to invest and reform to ensure that we deliver for all the people who need those services.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes to One o'clock.

Deferred Divisions

EUROPEAN ARREST WARRANT AND THE SURRENDER PROCEDURES BETWEEN MEMBER STATES

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 13425/01, Draft Council Framework Decision on the European Arrest Warrant and the Surrender Procedures between the Member States; and supports the Government's active participation in the debate on the draft Framework Decision and the Government's intention to ensure that extradition within the European Union takes place on the basis of the principles of mutual recognition.

The House divided: Ayes 333, Noes 146.

Division No. 105]

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Daisley, Paul
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*

Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan (Newport E)
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Meale, Alan
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Andrew
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cran, James
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*

Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence (Tewk'b'ry)
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith (Mid-Norfolk)
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Question accordingly agreed to.

House of Commons

Thursday 13 December 2001

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Abattoirs

1. **Mr. David Cameron** (Witney): What steps she is taking to assist small abattoirs; and if she will make a statement. [20554]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): As we announced in the rural White Paper last year, agriculture Departments in England, Scotland and Wales have agreed to transfer £8.7 million to the Food Standards Agency for the three financial years 2001–02 to 2003–04, enabling the agency significantly to reduce inspection charges levied on many small and medium meat plants.

Mr. Cameron: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that answer, but is she aware that in recent years the overall costs of small and medium abattoirs such as Mutch Meats in Witney have accelerated because of the need to remove waste, the BSE regulations, meat hygiene inspection charges and additional costs from foot and mouth? Does she agree that they need short-term help because of foot and mouth, but that in the longer term a proper answer is required to make those businesses viable? When will we get that answer? In particular, will it form part of Sir Don Curry's report? The terms of reference are not entirely clear. It is important that we examine abattoirs carefully to ensure that we do not end up with just a few mega-slaughterhouses.

Margaret Beckett: Of course, I am aware that there have been a lot of problems in the abattoir sector, which I agree have been exacerbated by foot and mouth. It is not for me to say what Sir Don Curry's commission will consider—it is independent—but it is possible that it will examine what is happening in a number of abattoirs. I am not sure whether it will look more widely at the overall climate, but I am sure that it will take heed of the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Is it possible to enter into negotiations with our European Union partners to review and revise meat hygiene laws to get a better balance between high standards and economic viability? Are there ways in which we can encourage farmers to use nearby abattoirs, and supermarkets to relax their policy of using just a small number of industrial-scale abattoirs, which are often distant from the point of meat production?

Margaret Beckett: The issue of whether people use facilities more locally or at a greater distance is likely to feature in one way or another in the various inquiries that have been set up to examine the foot and mouth outbreak. On the general issue that my hon. Friend raises, we continually press to get the right balance and to ensure that we have safety and high quality in food without overburdensome regulation. He will know that it is only a couple of years since an industry working group was set up to examine the sector. We keep it under review, but I do not anticipate making major proposals in the near future.

Norman Baker (Lewes): In recent years, every abattoir in my constituency has closed, with the consequence that farmers have to transport animals much further for slaughter. Are not longer lorry journeys bad for animals, bad for farmers in economic terms and bad for the environment? Is there not a case for Government to help abattoirs in particular parts of the country, including east Sussex, to reopen?

Margaret Beckett: Abattoirs have been closing gradually for about 20 years, as the hon. Gentleman is aware. Of course, there are issues about distances; equally, there are issues about commercial viability. Most of the abattoirs that have closed have basically gone out of business. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that we subsidise abattoirs. I do not find that an attractive proposition, but I am sure that some aspects of his comments will come up when the recent disease outbreak is examined.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I have just one small abattoir left in my constituency, at Ilkley, which is well regarded by local farmers? Does she agree that we should be encouraging more small abattoirs to stop long, painful journeys for animals? The impact of the foot and mouth outbreak might have been reduced if more small abattoirs had been spread around the country.

Margaret Beckett: I understand my hon. Friend's concern for her constituents, although she will know that wherever animals are sent to abattoirs the journey has to comply with the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997. That gives considerable detail on measures necessary to protect animals. With regard to my hon. Friend's more general point about the number of abattoirs, as I have said, that issue is bound to be considered. I recall being told that, at the time of the 1967 outbreak of foot and mouth disease, there were about 1,500 abattoirs, yet there was a serious disease outbreak then, although it was not precisely the same as the one that we have recently had.

Rural Services

2. **Mr. Chris Pond** (Gravesham): What measures she is taking to support *(a)* shops and *(b)* essential services in rural areas. [20555]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): Since the rural White Paper was published a year ago we have provided substantial extra funding to boost basic services in rural areas. We have helped village shops and pubs, extended rate relief, helped rural schools and other services, extended sure start to rural areas and assisted bus services, to name just a few.

Mr. Pond: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the opening today of the refurbished Shorne post office in my constituency? Is he aware that more than 1,000 of my constituents have signed a petition calling for improvements to a small parade of shops in Meopham called Camer parade? The viability of those high-quality businesses is threatened by poor access, especially for elderly and infirm people, and by the need for environmental improvements for which resources are not currently available. Does my right hon. Friend agree with those petitioners that local shops and other services are the life-blood of rural communities, and will he advise parish councils on how to access resources to make the improvements that are needed to such facilities?

Alun Michael: There are several ways in which we can help local shops to remain viable. I especially welcome the news that efforts to stem the loss of post offices have succeeded in the case that my hon. Friend mentions. I congratulate him on undertaking an extensive consultation with his rural constituents. He has pointed to one conclusion and I look forward to hearing more about his constituents' views when I see him shortly, as he has requested.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Will the Minister confirm that his Department has received a letter from my constituent Sir John Cave, chairman of the Council of the Devon County Show? Will the Minister acknowledge the real importance of the return of livestock to the show next year, and will he ask his officials to let the organisers of county shows know before the end of January whether they will get the necessary permits?

Alun Michael: I am aware of the importance of the Devon county show, which is why I visited it this year. Despite the fact that livestock were absent, it gave a tremendous boost to communities in Devon to get together and it was a welcome event. We are aware of the importance of livestock to the Devon and other shows, but the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that we must be careful not to jump ahead of the veterinary risk assessments that are available to give certainty that might turn out to be uncertainty. However, we will bear the hon. Gentleman's point in mind and give the organisers of such shows the best information possible as soon as possible.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): Will the Minister join me in congratulating all those involved in the successful award this morning by UNESCO of world heritage status to the Dorset and east Devon coasts, which are the first in England to receive it? What support can his Department give us in co-ordinating across that rural area the essential services that we need to provide for the visitors whom we look forward to attracting to our world heritage site?

Alun Michael: I am delighted by that news and the fact that my hon. Friend has made the link between the environment, conservation and the quality of the landscape, and the ability to attract people to the area to help the local economy. We are helping with the provision of services in a range of ways. I commend to hon. Members on both sides of the House the document "England's Rural Future", which as I said yesterday has been made available to the Library and the Vote Office. It describes the extensive work that has been done in the past 12 months, as well as giving our detailed response to the rural taskforce and the Haskins report.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): The Prime Minister said on 20 September 1999 that

> "This is not a Government that has turned its back on rural areas."

Why should anyone believe the Prime Minister when ever more rural shops are now going out of business and rural post office closures accelerating? In much of rural Britain, businesses are being forced into bankruptcy at a rate unprecedented since the war, and £700 million has been filched from county councils by a Government who fiddle the figures to favour their political friends.

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman's question is as much a caricature as it is a predictable and boring way of trying to talk up problems in rural areas. I suggest that he reads the facts in "England's Rural Future". He would then see that the words of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister have been justified by the actions that the Government have taken over the past 12 months. Not least among those actions is the creation of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, a powerful Department that is able to work for rural communities. We are getting on with that work seriously, while Conservative Members merely mock.

Rhizomania

3. **Mr. James Arbuthnot** (North-East Hampshire): What representations she has received from interested groups on the Department's consultation paper on rhizomania. [20556]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): We have so far received around 30 replies from individuals by post and e-mail, and one reply from a regional branch of the National Farmers Union, but the consultation period does not close until January. In addition, my noble Friend Lord Whitty has discussed the consultation with the president of the National Farmers Union, and officials have met the vice-president and representatives of the sugar beet and potatoes committees.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Is the Minister confident that his approach will give the sugar beet industry enough time to develop disease-free varieties?

Mr. Morley: The industry is aware of the problems with rhizomania. At least one variety currently available is resistant, but I accept that the more resistant varieties that can be grown in our climate, the better it will be for the industry. These are important and serious matters. The consultation period gives Ministers a chance to discuss with the industry how best to move forward.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Nottinghamshire is a large sugar-beet growing area, with a processing factory at Newark. Will my hon. Friend consider carefully representations from the area for an extension of the containment policy for another three years, so that disease-free varieties can be identified and produced successfully?

Mr. Morley: I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes, but we cannot ignore the significant increase in outbreaks that has occurred in Norfolk and Suffolk. One of the options under discussion is whether we could maintain the protected zones in other parts of the country—and that would include Nottinghamshire—where the problem is not so great.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Is the Minister aware that the proposal to remove protected-zone status from Norfolk and Suffolk will have a devastating effect on farmers in my constituency who grow carrots and potatoes for export? Is he aware of the crucial importance of the beet industry for Norfolk? Does he not agree that it is a disgrace that the Minister with responsibility for agriculture is in the House of Lords, where Members of this House cannot question him?

Mr. Morley: We had an Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall last week on that subject. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and indeed the whole ministerial team, are responsible for issues such as the hon. Gentleman raises. However, neither he nor the Department can ignore the current situation in Norfolk and Suffolk. I appreciate that it is not good news for farmers there. The sugar beet industry is important nationally, not just regionally. It is a very important part of our agriculture sector, but we must recognise the problems in Norfolk and Suffolk and try to reach a realistic agreement that will protect the interests of the whole industry.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): Why has the Minister ruled out the option of simply renewing our rhizomania status? There is no pressure from within the EU not to do so. I am sure that the Minister is aware that a recommendation to exclude Norfolk and Suffolk from the UK's protected zone will have a devastating impact on sugar beet production and horticulture throughout East Anglia. I plead with the Minister to show some common sense on this issue. Could he not allow a three-year extension of our protected status—including Norfolk and Suffolk—to see whether scientific tests can eradicate the soil-borne virus that so threatens our sugar beet industry?

Farmers in Norfolk earlier this week overwhelmingly rejected the three proposals put forward by DEFRA. Their plea is that the Minister back the status that we have now. I hope that he will show some common sense.

Mr. Morley: I understand the concerns in Norfolk and Suffolk on this issue, but the hon. Gentleman must accept that it is not true that there is no pressure in the EU. When the protected-zone extension was agreed last time, the negotiations were very difficult and a number of member states objected. The principal objection was that, unfortunately, rhizomania had established itself in Norfolk and Suffolk. We cannot ignore the facts: we must discuss the matter with the industry and try to work out what is the best way to move forward. Unfortunately, the disease is well established in that zone, and the number of outbreaks has gone up. We cannot ignore that.

Forestry

4. **Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston): If she will make a statement on her policy on forestry. [20557]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): Our policy is to implement the sustainable management of our forests and woodlands and to promote those standards globally. The standards we apply are set out in the UK forestry standard, published in January 1998. Our policies and programmes for forestry in England are set out in the "English Forestry Strategy", which we published in December 1998.

Mr. Miller: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. I beg your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, in first congratulating my noble Friend Lord Clark of Windermere, previously chairman of the all-party group on forestry, on his appointment as chairman of the Forestry Commission.

Community forests are important in creating a buffer between some of our old industrial areas and residential areas. Does my hon. Friend agree that this programme is proving successful, particularly in the Mersey basin? Will he commit himself to working with landowners to look for an extension of these programmes?

Mr. Morley: I welcome my hon. Friend's comments on the appointment of Lord Clark, which was supported by the forestry Ministers from all the devolved Administrations. Lord Clark has a long history of involvement with forestry issues, and I am sure that his appointment will be widely welcomed.

Community forests, and forests generally, have a tremendous role to play in regeneration and in reclaiming derelict land. I am pleased that the North West regional development agency has earmarked £10 million to take that forward. There is great scope for involving private sector funds and a range of organisations in taking forward community forests, which not only provide considerable benefits for local communities, as they have in the Mersey forest, but have scope for regeneration in a way that offers a range of benefits.

Sustainable Development

5. **Mrs. Patsy Calton** (Cheadle): If she will make a statement on the role of her Department in implementing the Government's sustainable development strategy. [20558]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): My Department has lead responsibility for the Government's strategy. DEFRA intends to put in place a departmental sustainable development strategy by spring 2002. The new Department's aims and objectives have sustainable development at their heart, and my Ministers and I have been actively working with others to take forward sustainable development—for instance, at the climate change talks in Marrakech and the World Trade

Organisation talks in Doha. We have called a waste summit, published a fuel poverty strategy and set up the policy commission on food and farming.

Mrs. Calton: I thank the Secretary of State for her answer. Now will she say categorically who holds responsibility for sustainable development? The Chancellor stated in his pre-Budget report:

> "The Government is using tax and other economic instruments to put sustainable development at the heart of policy-making".

The Green Ministers Committee has now become a sub-committee of the Cabinet Office and DEFRA has sustainable development as its No. 1 priority. Does the accountability for delivery of sustainable development lie with the Treasury, the Cabinet Office or the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs? Is this joined-up or disjointed government?

Margaret Beckett: If I may say so, that is a thoroughly silly question. If the hon. Lady had been listening, she would have heard that I answered her question by saying at the beginning that my Department has responsibility for sustainable development strategy. She seems to assume that it is in some way a failure of my Department, and a criticism, that we have the Treasury completely on board with regard to sustainable development. The hon. Lady herself said that the Chancellor made a great feature in his remarks of the importance of economic measures to policy development. The Treasury has agreed that sustainable development should be an underlying theme of the whole of the next spending review. That is a substantial policy achievement, and I should have thought that if the hon. Lady understood anything about how this place worked, she would have congratulated us on it.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I hate to say it, but the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) asked an extremely sensible question. The Government's record on implementing the strategy for sustainable development is one of talking big and doing little. How sustainable is a Department for the environment that has no control over planning? What is sustainable about building millions of houses on greenfield sites? How sustainable is a Department for the environment that has no say over major transport developments? Whatever happened to joined-up government? How sustainable are Ministers who, having lost the confidence of farmers, are rapidly losing the confidence of environmentalists? They have even lost the confidence of their civil servants: in the short life of DEFRA, 14,230 working days have been lost through strike action. Is it not clear that this Christmas the first prize for the best and most stuffed turkey goes to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs?

Margaret Beckett: We can hear the midnight oil running through that—the hon. Gentleman needs to work a little harder at his jokes in future.

It is a legitimate argument that planning and transport are important for sustainable development, but when arrangements were different and the responsibilities currently held by DEFRA lay with the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, there were those who expressed great concern at the implications of that—not least in rural areas, although urban environmental issues are important, too. Certainly, great concern was often expressed at the contribution of agriculture—not least to diffuse pollution. There will always be argument about precisely where the boundaries are drawn.

We have set up a planning co-ordination unit with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in order to bring our information to bear at the appropriate times. A senior civil servant from my Department sits on the transport board. It is certainly arguable that relationships are just as good and just as close, and that just as much information flows as when those sections were all in the same Department.

As for the notion that a loss of confidence is indicated by the fact—I am sorry to acknowledge it—that we have indeed lost a substantial number of days through strike action, that is a direct consequence of the policy initiated by the Conservatives when they were in government, which allowed and encouraged a great diversity of pay policy across Whitehall. Civil servants in our new Department have very, very disparate pay structures, which is what lies behind the industrial action.

Fishing Industry

6. **Andrew George** (St. Ives): What progress she has made towards producing a long-term strategy for the future of the UK fishing industry. [20559]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I welcome the contribution being made by the industry towards development of a strategy, through the Fish Industry Forum. The outcome of the common fisheries policy review that is now beginning will also be an important influence.

Andrew George: I am grateful to the Minister for that response. Does he realise, however, that more than two years have passed since the Select Committee's report? In his response, he accepted that we need a long-term strategy for the future of the industry; and that there is clear evidence that the piecemeal and reactive response to the problems of the industry for more than a generation does not address those problems. They need to be addressed. Today's announcement that the decommissioning package has been oversubscribed more than five times is further evidence that the fishing industry is in crisis. Piecemeal responses are no longer acceptable.

The World Wide Fund for Nature and the industry are making useful and intelligent long-term proposals for the industry. When will DEFRA produce a strategy for the future of the industry?

Mr. Morley: We asked the Sea Fish Industry Authority to make proposals for a strategy on behalf of the industry. It produced a document that I very much welcome as a contribution towards that strategy. I have also held discussions with the Fish Industry Forum, the industry itself, the WWF and other interested parties. It is fair to say that we would have made more progress, but the foot and mouth epidemic has had a devastating effect on the Department's work load—as it has on other parts of the rural economy. We are committed to taking the matter forward and will hold a high-level meeting when we intend further to develop the policy. We welcome the work done by the forum and its suggestions and will respond accordingly.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Does my hon. Friend agree that, as well as devising plans to enable fish stocks to recover, we also need a plan to ensure that the fishing industry itself survives in the best condition to catch those fish? Will he look at the success of the oil and gas industry Government taskforce, which set out a clear 10-year strategy that is being implemented? Will he set up a similar taskforce for our fishing industry?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend has been a great advocate of a regional approach to fisheries, and I will certainly take his suggestions seriously. The important thing to recognise is that the most important strategy for the fishing industry is to ensure that we have a sustainable fisheries industry, with sustainable management. That involves addressing some of the problems in relation to the state of our fish stocks and the pressure on them.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): The Minister will be aware that, under the Scottish decommissioning scheme, some 20 per cent. of the fleet has applied to be decommissioned. Although that is good for the industry, it has long-term economic consequences for fishing areas. Will he therefore consider a tie-up scheme to ensure that there is still a fishing industry when stocks recover?

Mr. Morley: A tie-up scheme would not address the problem of the effects of decommissioning on regional areas. The arguments for tie-up schemes are phrased in a different way, and I am not altogether persuaded by them. Funds are available through the regional development agencies and the Scottish Executive to help regions affected by job losses and changes in industry restructuring, but the hon. Gentleman makes a very important point, and I also say to the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) that decommissioning has consequences and should not be seen as an end in itself. Decommissioning should be seen as only one of a range of options to deal with the industry's structural problems.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): I am sure that the House would want to wish the Minister well with his negotiations in Brussels next week, but will he confirm that his approach to those negotiations will be based on sound science, sustainability, especially for areas such as the North sea, and a long-term approach that will deliver for fishing communities such as Scarborough and Whitby?

Mr. Morley: I can certainly confirm that, and I know that my hon. Friend is very concerned about the fishing fleets in Scarborough and Whitby, but the fact is that if we do not follow the science, even though that, on occasion, might mean taking very difficult and tough decisions, there will be no fishing industry. It is fair to say that, in this round of negotiations, the Commission's position on a range of stocks goes beyond the science and does not appear to have sound scientific justification. In those circumstances, I will most certainly challenge its position.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Will the Minister confirm that the long-term strategy for the United Kingdom fishing industry depends on the European Union treaties ratified by the House?

Mr. Morley: The European treaties certainly have a major bearing on fisheries policy, but the hon. Lady should be aware that the way in which we manage our fisheries in our own waters and the strategies that we apply to our own fishing fleet are matters for the House and the Government.

Farmers Markets

7. **Mr. Parmjit Dhanda** (Gloucester): What action she is taking to promote farmers markets in town centres. [20560]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): We are actively promoting farmers shops and markets as a good means of getting a higher proportion of the end price back to the primary producers. Farmers markets in town centres help to reconnect town and country. Our target is 400 farmers markets by 2003.

Mr. Dhanda: I thank my hon. Friend for his response. Is he aware of a local initiative in Gloucester, involving the local authority, that has brought about a regular local farmers market right in the heart of the city centre on the third Friday of every month? That has not only benefited Gloucestershire's rural economy but provided consumers with a choice of good-quality fresh fruit. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is a good model for other towns and city centres to follow?

Mr. Morley: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I congratulate his local council on its promotional work. We have encouraged local councils to promote farmers markets. Indeed, there is a possibility of their receiving support from the Countryside Agency and, following the recent White Paper, through the rural enterprise scheme. I use farmers markets myself on occasion; they are a source of excellent-quality British food from regional producers, and I certainly commend them to the House and encourage their support.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Will the Minister join me in congratulating Bracknell Forest borough council on its initiative of organising a monthly market in the town centre? Does he accept that many people in my constituency, which is not a rural area, like to use farmers markets and to buy local produce, because they know where it has come from?

Mr. Morley: The right hon. Gentleman is right, and I join him in congratulating his local council. Such markets are a way for local producers to obtain the benefits of added value by selling direct. Many producers, including some in my area, have seized upon such initiatives and developed them constructively. That is good not only for farmers and producers but for consumers, because such markets provide high-quality products and increase local choice.

Phil Sawford (Kettering): Although we all welcome the growth of farmers markets, there is considerable concern in the farming community about the current restrictions on livestock markets and their long-term future. Given the length of time that has elapsed since the last case of foot and mouth was confirmed, will my hon. Friend review those restrictions?

Mr. Morley: We will certainly review the current restrictions in the light of circumstances and the veterinary advice that we receive. I emphasise that risks remain even though it is very welcome news that we have had no further outbreak of foot and mouth since 30 September. Livestock markets still present a risk, so we must not drop our guard or be complacent. However, as the situation changes, we shall of course review it.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Macclesfield borough council has a beautiful paved area in front of the town hall and parish church in the heart of the town. The Minister has been very supportive of farmers markets, so will he be more specific about the assistance that might be available in the short term to establish them on a regular basis for the benefit not only of hard-pressed farmers but of consumers who want real British-produced fresh food?

Mr. Morley: As a Department, we have helped to promote farmers markets and develop a national network. We have advised and supported them. It is possible to obtain advice and support from the Countryside Agency and the rural enterprise scheme. Last but not least, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's local council might be interested in providing support to an excellent initiative.

Common Agricultural Policy

8. **Mr. Derek Wyatt** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): What assessment she has made of how the mid-term review of the CAP will be affected by the enlargement of the EU; and if she will make a statement. [20561]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): We expect the European Commission to initiate the mid-term review in 2002. Agreement on the agricultural elements of the enlargement negotiations has yet to be secured, so it is not yet possible to assess precisely how the enlargement and CAP reform dynamics will impact on each other.

The environmental damage and budgetary costs of extending the CAP to new member states both add weight to the UK Government's position that the CAP must be reformed sooner rather than later.

Mr. Wyatt: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. I realise that it is a complex issue. Farmers in my constituency keep cattle and sheep and others produce apples, pears, cherries, raspberries and strawberries. Our worry is that Tesco and Walmart—and not the consumer and the farmer—will be enabled. Can she be persuaded to ask the regional development agencies to hold a series of one-day conferences so that we can discuss with farmers the type of economic reform that is needed and the help that we can give?

Margaret Beckett: I appreciate my hon. Friend's interest in the subject, and he made a very interesting suggestion. I undertake to consider whether that or other means will enable us to do more to draw in input from exactly the stakeholders to whom he referred.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): In the right hon. Lady's plans to take forward negotiations on CAP reform, what will she do to deal with the problem of the high value of the pound and its fluctuation against the euro, especially now that the agrimonetary compensation schemes are to come to an end? Is she working to find replacement schemes?

Margaret Beckett: We recognise that agriculture is one of those sectors in the United Kingdom that has suffered an impact as a result of the level of the currency. The hon. Gentleman will know that Governments who have tried to meddle with the level of the currency have rarely been successful. However, I think that it is true to say that rarely have any British Government been worried by the level of the pound being too high, except for when Lord Lawson tried to keep it high deliberately.

Our goals for CAP reform are to provide greater room for manoeuvre and flexibility and to try to steer resources away from what is known as the first pillar and into the second pillar of rural support—agri-environment schemes and so on. Indeed, if we can, we hope to break the link between support for market-distorting subsidies and direct support for production. The hon. Gentleman's ideas about the issues that we should pursue in CAP reform are, I am afraid, not at the top of our agenda.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that reform of the common agricultural policy has long been an ambition of all of us in this country? Does she accept that enlargement gives us an opportunity to examine the relevance of the CAP and to ensure that any change is beneficial to the enlarged Community in Europe?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is right that enlargement is a key issue. It concentrates people's minds on the need for CAP reform, which has long been recognised in this country. There is also the additional pressure of the timetable negotiated by my right hon. Friends and others in Doha, under which the European Union has to get together a negotiating package of proposals, probably by spring 2003. All those things, along with the mid-term review that was already scheduled, bring greater pressure to bear than ever before in respect the need, and drivers, for CAP reform.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Before I go any further and get into trouble, the House should be aware of my farming interests.

Does the Secretary of State agree that to enlarge the EU, the CAP will have to be reformed? If so, does she also agree that every member, both new applicant countries and existing countries, should move towards a deregulated agricultural market, not a protected one?

Margaret Beckett: I certainly agree that those are parallel processes. It is common ground in most quarters of the House that CAP reform should be pursued. Enlargement gives further impetus to the need for reform and provides a useful driver. I share the hon. Gentleman's view, if I understand him correctly, that we should aim for a thriving and successful agriculture industry that thrives and succeeds without needing all the direct support from the Government.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): In addition to the pressures for reform to which my right hon. Friend referred, does she agree that it is also important to treat developing countries more fairly in the world trading and agricultural systems? What work is she doing to build up a coalition for reform within the EU, in particular with key allies such as Germany, Sweden and Denmark, to ensure that all opportunities for reform are taken as firmly and robustly as possible?

Margaret Beckett: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for raising that. I agree that it is important to give developing countries proper access to our markets in this and other sectors. On alliances, we are building on the solid foundations that were securely laid when my right hon. Friend was a Minister in the Department. We continue to work in particular with the countries that she named. The intention was to have a further discussion, which would have been held fairly recently, but the Danish Government decided to have a general election instead. We anticipate reinstating that engagement soon.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): As part of the Secretary of State's review of CAP reform, will she undertake to ensure that the needs of the horticulture industry are considered and, as more countries join the EU, that proposals for fair and transparent labelling are introduced?

Margaret Beckett: The whole issue of labelling is frequently discussed in a variety of ways in the CAP as it stands, never mind how it might be reformed. I take the hon. Gentleman's point. He will know that horticulture does not feature large on the list of top priorities for consideration in the mid-term review, but I can assure him that we will try to ensure that no opportunity for beneficial reform is overlooked.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It is intriguing to hear the clamour from the Tories and the Liberals on the need for CAP reform. May I make a simple forecast? If my right hon. Friend or any other Labour Minister reforms the CAP, the farmers in all the Tory and Liberal constituencies will squeal like busted pigs and the Tories and the Liberals will vote against it.

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend has often shown remarkable prescience. For everybody's sake, I hope that we and our allies in the European Union will be successful in substantially reforming the CAP, because that is highly desirable, but I accept that, whatever success the Government achieve, it will not be recognised by Opposition Members.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): May I tempt the right hon. Lady to go a step further and talk not about reforming but entirely dismantling the CAP, which has proved to be entirely incompatible with enlargement? It is expensive and futile, and it is perceived as such. Should not the Government lead the way in Europe towards dismantling it?

Margaret Beckett: It is arguable that the Government have been leading the way in negotiations in Berlin and elsewhere, although it is important that there is a core group of nations that are of one mind in seeking reform. I share the hon. Gentleman's view on the CAP, that there is very little to praise and much to blame.

Meat Exports

9. **Mr. Lindsay Hoyle** (Chorley): If she will ease the restrictions imposed on those exporting British meat. [20563]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The current restrictions on exports of British meat as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak are imposed by European Community law. As the disease situation improves, we are continuing to seek amendments that will ease them without jeopardising effective disease controls.

Mr. Hoyle: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, but could he go a little further? Sheep farmers in my constituency have suffered because they used to farm beef and, when the beef market collapsed and they could not export, they took up sheep farming, hoping to export at a better price. Unfortunately, the restrictions mean that they do not receive a price that reflects the true worth of their lambs. Can my hon. Friend introduce blood testing, as a way to ensure that exports can resume earlier?

Mr. Morley: I returned yesterday from an international conference on foot and mouth disease in Brussels, where a whole range of issues was raised, including the possibility of a greater role for blood testing and new technology that could aid disease controls. The Government, with the support of the Commission and other member states that have been very sympathetic, have been successful in regaining our exports as quickly as we realistically could, given the scale of the disease outbreak. I appreciate that there are still many restrictions on my hon. Friend's constituents in the sheep industry. However, on the continent, prices for sheepmeat are good at the moment, and I am sure that farmers will benefit from that as we gradually expand the export market.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): What does the Minister propose to do about the French conditions, which will effectively keep British lambs out of the key French market by requiring that all lambs over six months have the spinal column removed? Given that we do not have a traceability scheme for sheep, it is obviously impossible to give that assurance, so we will be shut out of the market. The French need our quality and we need their market. What is my hon. Friend going to do about that? In light of the decision on beef, will he ensure that the French comply with their obligations to have a single market operation?

Mr. Morley: I got two questions for the price of one. First, the French proposals for additional sheep controls raise serious issues because we do not think that they are justified by the science or, indeed, by reference to consumer protection. The matter was raised at the last Agriculture Council and it will come up at the next one. Our position is that the controls place unnecessary restrictions on the sheep sector. On the recent European judgment, we were always confident that our position would be upheld by the European Court of Justice, and we now expect the French Government to comply.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Is it not also important to review policy on the import into the United Kingdom of meat for personal consumption?

Mr. Morley: Yes, we have been reviewing that, and the need to review border controls and inspection came up at yesterday's conference. According to the papers presented at the conference, this has been the worst year ever for foot and mouth outbreaks internationally, and of course we have suffered as part of that. We need to consider a range of measures, and certainly border controls are one of them.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): Will the Minister join me in expressing delight at today's European Court ruling that the French ban on British beef was illegal? Will he now ensure that maximum pressure is brought to bear on the French Government to comply with the law without further delay? What consideration has he given to seeking compensation from the French Government for damage to British producers and exporters? Will that be done in the event of a failure to comply in a timely manner? Will he commit the Government to doing everything possible to help reopen that important market for British producers, which is worth hundreds of millions of pounds?

Mr. Morley: I repeat that we welcome the ruling of the European Court, which we expected because we always argued that the French position was illegal. Just to be clear, the dispute was between the French Government and the Commission. The French Government went against the rules of the Community and the Commission pressed the case successfully. I understand that the Court has powers to impose a daily fine on the French Government if they do not comply, and I am sure that it will consider that. The Government do not have a statutory procedure on compensation, but United Kingdom companies and firms may wish to pursue it, and we will provide them with support, advice and assistance on that.

Recycling

10. **Mr. John Baron** (Billericay): What plans the Government have financially to assist local councils in meeting their waste recycling targets. [20565]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): In the 2000 spending review, the Government found significant extra resources for local authorities. By 2003–04, the environmental protective and cultural services standard spending assessment, which includes waste services, will have risen by £1.1 billion over the provision for the previous year. There is also a private finance initiative provision of £220 million over the spending review period and a ring-fenced pot of £140 million over the next two years, on which we have now published a consultation paper.

Mr. Baron: I thank the Secretary of State for her response, but that money is not enough and it is not forthcoming. Is she aware that, after the recent waste summit, Friends of the Earth and other bodies such as Waste Watch estimated that about £375 million will be required annually if targets are to be met? In addition, the £140 million that she mentioned, which was first identified in the 2000 comprehensive spending review, has still not been paid. My county council in Essex has not received a penny. If the Government—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State has enough to go on with.

Margaret Beckett: Of course, it is perfectly understandable and not at all unreasonable that organisations such as Friends of the Earth continually press the Government to increase further the already substantial extra resources that we are prepared to provide. Those issues will be considered in the next spending review. As for the progress of the hon. Gentleman's county council, I know that it has had discussions with our officials about projects that it has in mind but, as far as I am aware, it has not yet made an application.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does my right hon. Friend believe that in parts of the country where one local authority is responsible for the collection of refuse and another is responsible for its disposal, there is adequate co-ordination to ensure that recycling is given sufficient consideration and is high on the agenda?

Margaret Beckett: As my hon. Friend will know, the Government recognise the importance of that. Indeed, one purpose of the recent waste summit was to press for more action to produce the recycling facilities that we need. I accept entirely my hon. Friend's point about co-ordination between different authorities. It is important that authorities try to develop waste management and waste minimisation strategies for their area because that enables the most efficient and cost-effective arrangements to be made.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Given the Secretary of State's rhetoric about waste, can she tell the House whether over the past five years, the amount of waste generated per person in the United Kingdom has increased or decreased?

Margaret Beckett: The figure is continuing to increase at a rate of about 3 per cent. a year. That is one of the reasons why the Government have made such a priority of waste minimisation, rather than just the handling of waste. Unfortunately, there has not been the investment over the years in adequate facilities to manage and handle waste, or in facilities to minimise it. Those are all issues to which the Government are giving considerable attention.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in areas where the local authority is seeking to build an incinerator, there is a fear that that will remove the incentive to recycle, so the incinerator will suck in large quantities of waste that should be recycled?

Margaret Beckett: I am aware of that perfectly reasonable and sensible concern. That is partly why I told my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) that it is extremely important that local authorities have an overall plan for the handling of waste in their locality, and that they engage the public in discussion about such issues, so that there can be a properly considered set of proposals. However, there are occasions when any proposal for any incineration under any circumstances is opposed, on the grounds of the perfectly reasonable fears that my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) mentioned.

The Government do not accept that there is no place for some, perhaps relatively small-scale, extension of incineration facilities. Unfortunately, there is still a quantity of waste that cannot be dealt with by re-use or recycling, and there remains a need for some incineration. I am sorry that some who campaign very well on these issues refuse to accept that.

Fuel Poverty

11. **Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): If she will make a statement on her strategy on fuel poverty. [20566]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy and I launched the UK fuel poverty strategy on 21 November. It shows that since 1996, efforts to tackle low incomes and reduce fuel bills have cut the number of fuel poor by some 1.5 million. Our first target is to take the remaining 3 million vulnerable households—pensioners, families and the disabled—out of fuel poverty by 2010. At the same time, we will work with those expert in the subject to identify how to reach our overall goal of an end to all fuel poverty in the UK.

Simon Hughes: In the week before the beginning of winter, in a country that has a high level of excess winter deaths—much higher than many other countries in Europe—does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the policy announced, which was expected to produce great things, is widely regarded as disappointing? Does he accept that we need to re-examine the Government's strategy, which was announced at the Labour party conference last year and set a target date of 2010 for eliminating, as far as practical, all fuel poverty? Furthermore, will he reconsider the definition of household income? By referring to household income, not disposable income, about a million people, on best estimates, are taken out of the programme, rather than vulnerable people being included in it.

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman is being remarkably and uncharacteristically churlish. We are the first Government who have ever given a commitment to end fuel poverty. We say that we will achieve that by 2010, and it is obviously right that we concentrate on the key priorities: pensioners, families with young children on low incomes, and the long-term sick and disabled. We have also said—and I gave strong support to the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000—that once we have dealt with the priority categories, we will complete the objective by dealing with all those who are fuel poor. As to the definition, it is open to question whether that should include mortgage interest payments and housing benefit. Our commitment is to end fuel poverty on either definition.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): May I tell my right hon. Friend that low-income families in Hastings and Rye have received very well the insulation scheme support that they have been given? However, many people are not receiving such support. Eaga in particular is failing to deal with applications for months, and the target of 2010 may not be achieved in respect of some people who have already made applications.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. There have been significant delays in the scheme because of the lack of sufficient heating engineers. We have recruited a further 400 engineers in the past six months and are now beginning to pick up speed. The home energy efficiency scheme has helped 250,000 households since its launch in the middle of last year and is installing more than 3,000 new central heating systems a month in pensioner households. We are getting on track and I believe that we will certainly fulfil our objectives by 2010.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): May I ask the Leader of the House for the business for next week?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I am gratified by the interest in the business for next week.

The business for next week will be as follows:

Monday 17 December—Second Reading of the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning (Amendment) Bill.

Tuesday 18 December—A motion to approve the use of the facilities of the House for those Members who have chosen not to take their seats.

Hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let the Leader of the House answer the question.

Mr. Cook: That will be followed by the remaining stages of the International Development Bill *[Lords]*.

Wednesday 19 December—Motion to approve a statutory instrument. Details to be announced in the Order Paper.

Motion on the Christmas recess Adjournment.

The business following the Christmas recess will be:

Tuesday 8 January—Second Reading of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill *[Lords]*.

Wednesday 9 January—Consideration in Committee and remaining stages of the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning (Amendment) Bill.

Thursday 10 January—A debate on House of Lords reform on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Friday 11 January—Private Members' Bills.

The House will wish to know that on Wednesday 9 January 2002, there will be a debate relating to the 2001 broad economic policy guidelines in European Standing Committee B.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 16 January 2002, there will be a debate relating to the sixth environmental action programme in European Standing Committee A.

[Wednesday 9 January 2002:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Union Documents: 8261/01, 9326/01, Broad Economic Policy Guidelines. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report: HC 152-ii (2001-02).]

Wednesday 16 January 2002:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Union Document: 5771/01, Sixth Environmental Action Programme of the European Community. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Reports: HC 28-xi (2000-01); HC 152-i and HC 152-ii (2001-02).]

Mr. Forth: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the business for next week and beyond. Does he know that this a red letter day? I am sure that he does, as he is always very well briefed. I am sure that you, Mr. Speaker, and the House will wish to be reminded that today is the golden wedding anniversary of Lady Thatcher and Sir Denis Thatcher, without whom, of course, Thatcherism would never have been possible. Will the Leader join me, my hon. Friends and, I hope, all hon. Members in sending our congratulations and best wishes to the Thatchers and in wishing them very many years of happiness together?

Following the conviction of the killer of little Sarah Payne yesterday, will the Leader promise us an urgent statement on what the Government propose to do to give all possible reassurance to parents throughout the country that everything will be done to ensure that something as horrible as this cannot and will not happen again? I believe that it is very important that we make an urgent response to the events leading up to this ghastly incident.

The Leader of the House has told us that there will be a motion next Tuesday

> "to approve the use of the facilities of the House for those Members who have chosen not to take their seats."

I notice that the resolution states that

> "those Members who have chosen not to take their seats . . . may use the facilities within the precincts of the House and the services of departments of the House".

It refers to Members. Will the Leader of the House promise us that it is solely, therefore, a matter for the House of Commons? Will we be given proper and adequate time to debate such a serious matter? Will the motion be fully amendable? Given that it is a House of Commons matter, will there be a free vote on it? Will the right hon. Gentleman assure us that it is not subject to the deferred Division procedure, so that we can ensure that those who attend the debate are those who vote on it, and that there will be no hiding behind pink forms on a subsequent occasion?

I pointed out that the motion refers only to Members. That is important. Will the Members who are allowed on to the premises be asked to sign the same form as staff? I assume that their staff will not be allowed in because, mercifully, the motion does not cover them. Will the Members be required to fill in the form, which we have always regarded as important for our security? It asks:

> "Have you ever been involved in espionage, terrorism, sabotage"

or

> "actions intended to overthrow or undermine Parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means?
>
> Have you ever been a member of, or supported a group or groups involved in any of the above activities?
>
> Have you ever had a close association with anyone who, to your knowledge, has been a member of or given active support to any such group or activities?"

If such people—we are talking about Sinn Fein-IRA—are going to be admitted on to the premises, will they be asked to fill in the form? I hope that they will be. Will they be subject to the sanctions that are always enforced on others whom we invite into the parliamentary estate? Those are only some of the questions that will have to be resolved. I know that you will be watching matters closely, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that the Leader of the House can give us explicit assurances before we even get to the debate.

Mr. Cook: I apologise for overlooking the golden wedding anniversary of Lady Thatcher and her husband;

I regret failing in that courtesy. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for being so magnanimous on this occasion and I am happy to add my felicitations to his. If that casts a passing shadow over the festivities, I regret it, but I am happy to offer my congratulations.

On the appalling murder of Sarah Payne and the trial that has just concluded with a conviction, I assure the right hon. Gentleman and the House that the Government already have several measures in hand to increase protection for vulnerable young children. We are introducing restraining orders and sex offender orders, which restrict the activities of known sex offenders. We are conducting a review of sentencing, which pays special attention to the risks posed by sexual and violent offenders. We are also expanding places on treatment programmes in prisons. We have introduced the possibility of extended post-release supervision for sex offenders, and are requiring the police and the probation services to work together to establish better arrangements for assessing sex offenders who have been released. I assure the House that we shall continue to do everything possible to protect young children. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will keep hon. Members informed of further developments.

Let me deal with the questions that the right hon. Gentleman asked about Tuesday's debate. It is a House of Commons matter and there will not be a Whip on this side. [HON. MEMBERS: "Nor a payroll vote?"] Nor will the debate be time limited; it does not qualify for a specific limit under Standing Orders and it will therefore be open ended. Like any other motion of the House, it is wholly amendable. Conservative Members can table any amendments that they wish. As the debate commences at 3.30 pm, Divisions cannot be deferred, and we would not wish to have a deferred vote on the matter. We want a full and open debate on whatever amendments the right hon. Gentleman cares to table, and to hold a vote at the end of it.

I remind the right hon. Gentleman that we are dealing with a matter that dates only from 1997, when Speaker Boothroyd made her statement to the House. She withdrew from Sinn Fein Members access to areas within the parliamentary precincts. They had access without passes until then. They also had access to some 20 different services and facilities of the House.

The situation in Northern Ireland has changed since 1997. We have had the Good Friday agreement, and seen the election of the Northern Ireland Assembly. We have also seen the first ever verifiable act of decommissioning in the history of Northern Ireland and, only yesterday, the Northern Ireland Policing Board, including its Sinn Fein members, agreed on a new crest for the police, which includes a stylised version of the crown.

There have been enormous changes in Northern Ireland, and I do not see a case for this place remaining frozen in the position that it took in 1997, before all those events took place. One of the four Members currently barred from these premises is now a Minister in the Northern Ireland Executive. If he can be Education Minister for a part of the United Kingdom, why on earth can he not have access to the Vote Office, the Library or the travel office in the House of Commons?

Members in most quarters of the House support the peace process. If we really want to see peace in Northern Ireland, we surely ought to take this one modest step forward towards normalising the politics of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Many hon. Members on both sides of the House have been eagerly awaiting the publication of the performance and innovation unit's energy review. Today's *New Scientist* claims to have a leaked copy of it. Now that the document is in the public domain, will the Leader of the House ensure that Members can have a copy of the report, and ask the appropriate Minister to come to the House and make a statement on it? Finally, does my right hon. Friend agree that anyone who has been married to Lady Thatcher for 50 years deserves a medal as big as a dustbin lid?

Mr. Cook: I shall not rise to the tempting invitation in my hon. Friend's closing remark.

As to the energy review, I have no idea whether the document that the *New Scientist* has is the right document. In my experience, leaks are often inaccurate. I told the House at the start of the review that I wanted to ensure that hon. Members were informed when it was complete, and that commitment remains.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): We welcome the publication of the Leader of the House's discussion paper on the modernisation of the House. Will he give us some indication of his timetable for consultation on it, as all Members are obviously extremely interested in these matters? Even if it is not within the time scale of the business that he announces this afternoon, will he tell us when he expects there to be a debate in the House on the matter?

In that connection, will the right hon. Gentleman give an undertaking that he will look carefully at the way in which the proposals that he has so properly set out in this discussion paper apply to our recent discussions on the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill? We take very seriously his statement that good security makes for good government. Is he satisfied that that has happened on this occasion? Given the Home Secretary's overheated threats last weekend, will the Leader of the House tell us whether every part of the Bill is essential to prevent and deter terrorist attacks over the Christmas holiday period? For example, does he really think that part 5 of the Bill, which relates to race and religion, must be on the statute book to deter and prevent terrorist attacks? What other parts of the Bill are essential for that purpose?

Mr. Cook: On the modernisation paper, I have requested the Clerk of the Modernisation Committee to mail a copy of my memorandum to all hon. Members, with a covering letter inviting comments and views on the proposals, preferably in writing, by 31 January. If we are going to take forward this modernisation package, it is important that we do so in a way that reflects the views of as many hon. Members among whom it is possible to get agreement as possible.

I stress that the objective of the package is to secure a more effective House of Commons. It is not about making life easy for Members of Parliament, and I do not imagine that any Member came to this place expecting an easy life. They did, however, expect the opportunity to do an effective job, and that is what we are seeking to secure.

[Mr. Cook]

On the other matter, I was interested to hear the shadow Home Secretary say on the radio yesterday:

> "I am fully convinced we can have this Bill through well in time for the Christmas break, and we need it."

I fully agree—we do need it and it can be done. We need the Bill because it contains measures that are important to the security of our constituents, such as ensuring that we have better control over airfields, better control over access to nuclear material and better powers for the Ministry of Defence police and the nuclear police. It is important to show our constituents that, given that we can identify those serious loopholes in our law, we can deliver on them in a reasonable time and we can have the Bill in place by the end of the year.

Mr. James Wray (Glasgow, Baillieston): Has the Leader of the House made time available to debate the shipbuilding industry throughout the UK? A question was asked in the other place about the number of schemes set up since 1997. I notice that the answer was nil.

Mr. Cook: I fully understand my hon. Friend's constituency interest and the great importance of the shipbuilding industry to our economy. There is an Adjournment debate on the matter next week, but obviously I shall consult my colleagues on what further facilities they can make available to allow my hon. Friend to register his views with them.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Will the Leader of the House confirm that the appalling measure he proposes to introduce next week with respect to Sinn Fein/IRA does not apply to the staff of those concerned?

Mr. Cook: The position in relation to staff of the four Members who have not taken the Oath will be precisely the same as that for any other member of staff. *[Interruption.]* No, they will be subject to the same security vetting as any other member of staff.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): With reference to my right hon. Friend's answer on paedophiles, can a statement be made on the monitoring of all the features that the Government have put in place since 1997, to find out how effective they are? I took the Protection of Children Act 1999 through the House and I am very concerned that effectiveness is not being monitored, although such monitoring is desirable. With reference to paedophiles in particular, will my hon. Friend reassure me and the House that the sentencing White Paper promised for spring will be introduced then or preferably sooner, but certainly not later?

Mr. Cook: I can assure the House and my hon. Friend that the Secretary of State for the Home Department attaches great priority to the matter, and work is proceeding with all speed. I hope that we can keep to the timetable we have set ourselves. It is important that sentencing policy should be reviewed and, as my hon. Friend says, it is important that we put the sense into sentencing.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Will the Leader of the House further clarify the grounds on which the decision has been taken to permit Sinn Fein/IRA and their staff access to the facilities of the House of Commons? To many of us, the decision displays further contempt for the traditions of the House. Furthermore, will the freedom being extended to Back Benchers be extended to the payroll? I know that hon. Members—principled Members—from the Government party are as appalled as me. Will the Prime Minister be present on Tuesday to explain to the House how he made a deal behind all our backs to bring this about?

Mr. Cook: I am advised by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that the matter was discussed two years ago, so it has not arisen unknown and unheralded. As to the vote next Tuesday, it will be on a one-line Whip. If Labour Back Benchers do not share the view I have expressed, they are perfectly entitled to express theirs. As to other members of the Government, I shall move the motion on the Government's behalf and of course I shall, not unreasonably, look to the Government for support.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): The Leader of the House is aware that I have never been soft on Sinn Fein or the IRA, but is he further aware that Sinn Fein, at one time, would not take its seats in the Republic of Ireland or in Stormont, because there was no united Ireland at the time? Now it is involved in those bodies and involved in the Northern Ireland Executive. A Sinn Fein Member has toured the Floor of the House as a guest of the British-Irish parliamentary body. The more such people are involved in our activities, the more influence that will have on them. Their involvement means that they are selling out some of their distorted principles from the past, which is very welcome indeed.

Mr. Cook: Before I reply to my hon. Friend, may I clarify something that I said earlier? I am advised that it was the SDLP that agreed to the crest for the Northern Ireland police yesterday; Sinn Fein has no members on the policing board for the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

I fully recognise my hon. Friend's deep and long-standing interest in Northern Ireland politics, and I welcome the sentiments that he expressed. We are engaged in a process; we want that process to advance; we want to draw into that process precisely those who have resisted peace in Northern Ireland in the past. If we refused to take the modest step of allowing them into the precincts—[HON. MEMBERS: "Modest?"] Indeed it is a modest step to allow them access to the Vote Office and the Library. If we refused to take that step, would it be any surprise if they themselves doubted whether we were interested in taking the process any further?

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire): Will the Leader of the House confirm that he began by saying that Tuesday's debate would involve a free vote, went on to say that there would be a free vote for Back Benchers, and then said that the equivalent of a Whip would be issued to all Labour Front Benchers—all Ministers and all parliamentary private secretaries? That means that the right hon. Gentleman will, in effect, be whipping through the House of Commons entry to the House of Commons for people who deny the basic constitution of this country. Is that what the right hon. Gentleman is saying?

Mr. Cook: The motion that we will move will reverse a decision made in 1997 in very different circumstances, and restore to those Members access to the premises of a kind that was commonplace when the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues were in office.

As for Tuesday's vote, yes, it will be unwhipped for the parliamentary Labour party. But the right hon. Gentleman has been a Chief Whip: he is not wet behind the ears. He knows perfectly well that when a Minister moves a Government motion he will expect other Ministers to support him.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I know that a private notice question was asked last week, but should there not be an emergency debate or a statement next week, given the events of the past 24 hours in the middle east? Does my right hon. Friend agree that our correct condemnation of terror attacks on buses in no way gives a green light for tanks on the streets of Ramullah, jet or helicopter gunship attacks, or what now appears to be a rather blatant attempt by the Sharon Government to topple President Arafat altogether?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend will know that there was a statement on the middle east the other week. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will want to consider when another might be appropriate. In the meantime, I fully share my hon. Friend's anxiety about the present desperate situation in the middle east. We are particularly concerned about the statement that the Israeli Government will not engage in further talks with Chairman Arafat. The fact is that there will be no progress on peace unless there is dialogue about peace. As I have told the House before, it is not by means of tanks or helicopter gunships or suicide bombers that we will establish peace in the middle east; we will do so only by means of negotiations at the peace table.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): As we look across the Chamber at the crest of Airey Neave, we should bear in mind the fact that this is a week in which immigrants may have to swear an oath of allegiance, and in which IRA funds from the United States may finally have dried up. Next week, we will debate a completely contemptible motion giving special recognition to people who refused to swear any allegiance, and whose funds will now be provided by the state. Will that motion be amendable, allowing those people's cash benefits and allowances to be set at zero?

Mr. Cook: The motion will be amendable. The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues can table any amendment that is in order. That is out of my hands, but I would expect amendments of the kind proposed by the hon. Gentleman to be capable of being tabled and debated in the House.

The whole purpose of the peace process is to ensure that tragic deaths and murders such as that of Airey Neave do not occur again. It is therefore important to make certain that the peace process continues. Yes, it is challenging, and many people in Northern Ireland have had to face challenging decisions as a result of it; but I hope that the House will not shrink from what it is asked to do.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I draw the Leader of the House's attention to early-day motion 238.

[That this House opposes the increase in segregated faith schools as outlined in the Education White Paper, Schools achieving success; notes that the White Paper says that church and other faith schools must be inclusive but that schools with a particular religious ethos cannot by their very nature be inclusive, because there is discrimination through selection with those of a particular faith being favoured over children who are not of that faith or indeed are atheist, that religious schools choose their children rather than the other way around, that an increase in religious schools may lead to less integration of communities, causing division; and being taught in a religious school is not necessarily a sound basis for living in a multi-cultural society; and further notes that events in Northern Ireland and also in Bradford indicate that we should be working for the greater integration rather than the division of our schools.]

In the light of recent reports on the riots in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford, which clearly point to segregated education as a problem; and of Lord Ouseley's report, published during the summer, which blamed segregated education for the lack of understanding between different cultures; and of the fact that, in opinion polls, an overwhelming number of people come out against any more faith schools, may we have a debate just on that issue before it appears in a Bill and is lumped in with lots of other things? Given the overwhelming opposition to more faith schools, we need to debate the issue.

Mr. Cook: I fully understand the anxiety that prompts my hon. Friend's question. The Cantle report drew attention to the serious problems that can arise in schools that have one single race or culture among their pupils. It is precisely for that reason that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has urged all faith schools to include children from other communities, cultures and faiths. My right hon. Friend will put that position forward when we debate the Bill.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North): I seek further clarification from the Leader of the House in relation to the disgraceful motion that is to come before the House next Tuesday. In view of the fact that IRA-Sinn Fein youth were involved in serious violence against military installations in South Armagh at the weekend, supported and condoned by the leadership of Sinn Fein-IRA; of the murder of a man in South Armagh by republicans earlier this week; and of the fact that, as everyone knows, Martin McGuinness is chief of staff of the IRA, is it not appalling that the Government should come forward with the motion at this time, especially in view of the recent comment by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that Northern Ireland was becoming a cold house for Unionists? Is this not more evidence of that fact? Is it not appalling that at a time when the House is debating and considering stronger measures to combat terrorism, the Government should consider putting forward measures to allow IRA-Sinn Fein and terrorist front men into this House and this precinct?

Mr. Cook: I gently put it to the hon. Gentleman that his party has participated in over 2,000 committee meetings with Sinn Fein members present. Unionists sit on the Executive of the Northern Ireland Assembly with

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a Sinn Fein Member, the Minister of Education. I do not see that it is possible to have that type of co-operation and dialogue in Northern Ireland and at the same time to keep them out of the building of Westminster.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does my right hon. Friend recall how, during the 30 years of IRA terror, time and again all the parties represented in the House of Commons urged the IRA to drop the terror and adopt politics? Would it not therefore be right for office accommodation to be provided, possibly as a first step to Sinn Fein Members of Parliament taking their seats, bearing in mind the fact that, whether we like it or not, they were elected as Members of Parliament no less than ourselves? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I realise how sensitive this subject is but this is not a debate. It is the Leader of the House stating what the business for next week is. I ask hon. Members to be calm.

Mr. Cook: The last point that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) is valid. Some 200,000 people took part in the elections of those four Members. Whether or not they voted for those Members, they are entitled to have their constituency interests adequately represented and looked after. I see no reason why we should deny those 200,000 electors Members who can have access to the precincts and to the House's facilities.

On the other point, my hon. Friend is correct. We have sought over the years to engage Sinn Fein and the IRA in the political process. We cannot now draw up the drawbridge and say that they cannot have a part in these political facilities.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): The Leader of the House might at some stage explain what use of the House was made by the people elected for Sinn Fein before 1997. To my recollection, they came here only for publicity and to provoke public reaction.

Last week, I raised with the Leader of the House early-day motion 513:

[That this House has confidence in the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and invites Elizabeth Filkin to accept reappointment on the terms of the initial contract working four days a week.]

The right hon. Gentleman said that the 18 signatures it had attracted were not impressive. The number has now doubled to 36. Does he need it to double again to 72 before he will allow hon. Members to demonstrate to our constituents that we understand how they feel about the matter? The Prime Minister said that it was a matter for the House, so will the Leader of the House give us the opportunity to vote on a motion of confidence in the present Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and to invite her to accept reappointment on the present terms?

Mr. Cook: I predicted last Thursday that after I had drawn attention to the fact that the early-day motion had only 18 signatures, the hon. Gentleman would be able to attract more. I congratulate him on his efforts since then, but I stand by the point that I made—that the number of signatures is still modest by comparison with the number attracted by other early-day motions, which have obviously achieved a resonance with hon. Members that the hon. Gentleman's one may not have. On the question of a debate, I cannot, even if I wished to—and I do not—avoid a debate on the matter. Any appointment made by the House of Commons Commission has to come before the full House for approval. That motion will be amendable and the hon. Gentleman may then, if he wishes, test the opinion of the House by seeking to amend it to reappoint Mrs. Filkin.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): I was disappointed to discover that we will not have a debate next week on my right hon. Friend's plans for modernisation of the House, which would have given us the opportunity to lavish on him the praise that is his due for an excellent first step. It would also have given us the opportunity to add a few ideas. I offer my right hon. Friend the suggestion that it is nonsensical that when Ministers make statements to the House, we are not allowed to have the documents supporting those statements until the Minister has finished. If we could collect the relevant documents on an embargoed basis before the statement, we could ask informed questions instead of engaging in the knockabout that we have at the moment.

Mr. Cook: I hear what my hon. Friend says and we will consider what might be done on that matter. On the wider issue of the modernisation package, I remind the House that we are at the start of the process. We issued yesterday the proposals for a programme of work, not the outcome of that programme. My hon. Friend offers tempting reasons why we should have an earlier debate, but the best time for the House to debate the matter is when the Modernisation Committee puts firm recommendations to the House. In the meantime, we would welcome the contribution of any hon. Member who wishes to comment on the consultation document.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): When the Leader of the House prepares his introduction to the motion next Tuesday, on access to the House of Commons, will he consider whether it is appropriate for the public to elect two sorts of Member of Parliament—those who are prepared to accept the constitution, take the Oath and use the facilities of the House and the Chamber in the way we all do, and those who are not prepared to accept the constitution and who have spent much of their lives campaigning to bring it down? Is it right that under our constitution we should have two sorts of Member of Parliament?

Mr. Cook: As I understand it, the hon. and learned Gentleman and his party would wish to make the distinction between the two sorts even greater than I propose. They would keep anyone elected who does not take the Oath out of even the precincts—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] I am grateful for such ready confirmation of my interpretation of what the hon. and learned Gentleman says. If the Conservatives want to make the gulf even larger than I propose, it does not lie with them to complain about two tiers.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Will my right hon. Friend provide time for a debate on Consignia, following reports of huge job losses and then speculation that they might not happen? The House deserves an answer on the future of Consignia at the earliest possible date.

Mr. Cook: I fully understand my hon. Friend's concern and it is widely shared on both sides of the House. I am confident that opportunities for discussion will arise in the future, but I remind my hon. Friend that we introduced an Act of Parliament to confer greater commercial freedom on Consignia and the Post Office. The decisions that have to be taken are not for Ministers, but for the management. I hope that the management in making those decisions will work with, and fully consult, the work force.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Yesterday, the Leader of the House published proposals to make the House more meaningful. Many of them are useful and constructive, but how do they square with his refusal to allow a debate on the fate of the existing Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards? How can the House hold the Executive to account if it cannot debate its own procedures? The right hon. Gentleman said that we could have a debate on the next commissioner. Does he mean that a debate could be held after that person has been selected by the House of Commons Commission? Would it not be invidious to have a debate when a person has been appointed, and for the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley) to move his motion then? How many hon. Members have to sign early-day motion 513 before the Leader of the House does his democratic duty and allows a debate on the existing Commissioner for Standards?

Mr. Cook: There is no minimum threshold for the number of signatures that must appear on an early-day motion to attract a debate. Many early-day motions with several hundred signatures have not been debated, and I regret that I cannot give a commitment that they will be. I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman has correctly apprehended what I said, so I repeat that the Commission does not make the appointment, the House does. The Commission can only make a recommendation. If the hon. Gentleman and, if I may use the term, his hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley)—who appears to have other pressing matters to attend to—really feel so strongly about the matter, I do not think that it would be invidious to expect them to table an amendment when the matter comes before the House.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating my predecessor on gaining the Scottish Parliament's Committee member of the year award? The Committee that my predecessor chairs is called the Public Petitions Committee, and it allows ordinary people to access the Scottish Parliament and interact with its procedures. Will my right hon. Friend consider that as a model to be reviewed in future stages of the modernisation of this House?

Mr. Cook: I well remember Mr. McAllion's diligence and commitment to this House, and I am not at all surprised that that has been transferred to the other place in Edinburgh. I congratulate him on receiving the award.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Is it not likely that the debate on Tuesday will prompt a consideration of the Oath? As currently phrased, the Oath does not fully or wholly accurately reflect the duties of Members of Parliament. Should it not contain a provision that all hon. Members should vote and speak in accordance with their own judgment and opinion? An advantage of such an Oath would be that Government Front-Bench Members would not feel constrained to support the Leader of the House on Tuesday.

Mr. Cook: I rather anticipate that my hon. Friends will feel enthusiastic about supporting me on Tuesday. I look forward to their willing and voluntary vote in that Division. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has a talent for spotting points that the rest of us have not focused on. If he wishes to propose a change to the Oath we will, of course, consider it. However, I should be very reluctant for the House to revert to the version used in the previous century, when the Oath occupied a full page and swearing-in took much longer.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): Will my right hon. Friend be able to find time for a debate on the powers of public utility companies? Transco has caused massive disruption in the Hollins Green area of my constituency while laying a pipeline. Access for residents was cut off and good farm land spoiled. The company consistently displayed a cavalier attitude to people living in the areas. Can we have a debate on how the public utilities can exercise their very necessary powers while demonstrating proper concern for local residents?

Mr. Cook: I have noticed the growing number of articles in the press on the conduct of Transco. I cannot promise my hon. Friend that there will be an opportunity for a full debate, but I am delighted that she has had this opportunity to put on record a matter that is clearly of serious concern to her constituency.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Does not the Leader of the House understand that Tuesday's motion will be seen first as a public relations coup for Sinn Fein, and secondly as appeasement of men of violence, given that the provisional IRA has only just begun to decommission very few of its illegally held arms and explosives? Does he further understand that there is a simple solution to the problem—that the hon. Members concerned could use the House's facilities if they took the Oath like everyone else? Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman accept that it is entirely wrong to try to push the matter through before Christmas in the hope of avoiding publicity, and to whip the payroll vote on what is essentially a House of Commons matter?

Mr. Cook: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that on one point he is grossly wrong—I do not anticipate any lack of publicity for what I have just announced and for what we will be debating on Tuesday. Indeed, I can think of no circumstances in which it would not receive publicity.

The act of decommissioning is described by the commission that we have appointed to prove and verify decommissioning as "significant". That significant step

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forward requires us to ask ourselves why we are still living in 1997 and have not recognised that there have been major changes since then.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): What is it?

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman shouts as loudly as that again, he will be removed from the Chamber. It is not allowed, and perhaps senior Members will tell him so.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): My right hon. Friend will know that as well as the Cantle report, other reports were published on Tuesday dealing with the disturbances that took place in Burnley, Bradford and Oldham earlier this year. Those reports have many common themes regarding the causes of the disturbances. Those themes are relevant not only to those three places but to many others in the country where there could equally have been disturbances. Certain circumstances meant that the disturbances occurred in those three places in particular. Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is a good case for these issues to be debated in the House so that we can look at a way forward, because we never again want to see such disturbances anywhere in this country?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend speaks with great authority on this matter. He has deep commitment to and concern for his constituency, and I know the strong and active part that he has played in promoting community relations. He will be aware that the Minister of State, Home Office has followed the matter closely and played an active part in the preparation of the reports. I assure my hon. Friend that Home Office Ministers will be pursuing the necessary follow-up to the reports with great vigour and, at an appropriate moment, I am sure that they will share with the House what action they propose to take.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am sure that the Leader of the House will understand when I say that I view the business of next Tuesday with the gravest concern. Is he establishing a precedent that no longer in this place are all Members equal? To qualify for our parliamentary salary and the use of facilities, we have to take the Oath or affirm. Is this a precedent? Is the right hon. Gentleman suggesting that Members of this House are no longer here on equal terms? If so, perhaps we should have a debate on this. Bearing it in mind that he will be inviting into this place people who are closely associated still with acts of terrorism and killing, what guarantee can he provide that they will not come in with weapons or be guarded by those with weapons and that our own safety will not be put in jeopardy? I was the last person to speak to Airey Neave—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Cook: I fully respect the sincerity with which the hon. Gentleman speaks. May I correct one point of fact? The motion that we will discuss on Tuesday will make no provision for salaries to be paid to the four Members who have not taken the Oath. It will provide for them to have access to the precincts, as they had throughout the years of Conservative Government up until 1997. Such access will not differ from the access of those individuals. However, that provision of access to the precincts will not apply to any members of staff they bring with them, who will be subject to exactly the same scrutiny that any other member of the public or member of staff working for Members of Parliament undergo.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I refer my right hon. Friend to early-day motion 557 in my name.

[That this House is gravely concerned about the implications for asbestos-induced mesothelioma sufferers and their families by a recent Court of Appeal judgment that a claimant cannot recover damages if he was exposed to asbestos by more than one employer on the grounds that it is not possible to say which one was to blame, ending a situation of joining defendants and apportioning liability accordingly that has lasted for more than 20 years; is further concerned that the judgment directs that claimants may have a claim under the Pneumoconiosis (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979, costing the Exchequer tens of millions of pounds each year, and creating conditions for the insurance industry to escape its responsibility; and calls for this injustice to be righted by legislation if necessary.]

I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the horrendous decision made in the Court of Appeal on Tuesday that people suffering from asbestos-induced cancer can no longer claim compensation when more than one employer is involved, on the grounds that it cannot be determined which employer the fibre that started the cancer came from. The judgment went on to suggest that people in that position may claim under the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers Compensation) Act 1979, which was set up to provide compensation when the insurer could not be traced. The Act does not provide compensation in this case—it is not an alternative to common law damages. The Appeal Court declined leave to appeal to the House of Lords. Will my right hon. Friend bring the issue to the notice of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with a view to considering the possibility of bringing in a small Bill to rectify that massive injustice?

Mr. Cook: Obviously, I cannot commit myself to legislation without consulting my colleagues and reflecting on the matter. I hear what my hon. Friend says about the judgment, and can understand the sense of injustice and hard feeling experienced by those who lost such a case. I can see that the implications of the principle contained in the judgment could go much wider than such cases. I am informed that the Association of British Insurers is consulting its members on their response to the judgment, and I hope that a way forward can be found that will not deny remedy and justice to those involved.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Will the right hon. Gentleman find time for a debate—next week or in the first week of January—on industrial relations in the civil service? Given that the staff of the Department for Work and Pensions are on strike and that that may cause immeasurable difficulties for vulnerable people seeking benefits or advice in the pre-Christmas period, and that staff of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs are also on strike, thus meaning that farmers will not receive the payments owed them under

IACS—the integrated administration and control system—which in turn will cause them great difficulties, especially after the events of last year, is it not clear that macho management is not working and that it is certainly not delivering for the public?

Mr. Cook: I would be the last person to defend macho management—or macho anything else. I very much hope that a common way forward can be found.

The strike in the Department for Work and Pensions relates to the introduction of changes that will be very much in the interest of the public. Although I hope that we can find agreement on taking forward those changes with the support of the staff—without staff feeling threatened in any way—our duty is obviously to the public and to ensure that we provide them with the best possible service.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the good sense and imagination that runs through his modernisation paper and especially on his comments that the proposals are a first step towards changing practices and the balance between this place and the Executive, and that the process will continue. I also welcome what my right hon. Friend said about the nature—albeit limited—of the free vote next Tuesday. That seems to go some way towards recognising that membership of the House and the use of its facilities are not in the gift of the Government—they are a matter for the House. It is the House—properly—on a free vote that should decide such matters.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is correct about the free vote for Members of the party. He is entirely free to vote as he wishes on Tuesday. I would have neither the temerity nor the courage to advise him how to vote on Tuesday.

I welcome his comments on the modernisation proposals. I also agree with him that, important though the package is, work will remain to be done and that modernisation will not stop with this programme.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Bearing in mind the motion that the Leader of the House will introduce next Tuesday, is he aware that the vast majority of Members take their responsibilities to Parliament very seriously indeed? Several of those Members are currently in shared accommodation and in accommodation that is not up to the standard of that occupied by other Members. Why the right hon. Gentleman is suggesting to the House that he will give Members who have no intention of taking part in its proceedings the same sort of space that he gives Members who take this place seriously?

Mr. Cook: Against the historic achievement of the Good Friday agreement, the first-ever verifiable decommissioning in the history of Northern Ireland and the election of the Northern Ireland Assembly, to argue over whether we can find a room for those Members does not match the gravity of that process in Northern Ireland.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Following an earlier question, may I remind my right hon. Friend that the board of Consignia has a long history of ignoring its work force and failing to consult them on major decisions? I was involved in a campaign to keep open the sorting office at Mount Pleasant in east London and visited the board of the then Royal Mail with three of my hon. Friends. I saw then the contempt with which the board treated the work force—collectively sounding like a third-rate 1980s management textbook.

Massive job losses are in the pipeline. Some of my constituents and people from the poorest parts of London will lose their jobs with Consignia. When we are talking about job losses on that scale, it is a matter for the Government and for the elected representatives who represent those people who are on the receiving end. Can we have a debate?

Mr. Cook: Of course, my hon. Friend raises a very important priority—ensuring that Consignia's management consults fully and tries to reach consensus with the work force, because the problem that faces Consignia is common to the management and the work force. I am very much in favour of Select Committees having access to all available information and to hearing, whenever possible, Government policy announcements. I was a bit taken aback to hear the scale of redundancy that was announced first to a Select Committee. I hope that the management will now remedy that by moving quickly to try to reach agreement and a way forward with the work force.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): On Monday this week, the report that the Home Secretary commissioned from Ted Cantle produced its first recommendation saying that the rights and, in particular, the responsibilities of citizenship need to be more clearly established and should be formalised into a statement of allegiance. That view was endorsed by the ministerial group on the issue, which states that the public realm is founded on negotiation and debate between competing viewpoints at the same time as it upholds inviolable rights and duties. Given the motion that will be moved in the right hon. Gentleman's name on Tuesday and the fact that the Ministers who made that comment will be invited to support it, is this an example of joined-up Government or double standards?

Mr. Cook: Not in the slightest. The citizenship of Britain of course embraces the fundamental right to vote in a parliamentary democracy. Many of the citizens of those four constituencies have exercised that right and they have elected those four Members of Parliament. The House has to ask itself whether it is consistent with what we preach in parliamentary democracy not even to let them into the precincts. The hon. Gentleman was a special adviser to the Conservative Government, so I find it surprising that he never expressed that view to those whom he advised at the time who, throughout their period in office, let those four Members into the precincts.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House will be aware that there have been requests for other debates from both sides of the House. Is it not passing strange, therefore, that the Government have selected next Tuesday for the debate to allow Members who have not taken their seats to use facilities in the House, especially when that party has not been prepared to nominate people to the police board and to take a fuller role in Northern Ireland? At a time when we have been debating international terrorism, is that not giving a wrong

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

signal? The shadow Leader of the House said that today was a red letter day—perhaps some hon. Members and many people outside the House will think that it might be a white feather day.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman's party sits on the Executive and the Government of Northern Ireland with one of the very four Members whom we are discussing. I cannot accept that it is right to sit down at the same meetings of the Executive in Belfast with him, but to say that he cannot even get in to use the Vote Office, the Library or the travel office here. That seems to fail to recognise the logic of the process, to which the hon. Gentleman has contributed greatly.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): The Leader of the House said that the Sinn Fein-IRA Members would not be eligible for parliamentary salaries. However, will they be eligible for parliamentary allowances? If so, will not the British taxpayer hand over almost £500,000 to Sinn Fein-IRA? Will the right hon. Gentleman also investigate whether the ribbons in the Members' Cloakroom can support the weight of a kalashnikov?

Mr. Cook: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's last question is worthy of the House of Commons or its exchanges. I happily confirm that the motion will provide for allowances to be payable on the same basis as those for any other Member of Parliament who has been elected by his constituents.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): To inform the debate on access to the House, will the Leader of the House make available the information about the terrorist activities of the Members concerned? At least one of them, Martin McGuinness, was to my personal knowledge the commandant of the IRA in Londonderry. I interviewed him when he was in that capacity and, during the interview, he told me that he had had a dozen Catholic informers killed. If he has, indeed, put that bloody past behind him and now believes that constitutional change should come about only by operating within the constitution, is not the appropriate test that he takes the Oath?

Mr. Cook: Martin McGuinness is, at present, the Minister of Education in the Northern Ireland Assembly. He plays a full part in the government of Northern Ireland and in the administration of the education system there. I think that it is wrong for us to say that that is all right for the people of Northern Ireland but that we will not allow him anywhere within the precincts of Westminster. As to what may or may not have been his past or the past of any of the others, we shall not get peace or make progress on the peace process if we constantly start from the very beginning and do not accept that some of these people have played a part in achieving a period of peace and stability in Northern Ireland.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): The House will recall the tragic murder of a special constable on the A64 in north Yorkshire. What does the Leader of the House propose that I say to the constable's family and my constituents in the Vale of York who are deeply distressed to hear of the despicable motion that the Leader of the House has put before the House.

In relation to the Second Reading of the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning (Amendment) Bill, does the Leader of the House agree with the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) that only a token gesture towards decommissioning has been made?

Mr. Cook: The de Chastelain commission described the act of decommissioning as significant. That is the basis on which we proceed.

On the hon. Lady's point about what she should say to her constituents, she might tell them whatever her predecessor said before 1997 when the four people involved were admitted to the precincts and had access to the facilities to which we shall propose on Tuesday they have access. Our proposal will be made in circumstances that are very different from those of 1997 when they had such access to the precincts. However, it is precisely to prevent murders and violence and the grief of relatives in the future that we signed the Good Friday agreement and entered into the peace process.

I make no apology for having a peace process that provides a relative peace and stability that Northern Ireland did not know beforehand. If we want that peace process to continue and we want to avoid murders in the future, we have to show our willingness to enter into that process.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Although I associate myself with the comments made by my right hon. and hon. Friends—I include my hon. Friends on the Unionist Benches—I wish to raise a matter that concerns my constituents in east Cowes. I refer to the loss of 650 jobs—one third of the work force—at GKN Westland that has been announced today as result of the downturn in the British aerospace industry. Would it not be a better use of time on Tuesday next week to debate the downturn in the British aerospace industry and what the Government propose to do to help those who are suffering because of it?

Mr. Cook: I fully sympathise with the position of all those, including the hon. Gentleman's constituents, who suffer as a result of the recession in the aerospace industry. That reflects the reality in aviation at present.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware from previous exchanges, Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry have sought to do whatever they can to make sure that we enable the aviation industry to come out of this difficult period. I am particularly concerned that we act to ensure that the skilled and experienced teams of people who will be needed in the future are available when the industry returns to normal.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Will the Leader of the House ensure that the Prime Minister opens the debate next Tuesday so that he can explain to the House and to the nation the extraordinary contrast between his laudable pursuit of the al-Qaeda network, which attacked the two tallest buildings in New York, and his craven behaviour towards the network of the IRA-Sinn Fein—they are inextricably linked in his own words—which attacked the two tallest buildings in London, namely the NatWest tower and Canary Wharf in 1996? These people whom he is inviting into the House should, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) suggested, be providing answers in criminal proceedings instead of being asked into the House.

Mr. Cook: The logic of the hon. Gentleman's position—I suspect that he may be prepared to follow it through—is that we would never have signed the Good Friday agreement. *[Interruption.]* He agrees with me on that. We would still have the IRA as an armed organisation at war with the British state. We would still have the IRA murdering people in Britain and letting off bombs in London. That is what the hon. Gentleman would embrace rather than the peace process.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): The Leader of the House mentioned the progress that has been made in the peace process, but that came about only at the last moment, at the eleventh hour and three quarters. Is he aware that there is every possibility that IRA-Sinn Fein will revert to their campaign of violence and terrorism against the British state? If their Members had taken their allowances and moved into their offices, what would happen if they did revert to that campaign?

Mr. Cook: Plainly, in the event of a breach of the Good Friday agreement and a reversion to the war with the bullet and the gun, many policies and attitudes will change, but it is precisely so that we do not have that reversion to violence that it is important that we maintain momentum in the peace process. We must be willing to show that we ourselves, and not only the other side, are committed to maintaining that momentum.

Asbestos Victims

1.30 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 24, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

deadly asbestos dust, which affects not only hundreds of my constituents but thousands of people throughout Britain.

This issue concerns not only families who are losing court cases but those who win cases, because even they are being denied their hard-won, legitimate compensation.

It is now estimated that as well as the hundreds who have died or who are dying from mesothelioma simply because they lived in the neighbourhood of the J. W. Roberts factory in Leeds before it closed in 1956, there may be as many as 1,500 mesothelioma victims in Britain every year, and that number is rising rapidly. Five years ago, and after seven years of campaigning, we won a court case and, in a landmark judgment, proved that Turner and Newall, which had taken over J. W. Roberts, was responsible for polluting people in Armley in my constituency. A handful of compensation claims have been paid.

In September, however, Turner and Newall was taken over by an American company, Federal Mogul. On 1 October, it applied in the UK courts to put its UK subsidiaries into administration. That decision immediately blocked compensation payments to Turner and Newall's asbestos victims. The administrators now refuse to deal with any compensation claims, despite the original court judgment supporting the victims. Cheques to victims have bounced. One victim received a letter offering compensation, and in the very next post, a notice saying that the offer was worthless because the company was in administration. That victim has since died.

As we know, administration proceedings can take years, but the administrator had three months—which are up at the end of this month—to produce a financial statement and hold a creditors meeting. However, the parent company in America has already ring-fenced its liabilities, and it can continue trading and making a profit. This is not only about a few cases in Armley or about Turner and Newall; it could affect all asbestos claims in Britain.

This has been an annus horribilis for asbestos victims in Britain. Judgments seem to protect the companies rather than the victims, as we saw in the Chester Street case in January, the Fairchild case in February and the Turner and Newall case in October. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) earlier, there has been another such judgment in the Fairchild case this week.

Asbestos victims are vulnerable and totally innocent, and they die of the worst forms of cancer imaginable. They did not bring it on themselves, and they deserve compensation. We urgently need a full debate so that we can have a co-ordinated Government response to ensure that victims get compensation and polluting companies pay. Tragically, these victims do not have years to live, and they cannot afford to wait. They need to be given hope by a debate in the House.

Mr. Speaker: I have listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman said, and I have to give my decision without

[Mr. Speaker]

stating any reasons. I am afraid that I do not consider the matter that he has raised appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 24. I cannot therefore submit the application to the House.

BILL PRESENTED

EURO AND STERLING CHOICE

Mr. Graham Allen presented a Bill to permit the use of the euro as well as the pound sterling as legal tender in the performance of financial obligations at or above a certain value; to provide for dual pricing of goods and services at or above that value; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on 11 January, and to be printed [Bill 70].

Orders of the Day

Animal Health Bill

Not amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

ANNUAL REPORT ON ANIMAL DISEASES

'In the 1981 Act the following section is inserted after section 10—

"10A Annual report on animal diseases

The Secretary of State shall lay before Parliament in each calendar year a report on measures taken by Government departments and agencies and other public bodies to prevent the importation into the United Kingdom of the diseases mentioned in Schedule 2A.".'.—*[Mrs. Ann Winterton.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

1.34 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss new clause 4—*Annual review of import controls*—

'In the 1981 Act the following section is inserted after section 10.

"10A Annual review of import controls

(1) The Ministers shall prepare a report during each financial year reviewing all of the activities of government departments, the Food Standards Agency, local authorities, port health authorities and other relevant public agencies directed to the prevention of the introduction of disease into or within England and Wales through the importation of animals and other things, including their making of orders under section 10 of this Act, assessing the effectiveness of the action taken, and proposing such further action as may, in the opinion of the Ministers, be required to further reduce the risk of disease being imported.

(2) The Ministers shall, as soon as possible after the end of each financial year, lay their report before Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales.".'.

Mrs. Winterton: I am delighted that the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who has responsibility for animal health, is on the Front Bench, having returned, no doubt triumphantly, from a conference that the Government organised in Belgium on the eradication of foot and mouth disease. A press release on the conference says that the Secretary of State addressed it on the way in which the outbreak developed and was tackled. However, she did not tell the conference the cause of the outbreak, which is one reason why the Opposition have tabled the new clause.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): A bit late.

Mrs. Winterton: It is not late. It will not have escaped the hon. Gentleman's notice that we are not in government; I remind him that both foot and mouth outbreaks, in 1967 and this year, occurred when a Labour Government were in office. In 1967, the relevant Minister handled the matter in an exemplary fashion and, as a result, the very good Northumberland report was produced, which pointed to the way forward for the future. I concede that, sadly, successive Governments have not done enough work on preventing further outbreaks of animal disease from being imported into the country.

The saying "Prevention is better than cure" is echoed by the farming community today, despite the introduction of the Bill, which was conceived in haste to put right legal problems encountered during the foot and mouth epidemic and also to deal with matters relating to scrapie, about which there is no hurry at all. However, the Government have not addressed the real problem facing the country—our vulnerability to future infection. The United Kingdom will be as vulnerable as ever to the importation of animal, plant and even human disease, even after the enactment of the Bill.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): My hon. Friend will know that, although the Government introduced the Bill before their own inquiries reported, Professor Mercer's report for Devon county council makes action on imports the first recommendation in his conclusion.

Mrs. Winterton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is a distinguished former Minister and an assiduous constituency Member of Parliament. She is right; in fact she has uttered the words that I would have uttered a little later in my speech; in fact, I probably will still utter them as the point is well worth making again. Well done Devon is all that I have got to say. Would that the Government had tackled the problem as a matter of urgency.

New clause 1 would oblige Ministers to conduct an annual review of the effectiveness of actions by all the agencies concerned to prevent animal disease, including foot and mouth, from being brought into the United Kingdom. We are an island nation; many farmers have asked me why the sea that surrounds us, which should form a protective barrier, has not done so.

Our defences against the importation of disease are minimal. At our airports and seaports, checks on baggage and goods in transit are infrequent, but when they are made, more often than not they reveal illegal imports of food, particularly meat. Many people travel extensively and visitors to the United States of America, Australia or New Zealand cannot fail to be impressed by the extremely tough and thorough precautions undertaken by those countries to minimise the risk of importing disease. I admire the policies of those countries and their actions, which have proved to be extremely successful.

Why should the United Kingdom leave itself wide open to unnecessary risk of disease in the future, and why have the Government not taken any meaningful action to clamp down on illegal imports? I have no doubt that the usual talking shops will have been set up between representatives of the various agencies involved, such as Customs and Excise, the Food Standards Agency, local and port health authorities and the Home Office, in order to find a way in which import controls could be strengthened, but what action has been taken?

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): None.

Mrs. Winterton: What decisions have Ministers made to protect animal, plant and human health?

Mr. Bacon: None.

Mrs. Winterton: My hon. Friend takes the words from my mouth. Answer is there none. What a disgrace. What an insult to the farming community, which has suffered so much as a result of Government incompetence and inaction. How much longer must we wait until the nettle is grasped—

Mr. Bacon: Until the next Conservative Government. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order.

Mrs. Winterton: My hon. Friend is right. He is very enthusiastic, and so he should be. The Government's inaction will have been noted by people in the country. They look to the Government to do something to help the situation, instead of doing nothing. I am not sure whether Ministers are prepared to take the necessary action to protect the United Kingdom from a scourge similar to the recent foot and mouth epidemic.

We may never discover the precise cause of the outbreak, mainly because the Government have refused point-blank to hold a full, independent public inquiry. At least the Devon inquiry undertaken by the county council, and to which my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) referred, points us in the right direction and recommends that prevention of disease through importation should be given the highest priority.

Many organisations involved in the rearing of livestock have commented on the present unsatisfactory arrangements. In December 2000 the National Pig Association forwarded comments as evidence to the then Select Committee on Agriculture regarding the Government's handling of the classical swine fever outbreak in August last year. Those comments included criticism of the lack of speed of Government action, and went on:

> "The NPA fears that . . . UK pig producers are unreasonably exposed to a repeat outbreak of a disease such as Classical Swine Fever, due to the Government inaction on effective control of the import of contaminated meat."

The association continued with an analysis of the lack of a governmental contingency plan:

> "The NPA fears that the Government will wash its hands of the consequent problems, in the event of such an outbreak."

As a result of the classical swine fever outbreak, the NPA had clearly understood the Government's irresponsible attitude to the amount of food imports entering the country, which remains as big a risk today as it was last year or in February 2001.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I hear the hon. Lady's allegations about lack of action, inadequacy and illegal imports, but what firm evidence has she about the scale of illegal imports? What evidence has she that the measures that we have taken are not deterring illegal imports? I accept that if an activity is illegal, one cannot guarantee that it will never occur, but what is the evidence to back up the hon. Lady's allegations leading to all those terrible consequences?

Mrs. Winterton: It does not become the Minister to be as complacent as he appears about the serious problem of animal, plant and human diseases that may come into this country in illegally imported meat and meat products.

[Mrs. Winterton]

He is right that no Government can guarantee that no disease will enter the country in that way, but I wonder whether he has recently travelled extensively as a private individual—*[Interruption.]* Would he like to intervene on that point? I think that I heard him mention checks from a sedentary position. What checks?

1.45 pm

Mr. Morley: On the claims that are being made about measures taken in America and Australia, I have been to those countries comparatively recently and I must say that I have not noticed any particular differences from the checks and security in our country. I am not complacent about this matter. Some issues need to be reviewed and we want to do some tightening up. We are and have been doing that, so the claim that no action has been taken is completely wrong.

Mrs. Winterton: When the Minister makes his speech, he can outline precisely what action has been taken. Frankly, it does not add up to a row of beans. I remind him that he made the following statement in a written answer:

> "The current epidemic has been caused by a specific strain of the foot and mouth virus (PanAsian Strain 0) which has occurred in a number of countries around the world. The precise means of introduction of the virus into Great Britain is unknown and the subject of continuing investigations,"—

he can tell us later what those investigations have found so far—

> "but is most likely to have been introduced in illegally imported meat or meat products."—*[Official Report*, 9 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 445W.]

There is a problem, and as I develop my speech, I shall show the hon. Gentleman that the Government have taken no meaningful action whatever.

Mrs. Browning: I was astonished by what the Minister said just now in his intervention. Many years ago, I regularly did business with American companies and travelled to America. Some 10 or 15 years ago, it was a matter of routine that the Americans asked one to declare both in documentary evidence and in person at the airport whether one was carrying any foodstuffs or plant materials. They have sniffer dogs at their airports. The Minister must whisk through the VIP lounge and never see ordinary people.

Mrs. Winterton: My hon. Friend makes her point very well and explains the reason why I asked the Minister whether he was travelling as a private individual. I, too, travel to the United States of America, and I do so at least once year. I am very much aware of the measures that that country takes to ensure that visitors do not import any disease through meat or meat products, and I admire it for what it does. I have also had the good fortune to travel to New Zealand and Australia. In New Zealand, they spray the plane. Elsewhere, one has to take off one's shoes. I know that visitors to New Zealand and Australia who have come from a farm or had an address at a farm have been put through checks to the 10th degree. Sniffer dogs can almost tell whether one has eaten an apple on the plane, never mind whether one has brought one into the country.

Mr. Bacon: I, too, have been to the United States and Australia. Indeed, I have worked in both countries and, like my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), I know how strict their controls are. Does my hon. Friend agree that even if the Minister will not take notice of us, he should take notice of the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks)? On Second Reading, he said:

> "As a regular traveller to the United States, I know how vigorously one is questioned there about any products that one is taking into the country. We have no such procedures".—*[Official Report*, 12 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 620.]

Of course, the hon. Gentleman probably does not go through the VIP lounge and must do what Opposition Members have to do.

Diana Organ (Forest of Dean): I, too, have been to America—we have reached the moment when we all say where we have been on our holidays. I had to hand over chewed bits of carrot and apple that small children had been eating on the journey. I was delighted to be able to do that. However, the questions that we are asked on entry to the United States are a formality; 11 September is testament to the fact that security in their airports is not as good as ours.

Mrs. Winterton: I was in America on 11 September because one of our children lives in Hoboken. We were on top of the twin towers on the previous Saturday evening. Internal flights in America have poorer security, but that does not apply to international flights. When people enter the USA, they put the fear of God into you, for good reason. When people enter the United Kingdom, the opposite happens. I shall consider that contrast in more detail later when I deal with some of the measures that the Government have introduced, which have proved useless.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): My hon. Friend probably knows that the 14 investigations at Heathrow found five tonnes of illegally imported meat. In every example that was drawn to the airport authorities' attention, illegally imported meat had been brought into the country. In some cases, blood was pouring out of suitcases. The authorities would have investigated more cases if they had the money and the facilities. We should debate such matters this afternoon instead of considering ways in which to cull more of our creatures.

Mrs. Winterton: My hon. Friend makes a strong point, and he is right. There appears to be no co-ordination in the effort against illegal imports.

Mr. Morley: That is an exaggeration.

Mrs. Winterton: I shall ignore that point and get on with my speech.

The Government received another warning about the danger of illegal imports. On 11 March, two weeks after the first outbreak of foot and mouth, Clive Lawrence, director of Ciel Logistics wrote to the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Ciel Logistics is approved to collect and recover consignments from airline warehouses and take them through the port health border inspection post. In his letter, Mr. Lawrence highlights the fact that the Ministry and Customs and Excise had long suspected that products were being illegally imported as passenger baggage, but did not have the resources to check. My hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) made that point. The letter states:

> "The issue had to be addressed when baggage handlers at Heathrow refused to handle the suitcases due to the smell and the blood coming out of the bags. Inspections carried out on Nigerian flights on the 7th, 8th and 11th May resulted in 600 kgs of detained foodstuffs."

Mr. Lawrence continues:

> "On one flight from Nigeria on 15th May, a check resulted in 2500 kgs being detained from passenger luggage. It contained various bush meats and a large quantity of maggot infested fish both wet and dry. We also recovered one whole dead deer freshly slaughtered in a suitcase."

The mind boggles.

Mr. Lawrence did not receive a reply from the then Minister for some time. In a recent parliamentary answer, the Under-Secretary referred to "improved publicity" to ensure that travellers are aware of import restrictions, and claimed that

> "at least 20 per cent."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 1085W.]

of legal meat imports are being subjected to physical checks. That may be because of the imports from Belgium that were stopped recently. I believe that two or three consignments were stopped because of the checks on legal imports.

As I said earlier, I do not believe that travellers who enter the country are informed that they should not bring in any animal or plant produce, nor are they questioned or required to fill in any forms to say that they are not doing so.

When we come into the arrivals section as ordinary travellers, there are, to the best of my knowledge—I checked when I last went abroad—no big notices telling us what we should or should not bring in. The only evidence of "improved publicity" that I could find in my local airport, Manchester—one of the most successful and best run in the United Kingdom—was one small, peeling poster that had been placed in the departure area rather than in arrivals. That is quite extraordinary and pathetic. I look forward to hearing the Minister outline the precise action taken since February to eliminate illegal imports.

The animal origin legislation is based on EU directive 97/98. The Miscellaneous Products of Animal Origin (Import Conditions) Regulations 1999 were made on 26 January 1999, laid before Parliament on 3 February and came into force in the United Kingdom on 1 March that year. Any product of animal origin arriving at a United Kingdom port or any other European port needed to be inspected for port health clearance before being allowed free circulation in the Community, yet Her Majesty's Customs and Excise continues to claim that it does not have the resources to continue to target the flights that more commonly carry illegal imports. That must be looked at, because the dangers are inherently greater from some parts of the world than from others.

Mr. Lawrence also has proof of the fact that the meats are often contaminated. His company found that one consignment was smuggled through in December 2000 as a cargo of vegetables and undeclared to customs. It was investigated and found to contain 15 dead monkeys and some tortoise legs. Laboratory checks showed a risk of Ebola contamination. Fortunately, that consignment was found, but it is generally acknowledged that the majority of luggage goes unchecked.

I wonder whether the Minister has seen the video prepared by the National Pig Association, which highlights the dangers facing this country from Ebola contamination. Although we are talking about animal health today, in cases such as that it is clear that plant health and human health are also implicated. If Ebola and other viruses about which our doctors know virtually nothing are imported, the effects will be far greater than the devastating effects of the recent foot and mouth outbreak.

On 4 December 2001, the Minister responded to a written parliamentary question about the additional biosecurity measures that have been implemented to check imports since February. He stated:

> "Adequate measures are already in place to control legally presented imports of meat and meat products."

That may well be true; I have mentioned recent finds of legally imported meat of a cheap or substandard nature coming into the country. I wonder whether those checks would also have applied to the chicken imported from Thailand and elsewhere in the far east—reported on the front page of, I think, yesterday's *Daily Express*—that had been contaminated by pork and was full of water. That chicken was being used by the catering industry. Very strict checks and conditions should be placed on the catering industry and others to prevent the importation of such cheap substandard produce. We have been talking about legally presented imports, but does the Minister choose to disregard those meat imports that are not legally presented? That would appear to be the case from the lack of action taken by the Government.

The Minister's written reply continued:

> "Port health authorities and local authorities are requested to undertake checks at port of entry and at premises of destination to ensure that products not eligible for trade are detected."—[*Official Report*, 4 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 261-62W.]

2 pm

Will the Minister clarify the divisions of responsibility for food import checks? He says that port health authorities and local authorities are requested to undertake checks, yet the Food Standards Agency also holds responsibility. Will he confirm the exact role it plays in import checks? Will he consider giving that Government agency, which has gained cross-party support for its vigilant attitude to food safety, full overall responsibility, or should a new body be formed to take responsibility for checking for illegal imports?

The National Farmers Union has written to Members, stating that the range of different agencies involved and the undoubted practical problems associated with enforcement are putting the United Kingdom livestock sector under continued threat. Who could argue with that?

Mr. Wiggin: Is not the FSA a responsibility of the Department of Health? That is another example of a lack of joined-up government.

Mrs. Winterton: My hon. Friend is right. The FSA relates to health, but it also relates to animal health. My point is that there is no joined-up government; it is absolutely disjointed. Various bodies hold various responsibilities—there appears to be no coherent policy whatever. I genuinely believe that the Government must urgently address that matter.

[Mrs. Winterton]

The NFU also questions whether the Government have shown sufficient commitment on the vital issue of illegal imports. Although the union acknowledges that the United Kingdom may never be able to achieve 100 per cent. protection from the import of animal disease

"much more can and must be done to reduce the risk of a re-run of this year's hugely damaging and costly events."

The Minister has told the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee that, in his view,

"the risks of a further outbreak remain very high"

and we all agree that there may very well be cases before the outbreak is definitely over.

Why, then, are the Government considering legislation that I believe to be hasty and insensitive to the needs of the farming community and that allows the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to plan for future outbreaks? Why do not the Government take preventive action and consider eradicating the possibility of further epidemics by removing the very source of disease through stronger food import controls?

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): The hon. Lady makes the strong point that, as well as introducing new measures to control future outbreaks, the Bill ought to reduce the likelihood of outbreaks or the rate at which they develop. No doubt she will support my new clauses 9 and 10.

Mrs. Winterton: No doubt the hon. Gentleman will support new clause 1, as one good turn deserves another. The point of tabling my new clause is to return us once again to everything that this country has gone through since February and the cost, not just to taxpayers, but to farmers, their families, animals, DEFRA officials and veterinary surgeons. The answer is prevention, which is the first issue we should consider. Through tabling the new clause, I seek from the Minister an indication that the Government are serious.

Mr. Drew: Is the hon. Lady saying that the Animal Health Act 1981, which gives powers regarding the control of imports, is insufficient? If so, why has she not tabled a new clause to that effect?

Mrs. Winterton: I am saying that, even if the Act were sufficient, the powers are not being used. I have tabled a new clause that would make the Minister responsible produce an annual report outlining precisely the actions taken. It is a spur to make the Government solve the problem more quickly.

Whatever mechanism is used, action should be taken. The new clause may not be perfect, but it is an honest attempt to raise what I believe to be the most important issue facing the agriculture community and, indeed, people living in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Nothing in new clause 1, or indeed new clause 4, would strengthen powers relating to animal health. What we seek is a commitment from the Government to be more open in their measures to crack down on illegal meat imports and deal with the concerns of those in the farming industry, who often describe in anecdotal terms what is happening in this country. Surely, if the Bill seeks to penalise farmers for poor biosecurity, we should seek from the Government a similar undertaking to be as open and honest as possible in all their efforts to ensure that both illegal and legal meat imports are of the highest quality.

Mrs. Winterton: That is a sound point. We look to the Government to take the necessary action. I agree with the hon. Gentleman—I would have liked the new clause to go much further—but we must be realistic and appreciate that, in the numbers game, it is hardly likely that the Government will accept this modest proposal. I am trying to give them an opportunity to accept it, to demonstrate their acceptance by what they do from now on, and to place in the House a record of what they have done. If by any chance they feel that they have not the necessary powers, they should bear in mind that, as the hon. Gentleman hinted, they could have introduced them in the Bill. They have introduced enough draconian and sweeping powers that run contrary to natural justice. I am amazed that they have not put first things first on this occasion.

David Taylor: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Winterton: I will. I must make some progress after that, but I do not want to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, who is to be my ally.

David Taylor: Not on this occasion.

The hon. Lady welcomed and endorsed the suggestion by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) that illegal meat imports should be of the highest quality. Can she tell us how we can attain such an elusive goal?

Mrs. Winterton: I think the hon. Gentleman jests. He knows quite well that the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) did not mean that at all.

David Taylor: He said it.

Mrs. Winterton: If he said it, no doubt he will wish to correct the impression that he gave. I know the hon. Member for Ceredigion—I know the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) as well, of course—and that is not a view that he would ever express or espouse. I shall rush to his defence, and pull out my trusty sword. *[Interruption.]* There will be no blood on the carpet this afternoon; that would not do. I fear that you are about to rule us out of order, Madam Deputy Speaker: I had better get on.

As I have said, new clause 1 is very modest. An annual review of import controls would ensure that the situation remained under constant appraisal, and—a more urgent requirement—that local authorities and central Government adopted a joined-up and collective approach to import checks. I urge the Government to consider the proposal carefully, and then to implement an annual review with immediate effect. It would cost them nothing apart from a lot of good will, and they would do much good in the process.

On 14 June, the Netherlands banned the import of pigs and fresh pigmeat from Spain after an outbreak of swine fever. That move by Dutch officials strengthened action already taken by the European Commission, which at the time banned live exports from the region of the country affected. Why could the United Kingdom not adopt a similar approach to defend our shores from a repeat infection of animal diseases that have such catastrophic consequences for farmers in rural areas, for our economy and, indeed, for our international reputation?

We believe that it should be Government policy to defend the high standards of British agriculture, especially those that underpin Britain's exemplary record on animal welfare. Food imports that do not match the standards required of British farmers by law must not be allowed to undercut British produce, and thus undermine British standards.

I urge the Government to ban unfair agriculture imports—not, I hasten to add, imports that are unfair in terms of pricing, but those that have not reached the quality that we expect our farmers to produce. The Government have repeatedly refused to go along that route.

Mr. Morley: It is illegal.

Mrs. Winterton: The Minister says that it is illegal. That means that we have imported legally the chicken breasts that I mentioned earlier that were on the front page of the *Daily Express*.

Mr. Morley: There is a misconception. I have heard it before. A proposal to ban imports that do not meet our standards would be illegal. All imports into this country have to meet the same standards that are applied in relation to the EU: for example, standards on slaughterhouses. It is true that some products and production methods in the United Kingdom are higher than those standards. There are various reasons for that and various choices, but all imported meat has to meet those EU standards. In that case, they are legal. A proposal to ban them would be illegal.

Mrs. Winterton: The recent outbreak started in February. If the Government had been the French Government, they would have immediately stuck two fingers in the air—*[Interruption.]* It may cost them a lot of money, but I bet that our producers will not receive compensation for the lack of business and the terrible difficulties that they have faced because of the French ban on British beef. If foot and mouth had been imported into France, as it was into this country, the French would have immediately, not knowing what the source was—the UK Government do not yet know—ceased the import of meat and meat products from countries where there was endemic foot and mouth. Consumers and farming communities in the UK would have liked that sort of action in order to protect animal health and human health in the UK.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Is not the fallacy in the Minister's argument illustrated by the fact that recently five plants in China have been licensed by the EU to export chicken meat to Europe, yet they have not been properly or fully inspected by EU inspectors? There is no way of knowing whether those meat products will meet the standards required in this country. Whatever the theory may be, in practice those products are coming in and do not meet our standards.

Mrs. Winterton: My hon. Friend makes an exceptionally strong point that cannot be refuted. It is disgraceful that there are double standards. What the EU says is not necessarily carried out. I urge those in the catering industry and in supermarket chains, which hold such power over the sale and processing of food, to recall what my hon. Friend has said—not to buy products from those plants and instead to buy from plants in the UK, where the birds have been raised to a good standard of husbandry.

Mr. Drew: The hon. Lady may be intrigued to know that, during its visit to Brussels and to the World Trade Organisation in Geneva, the Select Committee on Agriculture took up that point. Representatives of third-world countries regarded the demands of the EU to inspect as somewhat protectionist, so there is a balance to be reached. It is not as clear-cut as the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) alleges. A degree of checking goes on. It can always be improved, but the position is not that clear cut.

2.15 pm

Mrs. Winterton: The hon. Gentleman has made his point. I am not in a position to know whether the plants that he knows about have been inspected properly. I am not so concerned about whether China believes that we are trying to protect our market. If we are, we are doing so for good reasons of animal husbandry and for the quality of the food produced.

I wish the hon. Gentleman well in his travels. I understand that the Select Committee will be going even further afield in due course. No doubt in the Tea Room he will tell me of his experiences. As he travels, not as an ordinary person, but as a member of a Select Committee, I hope that he will take the opportunity to go around every airport, open his eyes and look at what other countries do. If he goes to New Zealand, or even perhaps South Africa and the United States, that will be a very good experience for him. What he sees will bear out everything that I have said.

I think that I have spoken for far too long—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Hear, hear? Everyone has been asking me to give way and I have been very generous. If I had not given way, Members would have been critical. I apologise if I have spoken for too long, but I heartily recommend the new clause. It is not necessarily perfect. It does not necessarily go far enough but it puts down a solid marker as to what the Government might do to bring immediate improvement to the dreadful situation that faces the UK as a result of the importation of illegal meat and meat products.

Diana Organ: In health policy, whether it is about human or animal health, the essence is to prevent rather than to cure. Any health policy should include measures to prevent the disease, rather than deal with the symptoms. That is a positive way forward. As a result, I support new clause 4.

It is important that we take this issue forward. The terrible events of foot and mouth over the summer show that we must do something to make controls on imports much tighter. We do not yet know how foot and mouth came into this country. There are three inquiries on the go but they have not published their reports yet. The most important one in relation to this issue is the inquiry about

[Diana Organ]

lessons to be learned, which is chaired by Dr. Iain Anderson. I believe that it starts tomorrow and will publish within six months of starting, but its terms of reference are important:

> "To make recommendations for the way in which Government should handle any future major animal disease outbreak, in the light of the lessons identified from the handling of the 2001 foot and mouth disease outbreak in Great Britain.

In its first recommendation, the Devon inquiry made the same point: the lesson to be learned is about the protection of this country from the invasion of disease. That recommendation said:

> "We therefore find that methods of import control must be tightened to the highest international standards and if necessary be the subject of new legislation. It is important that new powers are implemented properly at ports and airports with the increase in staffing that that implies."

Another inquiry also supported that view. Following the 1967 outbreak, the Northumberland inquiry recommended that we should tighten and have greater security on import controls at ports and airports to stop disease coming in. The Government have chosen to introduce the Bill before any of the inquiries that are examining the 2001 outbreak report, but in the light of recommendations from those other notable reports, it is right that new clause 4 should be included in the legislation.

We are not sure where the FMD outbreak came from. It is highly likely—but it is only speculation—that it came from the importation of illegal meat that entered the food chain, possibly because certain farmers did not observe the recommendations on the use of swill. As we heard from the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), other countries appear to have tighter controls, and we have rehearsed the reports of holiday entries into north America, which has greater questioning, monitoring and controls. According to the hon. Lady, it seems that the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee may have the opportunity to visit New Zealand, and it would look carefully at the import controls in place in Auckland should it do so.

We do not seem to have those import controls at our ports and airports and it is right to put them into legislation. However, to do so, we need more resources. The current officials of the port animal health teams do not have sufficient resources to carry out the checks that would be necessary. It is right that we should put the resources in. One can always call for more resources, but if we are seeking to improve our biosecurity, they will be necessary. At the moment, through the Bill and other measures, we ask farmers to look to biosecurity when there is an outbreak of disease, whether of classical swine fever or FMD.

Mrs. Browning: I do not disagree with the hon. Lady's remarks, but I am puzzled on one point. It is clear that new measures will require new resources, but why does new clause 4 not contain a recommendation to that effect?

Diana Organ: The new clause would provide for an annual report, and it would automatically follow that better import controls could not be instituted without resources. If we are to have good national biosecurity, we need to put the resources in. The Minister has rightly said that we need better awareness among the travelling public. However, the problem lies not with the naive travelling public, but with those people who deliberately import meat illegally. The odd traveller who has a deer or a tortoise in his suitcase is something that we might want to check, but we do not need the new measures for him. The problem is those people who are deliberately engaging in illegal trade and bringing substandard food products into this country.

Mr. Paice: I agree with much of what the hon. Lady says, but she cannot be allowed to get away with asserting that we should be worried only about those people who, to paraphrase her remarks, are in it commercially. We have heard many stories of people bringing large quantities of meat into Heathrow in private suitcases, and they presumably do not do so on spec but have a destination for it. The problem goes further than that. What should be done about the countless number of much smaller items such as ham sandwiches and other consumer items that are brought in? *[Interruption.]* Before the hon. Lady seeks to ridicule that question, I assure her that if she tried to take such items into Australia or the US she would not get past the first post. We should take the same care in this country.

Diana Organ: We need a risk assessment. We cannot absolutely eradicate all risk of people bringing in the last little bit of a ham sandwich tucked into their pockets. In the examples that we have heard about, of suitcases going round Heathrow with blood dripping from them, the system has caught up with the travellers responsible and prevented such illegal importation. What we need to do now is to provide more resources, and an annual report, to help to tackle the problem of people who import illegally as a commercial business, in the way that Customs and Excise tackle the illegal importation of alcohol and tobacco products. We need a proportionate response—that phrase was much used in Committee—and I am much more concerned about larger quantities of meat that might enter the food chain than about the naive traveller with his accidentally imported bit of ham sandwich.

Mr. Paice: I draw the hon. Lady's attention to the conclusions of the Department's scientists that the outbreak of swine fever in the late summer and early autumn of last year was caused by the illegal importation of a pig product, assumed to be a pork pie or a ham sandwich. The consequences for the pig industry in East Anglia were devastating and that is why we cannot ignore that relatively small problem.

Diana Organ: We are not sure how the swine fever outbreak started, although there has been much speculation. We must use better targeting—

Mr. Bacon: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Diana Organ: May I answer the first intervention before I do so? We have to target resources, but my concern is that we need more systematic and rigorous controls at the point of entry so that we can catch people who import, illegally and for commercial purposes, meat that will enter the human food chain. We have already caught many of the other offenders.

Mr. Bacon: I draw the hon. Lady's attention to a report published today by the Health and Safety Executive. It is called "Reducing risks, protecting people". On page 67, under the heading

> "Comparison of risks against costs",

it says:

> "In comparing costs against risks the Health and Safety Executive, when regulating, will be governed by the principle that there should be a transparent bias on the side of health and safety . . . There is a need to err on the side of safety in the computation of health and safety costs".

For duty holders,

> "the test of 'gross disproportion'"

should be seen in that light.

Is not that evidence that the Government recognise that the potential costs of getting it wrong are so huge that it is worth a bit of investment—a favourite word of the Government—"up-front" to ensure that we get it right?

Diana Organ: There will always be some level of risk, especially on food issues. We seek to improve the biosecurity of the nation through the Bill, but we cannot have a 100 per cent. risk-free situation and say that nothing will ever break through the barrier that we are trying to erect. There is always a cost to set against every benefit. I am arguing for greater and more targeted resources and an annual report, because it is obvious that the present measures have failed us in the past.

Mr. Simon Thomas: The debate is slightly off target, because it is not important that we decide today what constitutes the greatest risk to animal health, be it a ham sandwich or an illegal cargo of Brazilian meat entering via the Republic of Ireland. What we need to decide is whether it is right and proper that the Government should tell us annually what steps they have taken to crack down on such offences. It is on that basis that we could hold the Government to account. We need that open accountability and auditing of the Government's work. The hon. Lady is answering the points well, but the debate is not concentrating on the crucial issue.

2.30 pm

Diana Organ: I give great thanks to the hon. Gentleman, who is absolutely right. This is a sub-debate which does not go to the heart of the matter. The real point is that we want an annual report and more targeted resources. More information should be given to the travelling public, but we want the Bill to improve control measures at ports and airports and to strengthen biosecurity.

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): Most hon. Members have received correspondence from dismayed farmers and people in the agriculture industry, expressing much the same sentiments as have been heard in the past hour. Many people involved in this exercise recognise that we need stronger and better regulation of food imports. As has been pointed out, the new clauses offer a mechanism for keeping matters under constant and vigilant review.

People who work at our ports and airports would welcome having the matter raised regularly, as that would ensure that they were given the support needed to do their jobs effectively. Financial support is important, but so, for instance, are proper notices and leaflets. They would bring the matter to people's attention before they disembark in this country, and they represent a cheap way to remind people to take care.

Tony Cunningham (Workington): That is an important point. Some options are simple and cheap. For example, people checking in luggage at airports are asked whether they packed the bag themselves. Similarly, a few simple questions when people return to the country would remind them of the portion of pork pie or sandwich that they have in their possession. They do not bring such material in deliberately, but an appropriate question and the correct signage could be helpful.

Mr. Breed: I agree. That would command the support of most people. However, some ports have better facilities than others. Early on in the foot and mouth crisis, I spent five or six weeks submitting requests to visit ports to look at their facilities. Eventually, it was agreed that I could visit Felixstowe.

Felixstowe has impressive facilities for checking imports. Refrigeration units allow refrigerated containers to be checked, and a computerised system checks containers' provenance. In addition, the port has many expert staff, who do admirable work. Trading standards officers, the port health authority and the Customs and Excise work together as they check containers. That was impressive.

I wonder, however, whether I was allowed to see Felixstowe because it would make me think that other ports' facilities were equally impressive. I suspect that they are not. People who deliberately try to introduce illegal meats are unlikely to bring them through the port at which there is the greatest likelihood that they will be caught. They are more likely to go for the weakest link in the chain of security around the country.

We need to ensure that all airports and seaports have the proper facilities. Improving security arrangements at one port will only put more pressure on other ports and other forms of entry. I hope that the Government will recognise that part of the war against foot and mouth disease and other diseases involves improving ports' facilities. Officials' ability to do their work properly needs to be reviewed regularly.

I was interested to read recently that European legislation in the new year will try to make the whole of Europe a fortress against third-country imports. A clear problem at Felixstowe involved imports from European countries which had originally been part of third-country imports into those countries. Officials' ability to check those imports was insignificant.

It is a weakness in the system that imports from Thailand, Brazil, South America and Asia, for instance, can go to other European countries before being passed on to Britain. Such imports are subject to very little checking. I do not know what input Britain has had into the discussions of the forthcoming European legislation, but it is a major problem. Being an island, Britain has more ability to protect itself than other countries. I hope that we have contributed to discussion of the introduction of that legislation and made sure that we do not suffer from third-country imports that pass through another European country.

[Mr. Breed]

The new clauses have been tabled by hon. Members on both sides of the House. The proposals that they contain do not go much beyond what the Government were doing anyway. If there had been regular reviews or reports after the 1967 outbreak, some of the measures that we now believe to be necessary might have been introduced earlier. If those matters had been raised in a debate or report, we might have been alerted beforehand to some of the problems at the heart of this year's foot and mouth crisis.

If things like the movement of animals—and especially of sheep—the growth of market traders, and the conditions in markets had featured in previous annual reports, we might not have had to face some of the problems encountered this year.

The new clauses are based on common sense. If the Government are undertaking regular reports and reviews, there is no reason why—given their new-found transparency and openness about the actions that they are taking—they should not publish their findings and present them to Parliament. A proper annual review could take into account the new information arising from the inquiries that are in hand. It would allow the House to adapt to new circumstances and to ensure that new forms of security and defence were established. In that way, we could avoid subjecting the country to more disease than might reasonably be expected.

I hope that even if he cannot support the new clauses, the Minister will support the desire expressed in them for openness and transparency so that a regular review is not just seen by a Department but laid before Parliament. That would ensure that we are vigilant in future, bearing in mind the enormous cost of foot and mouth for the country and the way in which it has ravaged our rural economy. Producing an annual review and report would be an inexpensive and reasonable way of doing that, and I hope that the Minister will support the new clause.

Mr. Drew: I congratulate the official Opposition on catching us up with regard to new clause 1. If they had got a move on in Committee, we might have had this debate then. I remember that the new clause was first down in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ). However, as an altruistic soul, I do not claim ownership. I am looking forward to what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say. There is a unanimity of purpose in dealing with imports and, more particularly, improving co-ordination of the way in which we deal with them.

In a sense, I am pleased that the official Opposition are not aiming to strengthen existing legislation on controlling imports. I have talked to the National Farmers Union, and have been led to believe that the Animal Health Act 1981 is sufficiently strong to control imports of illegal and unacceptable foodstuffs into the country. It is a question of co-ordinating and monitoring the situation and, as new clause 4 specifies, publishing a report of what is going on.

I hope that my hon. Friend can tell us what is happening. There is a need to tighten things up, although we might be 20 years or more too late, as the Northumberland report highlighted. It is amazing what people can find in the Northumberland report as worthy of prioritisation. When I look through it, I do not always find some of the things that it is said to have mentioned. It is a good report, but it is about a different outbreak at a different time. We can learn from it but we cannot treat it as tablets of stone and implement every recommendation as if things have not moved on, because they have.

So many organisations are involved in controlling imports that we must consider the issue carefully. They include Customs and Excise, the Home Office, the Food Standards Agency and local authorities. Two-tier systems—or three-tier, like mine—have district environmental health officers and county council trading standards officers and, last but not least, the port health authorities.

Mrs. Browning: I am interested to hear the hon. Gentleman praying in aid the excellent work of the trading standards officers in Gloucestershire county council. However, I recall that only yesterday, in Westminster Hall, he was advocating abolishing Gloucestershire county council.

Mr. Drew: I thank the hon. Lady for giving me the opportunity to say that that is why I am calling for unitary authorities. In that way, we might have some real co-ordination, with different officers working in the same way. I am in no way being derogatory about the excellent work they do, but rationalising the services makes sense. These proposals are about improving co-ordination and making sure that people work together.

2.45 pm

The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) hit the nail on the head, which he does more often than not. We are not simply talking about the main ports of entry. Not a lot of people know this, but I have in my constituency a port called Sharpness. On a busy week, about 10 ships come in to it. I am loth to remind my hon. Friend the Minister, but we had an immediate rapport about this when I came to this House. My hon. Friend told me that he had managed to negotiate an improvement in the herring quota for my constituency. The only problem was that although I have a port in my constituency, I do not have a herring fleet, and I put him right later on. It appeared in *Punch*, and is a legitimate source of interest between us.

Sharpness is the epitome of the problem. It is a very small port, although its tonnage is growing. The idea is to have permanent people on the port side looking at every cargo that comes in. We have foodstuffs coming in, but nothing mainstream. New clause 4 puts forward ideas for improving that. Given that unity of purpose, my hon. Friend the Minister would be churlish, to put it mildly, if he did not allow us to consider ways in which to improve the situation. We can talk about that, in this place or the other place, and about how to use the existing legislation more effectively.

There is an issue here concerning our relationship with the European Union. I had the opportunity to speak on this matter about a month ago when we considered the potential of the European food standards agency. In many respects, our Food Standards Agency, introduced by a Labour Government, has set the trend for other countries within Europe and further afield. They regularly draw on the evidence of the Food Standards Agency to see what good work is being done. We cannot introduce the sort of measures that we want in isolation from Europe. Whatever our view of Europe, we must accept that much of our trade is there and that much of it will come through Europe, whether it is legal or—dare I say—illegal. We must work with other EU countries, and that should be done through the Food Standards Agency. Whether we are talking about our Food Standards Agency being at the forefront or working in tandem with the European agency, I do not mind.

If the Food Standards Agency is to be the lead agency, as looks highly likely, I accept that the Food Standards Agency should report to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs as well as the Department of Health. That is one of the only recommendations that I made when looking at DEFRA's terms of reference. We can have that argument another time. How do we empower the Food Standards Agency, what do we expect it to do, how do we monitor its performance and how do we expect the other Government agencies and Departments to relate to it?

Finally, when we talk about farmers improving their biosecurity, there is a trade-off with the need to know that there is a so-called level playing field. It will be more level if farmers know that there is a regime that not only deals with imports but tells people what it does. Because there are various agencies trying hard to do what they can, it is never completely clear who is taking the lead and what they are doing.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will be able to allay a lot of fears. The debate has been important; I am glad that it has come at the start of the Report stage rather than getting squeezed off the end, as happened before. This is an important point, and we will have done a great deal of good if we make sure that things are tightened up and we all know where we are going.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Perhaps I might tempt the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to save the House further debate on this subject. I should be delighted if he would intervene to tell me whether he agrees or disagrees with the proposal. New clauses 1 and 4 focus centrally on the production of a report, and some cogent arguments have already been put by hon. Members in support of that idea. Would the Minister like to stop me going on for too long by telling me whether he agrees or disagrees with the proposal?

Mr. Morley: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman who—as ever—goes straight to the point. Obviously hon. Members want me to respond, but I cannot do so in an intervention. I can only say that I think that the case is being made well and I am very sympathetic in principle to the idea of the report as well as to the general principle of being open and transparent. However, I am not sure whether the Bill is the right vehicle for that, as the issue is one of imports—not animal health. However, I am prepared to take the proposals seriously and to consider whether we can do something along those lines.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful to the Minister for his intervention. When he appeared before the Select Committee and we probed him, as many have done, as to why the measure had been so hastily and speedily introduced, he reminded us—including those of us who have served in the ministerial area that he occupies with such distinction—that legislative opportunities do not come often. However, there are precedents that might give him comfort as regards his worry that the Bill is not the right legislative vehicle: the exercise rewriting in plain English the UK tax laws resulted from Parliament agreeing, in a Finance Bill, that an important report be produced. That may offer the Minister a degree of comfort. That is one reason for the request in both new clauses that a report on action to deal with illegal imports, in the first instance, be laid before the House.

Westminster Hall offers us more opportunities to debate such reports, which would also enable the Select Committee to go through such matters. By the time the Minister responds to the debate, I hope that he will have resolved his internal struggle as to whether he will sign up to the proposal to produce such a report—whether enshrined in law, as I should prefer because that would guarantee that it was done, or undertaken outside the provisions of the Bill.

As other new clauses and amendments rightly point out, it is also important to develop a strategic approach towards not only foot and mouth but a range of potentially lethal and infectious diseases—as suggested in schedule 2—that threaten us in the United Kingdom. The proposed report would assist in the development of a biosecurity strategy to which all parties could make a contribution.

When the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) spoke to his new clause, he talked about the Food Standards Agency. I do not think that is the right lead body: in essence, the issue relates to animal health and, as many hon. Members have already pointed out, it involves many governmental and non-governmental agencies. DEFRA would offer the best co-ordinating point for all those elements, so that each can make their contribution to the production of the report.

The report could also be developed as an action document for a wider biosecurity network. I have studied the information issued by DEFRA in its briefing: "The Animal Health Bill—frequently asked questions". The strategy for dealing with importation covers little more than one A4 page. Most of it describes various forms of publicity. The most far-sighted statement is:

> "We are also looking at a wide range of other options to ensure the rules on imports are enforced effectively and efficiently. These include, for example, the possible use of sniffer dogs and x-ray machines."

I am sure that the Minister will tell us that much more is really going on, but why not deal with the problem rigorously by producing an annual public report? The Minister might have been on his way back from Brussels and thus unable to listen to "Farming Today" when a spokesman was talking about changes in EU legislation. Those changes may in due course be relevant, but we cannot wait until then. The spokesman referred to the areas where there are risk factors for foot and mouth alone: in Russia, the middle east, north Africa, Asia and south America. We could add to those factors the variants for the possible importation of suspect material: illegal immigrants, tourists, legitimate immigrants—one could go on, but this is neither the time nor the place for a debate on all those factors. Given the complexities, however, there is a real need for the Minister to sign up to the production of a report that could form part of a proper biosecurity strategy to deal with those problems.

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[Mr. Jack]

We should not let people forget the foot and mouth outbreak. Although the previous one was in 1967, the cases of swine fever and other diseases show that it may not be long before there is another outbreak. It is better that we are rigorously prepared; the report would make a contribution to that.

Mrs. Browning: The Minister will be aware that, in Committee and during today's debate, I have drawn his attention to the first conclusion of Professor Mercer's inquiry into foot and mouth in Devon. It is an indictment of the Government that, in drawing up primary legislation, on Second Reading and in Committee, they flatly refused to address the urgent need to ensure that action is taken to deal with imports. We must do that if any lesson is to be learned from the recent foot and mouth outbreak.

In his evidence to the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Minister acknowledged:

> "The legal imports were never responsible for this outbreak. We do not really know what has been responsible . . . it was probably some form of illegal import."

If that is his view, it beggars belief that—on the precautionary principle—the Government have included no provisions that address that problem. What is worse, when they were presented with reasonable amendments in Committee, they refused to accept them and voted against them. New clause 1 offers us the last sliver of a chance to extract from the Government a tangible piece of documentary evidence as to how they are dealing with a clearly perceived problem: the most likely cause—in the absence of other evidence—of the recent foot and mouth outbreak.

I support the new clause. However, umpteen glossy Government reports pass through the House, so I hope that, if the Minister is amenable to the suggestions and produces an annual report, he will not see it as a soft option. The report will need to give tangible and quantifiable evidence and to demonstrate year-on-year progress. It must be devoid of any of the usual spin doctor waffle—the matter is important and it deserves better treatment than that. The report will need to be statistically—

Mr. Morley: Is this a persuasive case?

Mrs. Browning: I have a certain sneaking affection for the hon. Gentleman—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ooh!"]—and I have tried every course. On Second Reading, I went out of my way to say nice things about him. Throughout Committee, I read him interesting extracts from publications—but now there is no more Mrs. Nice Guy. I shall lay it on the line: as my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) correctly pointed out, we are talking about animal disease. Clearly, there is a read-across from our concerns about the danger that imports present and the spread of animal diseases in this country to harmful human diseases and human health risks.

As time goes by, there may well be communality between the procedures that are put in place to address both issues, but the Bill deals specifically with animal disease, and it is on that basis that the Minister should recognise that—although he accepted not a signal amendment in Committee from any party or, indeed, his own Back Benchers—now is his chance. Christmas is coming, and he should remember the lowing animals around the manger. Now is the time for the Minister to show the softer side of his nature and support new clause 1.

3 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas: At the start of what I hope will be a short contribution, may I clear up any confusion that may have been caused in Leicestershire because of my earlier remarks? Of course, I wanted to refer to legal meat imports. It is important to realise that legal and illegal meat imports present a risk to animal health. As has been rightly said, there is a public health issue as well. Certainly, all of us who are here to serve, to protect and to provide services to the public should be concerned when we hear of the cases involving Ebola-carrying monkeys.

I simply want to take this opportunity to encourage the Minister to accept either new clause 1 or new clause 4, because there is a great deal to be said for them. A bit of politicking has gone on, which is quite natural, and the Government have been accused of being rather lackadaisical in their attitude to illegal meat imports. However, when I met representatives of the county committee of the Farmers Union of Wales in my constituency last Friday, they told me that they were being asked to do an awful lot to improve and maintain biosecurity. They pointed out that they had to face the financial penalties for not reaching the Government's standards, and they simply said, "Ask the Government what they are doing for us." They wanted to know what the Government are doing to protect their industry and farming communities from illegal meat imports.

Legal and illegal meat imports involve an economic cost that affects how we try to get our local farmers to sell their produce successfully. The point that the farmers wanted me to get across—I am delighted to have the opportunity to do so—is that they want the Government to show clearly how they are checking meat imports, ensuring that higher public standards are meeting consumers' concerns and weeding out illegal meat imports.

The FUW would like an annual report to be published to show what percentage of meat imports are checked and at which locations those checks take place. I accept that those checks take place at large ports such as Felixstowe, but we also heard about the smaller ports such as that in the Stroud constituency, as well as Fishguard and Swansea, where such checks are not carried out regularly and where curious meat imports end up. South American beef is sent to the Republic of Ireland, somehow acquires EU status and is then imported into this country. We would like an annual report to explain how such things occur.

If the Minister does not accept either new clause, I hope that he will at least undertake to produce a report. If he does that, I would still commend new clause 4 to him. Despite the virtues of new clause 1, by which Conservative Members try to address similar aims, the advantage of new clause 4 to the Minister is that its terms are much more detailed and thorough. It states which agencies should be covered by an annual report and casts its net a little wider than just the narrow confines of the Bill. We seek a wider-ranging report on animal health issues that might be addressed not only by the Bill, but by the actions of other Government agencies and Departments—for example, the Food Standards Agency under the Department of Health.

There are great advantages in both new clauses, but new clause 4 has the added advantage that the National Assembly for Wales would receive a copy of the report. Two serious animal diseases—brucellosis and tuberculosis—are dealt with as animal health matters by the National Assembly, not by the Minister here. Plaid Cymru would like to amend the Bill and suggested some changes on Second Reading, although not in Committee because we did not get to that point. Under amendment No. 19—if we ever get there—we shall try to give the National Assembly greater powers to deal with animal health issues.

Indeed, the National Assembly's Agriculture and Rural Development Committee has said that it wants such powers, but it wants to have them through secondary legislation, which is a slightly different way from the one I would advocate. All that has the virtue that the National Assembly should receive a copy of such an annual report and debate it, and it should be able to suggest any improvements to primary legislation that are needed to crack down on illegal meat imports.

I hope that the Minister will either undertake to produce such a report, or, even better, accept one of the new clauses. However, whatever happens, I hope that he will accept that the farming community and the public need to see an annual report from the Government in which they set out the steps that they are taking to ensure that there is no further outbreak of foot and mouth, or any other serious animal health problem, in this country. I hope that the Government will take all necessary steps to ensure that no such outbreak occurs and that they will be openly accountable.

Mr. Paice: The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) referred in his opening remarks to a point that I want to make. I endorse what he said about the pressure that is properly put on farmers to improve their biosecurity. The vast majority of farmers realise that more can be done, but probably those who realise what can be done have already done it—that is the nature of such things. However, the need for biosecurity is recognised and accepted by the industry.

Alongside that, the Government have been making noises during the past few months, if not years, about farmers taking increased responsibility—using insurance mechanisms or whatever—for the consequences of animal disease. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to start with that issue because it behoves the Government to do their bit to minimise the risks against which farmers must take their own biosecurity measures.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) and my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) and other hon. Members have said, the advantage of an annual report is that it would give the House and others the opportunity to find out what was happening. In itself, it would solve nothing. In theory, an annual report could say that nothing had been done and that could go on year after year, but we all know that the reality is that such exposure of the actions taken, or not taken, would result in improvement.

It is worth making the point that when the House passed the Food Standards Act 1999, about which I spoke on behalf of the Opposition, we tried very hard to give the FSA the responsibility for monitoring the standards of imported food. I recognise that that issue relates to human health, rather than animal health, but, as several hon. Members have rightly said, there is a tremendous amount of conjunction between those two issues. Of course, some diseases affect humans and other animals.

I make the aside, but it is an important one, that if we are facing climate change and a gradual warming of this part of the world—most people now accept that that is happening—we shall be increasingly at risk of diseases that have not yet reached these shores. We are dealing not only with known problems, but with those that might arise in future. It is a great shame that the Government strongly resisted making the FSA responsible for import controls, for example.

I also want to refer briefly to the world trade in food. I readily accept that we are debating whether an annual report should be published on how we address the animal issues that relate to imported foods, but we need to return to the point about new legislation that the Minister made in an intervention on my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde. Of course, the Minister is right to say that, strictly speaking, food can be moved freely in the European Union, but I remind him that there is a treaty article—it was 36, but it now has another number—that allows any Government to impose import controls for reasons of human or animal health or welfare. The power can therefore be used if necessary. The power's use is considered by the European Court of Justice, and France used it over BSE. As a result of decisions made at the European Council, the court decided that its use in that case went over the top.

In an intervention, I referred to food imports from China and the increasing amount of meat imports, including poultrymeat, that come from Brazil and Thailand. We therefore need to question whether the controls exercised by the EU on our behalf are sufficient. I hope that an annual report would be able to refer to the implementation of the European controls.

It has been argued that the developing world would see the introduction of certain standards as a trade barrier. Like most Conservative Members, I am in favour of free trade as long as it is fair trade. The non-governmental organisations that assist the developing world frequently use the term "fair trade", and I have no qualms about the concept. However, if standards are imposed in this country or in Europe, we cannot have fair trade if products that do not meet those standards are allowed into the marketplace. The Government or the Commission must either prevent such imports or provide public support to domestic producers to compensate them for the extra costs that would be imposed on them.

A couple of months ago, the Minister created agricultural headlines when he expressed his belief that subsidies were doomed and would go. I do not want to enter that debate now, but his view hardly suggests that the Government are willing to set out the compensatory approach that I have just described. As the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) said, we must recognise the importance of the famous level playing field for imports.

The two main apostles of the free market are the United States and Australia. Although we can argue about whether they are as white as white as they sometimes

[Mr. Paice]

pretend, the fact is that their import controls on food products are extreme while the controls in this country are a joke. During the summer recess, I went to Australia with colleagues from both sides of the House and, when we arrived, our bags were searched and we had to take our shoes off.

Mr. Morley: That was because of foot and mouth.

Mr. Paice: Of course it was because of foot and mouth. However, we were struck by how seriously Australia took the issue. Accidentally or not, there was no way in which one was able to bring in any food product however small. Until and unless we adopt such policies in this country and throughout Europe, we shall continue to face the dangers associated with the import of foodstuffs.

When I referred to the outbreak of swine fever in East Anglia, the Minister said that his scientists had concluded that it was probably—the case cannot be absolutely proven—caused by an illegal import or an import of pigmeat in some form or other, probably a ham sandwich, from a country where the far-eastern strain of classical swine fever is endemic. As we do not allow pigmeat imports from any of those countries, the import of this product would have been illegal.

If the scientists are correct—I have no reason to doubt their findings—the word "probably" becomes terribly important. The precautionary principle applies and I am sure that the Minister, who is a reasonable man, will agree that "probably" is sufficient to justify precautionary measures.

3.15 pm

Despite that case, I have seen no evidence that suggests that controls have been improved at our sea ports or airports. I hope that the Minister will tell me that I am wrong and will point to the range of measures that the Government have enforced since the veterinary report into swine fewer was produced to show that significant improvements have been made. I suspect that he will not be able to do that, and that reinforces the case for the publication of an annual report.

The Minister was impressive in his response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde. The hon. Gentleman showed that he was open minded and, even if he cannot make a commitment in the next few minutes, I stress to him that we can make further progress on this matter in another place. I hope that he will undertake that this crucial issue will be considered there. No one has spoken in this debate against the proposal in the new clause, and I hope that he will appreciate that.

Mr. Wiggin: I have opposed the Bill since its introduction and the only redeeming feature in it would be the inclusion of new clause 1. The Bill is draconian and remains unamended. It is extremely worrying in every way.

When the Minister was in Brussels yesterday, he will have heard about the new vaccination testing that will allow the tests to differentiate between vaccinated and infected animals. That means that vaccination will become a more effective tool in combating foot and mouth. Although there is no demand for a general prophylactic vaccination of all livestock, it could at least be used as a ring-fenced measure. However, for that to be viable, the tests would have to be fully validated and international rules for the trade in meat from treated animals would have to be changed. Perhaps that is what we should be debating today.

Mr. Byrne, the European Commissioner responsible for foot and mouth and food safety, made the point that he wanted all new proposals to focus on improvements in livestock management. He warned:

> "This will require improved identification and traceability"

and would lead to more restrictions on animal movements. More resources could also be devoted to stopping illegal imports of contaminated meat.

If we adopted new clause 1 and could move away from the concept of slaughter, a huge part of the Bill would become obsolete. If we could focus on preventing the import of disease and not on the 5 million animals that were slaughtered, we would be doing something positive and not concentrating on passing a draconian Bill.

I have examined other parts of the Bill and hoped that science would throw light on them. It did, because one of my constituents was the first to be genotype-tested for scrapie. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not the sheep?"] Mrs. Sue Farquhar will be grateful to hon. Members for pointing out that it was her flock of Shropshire sheep that were genotype-tested. She is from Hansnett farm in Canon Frome and, in an article in *Farmers Weekly* a few weeks ago, she and her husband advocated that all sheep owners should have their flocks scrapie tested. I am sure that all hon. Members agree that that was a positive suggestion.

However, Mrs. Farquhar rang me yesterday in some distress. The results that she had been promised would take two weeks to arrive came back four weeks later and 80 per cent. of them were wrong.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We are wandering a little away from the point.

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. If it were accepted, new clause 1 would be the only reason to support the Bill. If it is not accepted, we shall need to consider all the different reasons why the scrapie tests have been invalidated. That is why I may have strayed briefly from the point. However, I feel that if I cannot mention the matter, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will have let down my constituent, but worse than that, I will have let down all livestock owners in the UK—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That may be so, and I would hate it if the hon. Gentleman were to let down his constituent, but he really must confine his remarks to the new clause.

Mr. Wiggin: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall return to the new clause and, in particular, to the point that it is incumbent on the Government to ensure that they do not allow the importation of any new disease. Whether or not they decide to eradicate existing diseases is by the by, as you rightly pointed out, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I shall close, then, with the thought that the Bill's drafting and its draconian elements, and the fact that I have been unable to tell the Minister about scrapie, mean that it is essential that we support new clause 1, and I hope that Labour Members will do so.

Mr. Bacon: I shall start where my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) left off—with the difference between the Government's talk and their action. Just this morning, I was speaking to a leading figure in the pig industry, who said:

> "The Government has done nothing that would give anyone any confidence that a new outbreak isn't incubating right now."

[Interruption.] I think that I heard the Minister say that it is not true. If it is not true, the Government are failing to communicate what they are doing, because that is the pig industry's impression. I have been in the House only a short time, and sitting on the Public Accounts Committee week after week, hearing tales of the Government getting things wrong, I have been particularly struck by the fact that one of the most important functions of Government is to identify and manage risks. The risk that we face from illegal animal imports, which new clause 1 does something to address, is extremely serious, and the Government failed even to mention it when introducing the Bill, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) said.

This country has been exposed to the risk of many diseases from imported products over the years. We have had foot and mouth from Argentina, swine fever from Denmark and the Netherlands, enzootic bovine leukosis from Canada and maedi visna from Iceland, and I could go on. Indeed, my constituency was heavily affected by classical swine fever. Irrespective of whether new primary legislation is needed, what the Government are doing to co-ordinate the various agencies and to ensure that their powers are being properly used is exceptionally important.

As the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) pointed out, many agencies are involved. Customs and Excise is responsible for controls on the international movement of all goods. Local authorities are responsible for inland checks on illegal food products, including those that have been illegally imported. Port health authorities are responsible for border checks on imported foods. The Meat Hygiene Service is responsible for enforcing hygiene controls on meat imported into licensed UK cutting plants. Again, I could go on. There is a perception, which is borne out by reality, that there is no, or at best insufficient, cohesion between those bodies.

The Government recognise that. I am told that an interdepartmental taskforce is reviewing the co-ordination of responsibilities. On Second Reading, the Minister referred to that, saying that he did not think that there was a need for primary legislation, but that

> "DEFRA has been leading interdepartmental discussions"—[*Official Report*, 12 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 666.]

with various agencies. That was a month ago, and I am not sure how much action has taken place since then. People want action and change, not simply talk.

The National Farmers Union acknowledges that, theoretically, the necessary legislative powers already exist. It goes on to say:

> "However, we believe that there is an urgent need for a far more comprehensive review of the overall framework and resourcing of the UK's system of import controls to ensure their effective implementation.
>
> Such a review should include a fundamental examination of the activity and responsibilities of central government, its agencies and local government in order to ensure coordinated activity and an effective import control regime".

It cannot be the case that we now have an effective import control regime, or we would not be spending so much time talking about the issue today. The regime cannot be effective when so many industry bodies are flagging up the fact that they think it is not.

The National Pig Association, which is of great interest to me because of the pig farming that is undertaken in my constituency, said:

> "It is likely that both outbreaks"—

foot and mouth disease and classical swine fever—

> "started as a result of illegal imports of meat. There is an urgent need for the Government to act to reduce the risk of further outbreaks of imported diseases."

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton referred to the Devon foot and mouth inquiry, which is, perhaps, one of the most important pieces of evidence that has come to light so far. It is the first independent, or at least quasi-independent, review of the crisis. Its conclusion is so important that I should like to make sure that it is all entered on to the record. In paragraph 1.1 of its preliminary findings, the inquiry says:

> "While it is certain that the disease entered this county via sheep bought by a Devon dealer from Longtown market in Cumbria, how it entered Britain is still a matter of conjecture. What is clear is that food is different from other internationally traded commodities and must be treated as such. It is fundamental to our existence, perishable and climate sensitive. No country or region can hope to meet consumer demand entirely from within its own boundaries. All of which means that while food traded internationally and within national borders is inevitable, it requires sensitive handling and rigorous bio-security. It was suggested to the inquiry that import controls of meat and other livestock products at the points of entry are inadequate and below the standard in countries free from Foot and Mouth."

That is why the inquiry goes on, in its first finding, in paragraph 1.2, to conclude:

> "We therefore find that methods of import control must be tightened to the highest international standards and if necessary be the subject of new legislation. It is important that new powers are implemented promptly at ports and airports with the increase in staffing that that implies."

I referred earlier to the report of the Health and Safety Executive, "Reducing Risks, Protecting People". If we were to approach the risk management of imported diseases and related health and safety issues in the same way that manufacturers approach safety in their plants, we would have what are known as hazard analysis critical control points, or HACCPs. Imports are an obvious critical point of entry for disease into UK agriculture, but when introducing the Bill, the Government did not, despite the recommendations of the Devon inquiry, which my hon. Friend pointed out, even mention them.

Earlier this week *The Daily Telegraph* reported that there has been a new outbreak of Ebola in west Africa. That is, of course, a matter for human as well as animal health. Ebola has a fatality rate of about 70 per cent. It is suspected, although no one knows for certain, that it is carried by bats and ground rodents. Returning to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin), in the light of such reports it behoves the Government to examine seriously whether the resources devoted to controls at airports and ports of entry are adequate. Customs and Excise rakes in about £100 billion a year on behalf of Her Majesty's Government. It beggars belief that if the risk of a disease entering the country were sufficiently high, it would not be worth spending a considerable proportion of that sum to increase the security and biosecurity of people in this country.

[Mr. Bacon]

New clause 1 is a modest step in the right direction in that it at least places an onus on the Government to report back to the House on their actions. I hope that, even at this late stage, the Minister will consider what has been said in this debate. On Second Reading, virtually every Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour Member who spoke referred to the need for greater controls on imports. It is time that the Government took the issue much more seriously, and they could do so by accepting new clause 1.

3.30 pm

Mr. Morley: We have spent two hours on new clause 1, which, I accept, deals with an important issue. I am not at all complacent and recognise that preventing disease at the point of entry is a key issue, but it is not the only issue. There are three issues in disease control: preventing disease from getting here in the first place, which we have debated; controlling the spread of disease once it appears in the country; and, of course, eradicating the disease and the measures needed to do that. All those criteria are important.

I have differences, not necessarily with Members who have spoken this afternoon, but with people who try to present the issue of import control as the only method of controlling disease in this country. Some of them would be happy to have import control barriers and stop meat coming in from other countries. It is a myth that everything that comes from abroad is substandard; that is not the case, and no one in the House would suggest that. However, some Members have suggested that our import controls are substandard in comparison with other countries. There is no evidence of that; our import controls, procedures and methods are as good as, if not better than, those of any other European country.

Unlike a lot of Members, the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) has been to see one of our border inspection posts, through which all third-country imports have to go. They are well run, efficient and well resourced; some are very modern indeed. That does not mean that we should not look at whether we should make them better and whether there is a case for strengthening border controls and inspections. The Department has been doing that; we have spent more money on publicity at points of entry so that people are aware of controls. We have had a cross-Department review as the issue is a multi-agency one, involving Customs and Excise, port health authorities and local authorities. The Food Standards Agency provides an overview, but it does not exercise regulatory control over the inspections. Our minds are certainly not closed to improvements and, if necessary, strengthened law and regulations. I have doubts about adding the new clauses to the Bill because the powers that we have at present can be changed by order. Parliamentary time is a precious resource; if regulations on import controls need to be changed, that can be done by order, so primary legislation is not necessarily required.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: I am dismayed—*[Interruption.]* Well, I shall probably be even more dismayed later. The Minister is introducing draconian and sweeping powers to deal with the spread of disease and its eradication, yet the Government have not done anything of any consequence—and he knows that they have not—about the importation of disease into the United Kingdom. We can gather from what he has said that nothing done so far has been in the least bit effective. In an intervention, he gave a different view from the one that he is giving now. Will he revert to type and accept the new clause? He could have done something about the problem in the Bill and taken action, but that has not happened.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Lady is again confusing the facts. The Bill deals with animal health, but import regulations deal with a different subject although, of course, if necessary, they can be changed. However, I come back to the point that allegations are just allegations; the evidence is not there. That does not mean that illegal imports are not coming into the country—the fact that we have been seizing them demonstrates that they have been coming in. There have been seizures of illegal commercial imports; the bush meat seizures at Heathrow airport are an example of Customs and Excise applying a risk assessment at points of entry and taking efficient action. Some of the people involved in the organised illegal bush meat trade have been sent to jail. I may be wrong, but that has never happened before, and it shows how seriously the Government treat illegal imports and demonstrates that action has to be taken.

Mr. Bacon: A moment ago, the hon. Gentleman referred to the fact that primary legislation was, in his view, almost certainly not necessary. However, the excellent new clause 1, which was tabled by my hon. Friends, and new clause 4, which was tabled by the hon. Members for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ) and for Stroud (Mr. Drew), are agnostic on the question of whether or not primary legislation is required; they merely require the Minister to report back to the House.

Mr. Morley: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to get to it, I shall answer his point later. I want to deal first with the myths and put things in perspective.

We are not out of sync with other countries, especially European ones, in the measures that we have taken to protect our consumers as well as animal and public health. I saw an interesting television programme about American border inspections. The Americans take that seriously, and I do not wish to imply otherwise, but the programme showed a guy searching luggage. He found some imported meat, including dead tropical rats, but because he could not find dead tropical rats in his guidebook he said that they must be all right, and allowed them into the country. That does not strike me as wonderful enforcement at the point of entry.

Let us put things in perspective. We need to look at enforcement. At the conference yesterday, I saw the presentation by the Food and Agriculture Organisation, which hon. Members have mentioned. The person giving the presentation was also in the European Union foot and mouth disease group. The presentation showed the scale of the spread of foot and mouth and indicated that 2000-01 has been the worst year ever for international outbreaks, not just those in the UK. A survey of risk assessment by the group demonstrated that the UK was last in risk assessment, which proves that one should not be complacent about many of the issues.

We shall have to look at those issues, but they are not the only ones. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) rightly said that the Devon inquiry was the first one. As she said, we know that the disease came to Devon via sheep movements in the country but, incredibly, the report did not mention biosecurity measures to stop the spread of disease.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): Nobody participating in our debate or in the Bill's Committee stage has suggested that importation is the only thing that matters, although it is important, as the Minister will acknowledge. It would help to put things in perspective if he told us the total resource or financial commitment that the Government are making available towards preventing the importation of illegal food, and the number of people employed in that role.

Mr. Morley: That is a multi-agency responsibility that goes beyond government, so I do not have the figures immediately to hand, but I am happy to try to get them for the hon. Gentleman, as I believe in being open and transparent. As has been said, having a report is not a bad thing so that people can see what is being done. From the Government's point of view, it is a good idea to demonstrate what is being done by giving the number of prosecutions and seizures. I am not against that principle. In fact, my hon. Friends the Members for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ) and for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who tabled new clause 4, made a good case; a case was also made for clause 1. My hon. Friends tabled a similar amendment in Committee, so they have been thinking ahead.

To a certain extent, we already conduct a review. Under the Animal Health Act 1981, a report on expenditure incurred, prosecutions under the Act, and the incidence of disease in imported animals is produced every year. Of course, that report deals with imported animals so it is not quite the same as the report proposed in the new clauses. I recognise that, and I do not disagree with the very persuasive arguments advanced by my hon. Friends.

The question is whether it is legally possible to include such a clause in a Bill that does not concentrate on imports. That does not mean that we do not take the new clause seriously; we do. The issue is the nature of the Bill. I will consult the Department's lawyers and other Departments, as it is a cross-Government matter. The principle of an annual report is perfectly reasonable and fair. If a measure along the lines of the new clause can be arranged, whether it is introduced in the Bill or elsewhere, I am willing to press the case.

Mrs. Winterton: I am grateful to the Minister for that response, which warmed up a little towards the end, but having considered the matter and listened to the debate, in which virtually every speaker from both sides of the House supported the principle of an annual report, which the Minister himself accepted, I fear that I cannot accept his undertaking to introduce the measure in another form, for the simple reason that we know that there is tremendous pressure on legislative time.

Unless I can have a cast-iron guarantee that the measure will be introduced in the other place, I must press the motion to a Division. If the Minister can give me a cast-iron guarantee now that the measure will be introduced in the other House during the passage of the Bill, I shall accept what he says.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Lady knows that, because of the wording of both new clauses, I cannot give a cast-iron guarantee. I have given the House an undertaking that I am willing to consider ways in which we can advance the principle. That may well involve changes in the Bill, but I shall have to take advice on that, and I shall certainly do so.

Mrs. Winterton: Although the Minister accepts the principle of what we have been seeking, we want the measure itself. My original decision must therefore stand, and I must press the motion to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 195, Noes 318.

Division No. 111] **[3.42 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael

Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson
and
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David

Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 5

OFFICIALS: BIOSECURITY

'In the 1981 Act, the following section is inserted after section 16—

"16B Officials: biosecurity

(1) The Ministers or any person acting on his behalf, shall take all reasonable precautions to ensure that he does nothing which causes an animal to be infected with a disease specified in Schedule 2A.

(2) Any person who fails to take such reasonable precautions is guilty of an offence, and shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum.".'.—*[Mrs. Ann Winterton.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I hope that we shall be able to make progress, as there are many other new clauses and amendments that we would like to debate. The new clause, which deals with biosecurity in relation to officials, is extremely important and I hope that the Minister will be sympathetic to it. The Bill as a whole introduces the concept of conditional payment in relation to compensation for slaughtered animals. In the first instance, it provides for 75 per cent. compensation, subject to the judgment that the biosecurity arrangements on the farm in question are suitable.

I believe that the judgment that is made in the Bill is contrary to natural justice. The Government seem to have tried to smear farmers by saying that they were responsible for the spread of the disease and that they breached biosecurity to such an extent that a penalty must be introduced in respect of compensation or compulsory purchase of slaughtered animals. In Committee, the Minister conceded that that charge could be levelled at only a very few people in the farming community. One must, therefore, ask rhetorically why the Bill does not specify 100 per cent. compensation for the majority of farmers, and 75 per cent. compensation for those whose biosecurity arrangements are found not to be satisfactory by the Minister or officials sent by him.

I recognise that compensation is the subject of several amendments that will be considered later, so I shall not mention the aspects with which they deal, but I must tell the Minister that the outbreak was under way for some considerable time before any biosecurity measures were introduced. Such measures were introduced very late in the day during the recent epidemic. Certainly, no specific advice was available at the outset to farmers or those in the rural community about how best they could stop the spread of disease. That may have been due to the lack of a workable contingency plan. The Minister said in Committee that such a plan was available—

Mr. Morley: Absolutely.

Mrs. Winterton: If that is the case, I would be grateful to see it. If such a plan was available, it is obvious that it was not in the least suitable for the sort of outbreak that occurred in this country. The disease obviously spread considerably faster than the Minister and his officials expected, perhaps because of delays in clamping down on animal movements in the first few days of the outbreak.

While farmers are being accused by implication in the compensation measures in the Bill, many cases have been brought to my attention in which breaches of biosecurity occurred in respect of DEFRA officials and people who were subcontracted to undertake duties on behalf of the Department, whether they were the so-called dirty vets, slaughtermen or other officials. In case the Minister accuses me of promoting myths, let me say that I do not believe that these stories are myths. There were many biosecurity lapses among officials.

4 pm

Farmers are keen to have good biosecurity. However, the Bill almost characterises them as initially having no biosecurity arrangements. We should treat farmers and officials equally. The Minister has agreed biosecurity arrangements, and I understand that Department officials who call on the farmers will go through the check list. If it is right for farmers to put those arrangements in place, those who work for the Department should also be liable for breaches of them. The new clause would redress the balance by ensuring that officials who act on the Minister's behalf are charged with the need to operate under strict biosecurity arrangements. If they are found to have failed and are convicted, an appropriate fine should be levied. New clause 5 provides for that.

There is little more to say about the provision, which simply introduces equity as between the farming community and Department officials. I hope that the Minister will consider it sympathetically.

Mr. Breed: The term "biosecurity" became common this year. When it was first used, few people understood it precisely. I forget the actual date in February when the outbreak began; it was imprinted on my mind once—I am sure that it remains imprinted on the Minister's. However, it is instructive to consider what was happening then. In my part of the world, we ran out of disinfectant in days. The strategic stores of disinfectant to facilitate biosecurity were not available. Yet we have been told that robust contingency plans were in place. They did not extend to disinfectant for extensive use.

Biosecurity became important, and the practices developed and the protocols were drawn up as we went along. Towards the end of the outbreak, biosecurity measures were considerably better than at the beginning. That betrays the lack of robustness in the contingency planning exercise. We had to make up the biosecurity as the epidemic took hold.

I cannot go on without referring to the Department's refusal to support Cornwall county council in establishing biosecurity on the Tamar bridge. It may have been a small measure, but it would have been effective in making people realise what biosecurity was about. It might not have prevented much infection, but it would have raised awareness and made people more conscious of the need for biosecurity. Nevertheless, it did not happen. I expect that we now have a new definition of biosecurity and I hope that agriculture will continue to improve on it. We will need to ensure that biosecurity is maintained.

I disagree violently with confusing penalties with fines. The idea of reducing compensation until farmers proved that they had taken the right biosecurity measures is wrong. The tiny minority who do not ensure that their biosecurity measures are appropriate should be fined. That should apply to anyone who is not making the required efforts to ensure that we get on top of any future disease outbreaks. After all, we fine those who walk dogs on paths and beaches from which they are banned. There is therefore no reason why farmers who have been convicted should not be subjected to fines. However, they should not be subjected to a summary reduction in compensation.

Instead of

> "summary conviction to a fine",

officials who deliberately—that is unlikely—or through lack of forethought are found guilty of breaching biosecurity should be properly fined. If the Government do not like that idea, they could ensure that the officials receive only 75 per cent. of their salary and make them apply for the other 25 per cent. once they prove that they have not contravened biosecurity measures.

The point has been well made that everyone, including DEFRA and other Government officials, members of the public and farmers should ensure that they participate in the biosecurity plan. The measures should be properly enforced.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Does the hon. Gentleman remember that, in Committee, the Minister said:

> "I understand the arguments about whether compensation should be 100 per cent. or 75 per cent., but what we want is an incentive for good standards of biosecurity"?—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 29 November 2001; c. 134.]

Does not that apply to officials? Should they not have an incentive for good biosecurity? Does not the new clause provide for that?

Mr. Breed: It would achieve that. If officials come before a court because they have contravened the regulations that they are there to enforce, they should suffer a penalty. Farmers should suffer a similar fate; their compensation should not be reduced arbitrarily. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. If farmers are expected to ensure that they fulfil biosecurity regulations on pain of reduction in compensation, officials should recognise that they do not have special immunity and should be subjected to the same sort of penalties. I hope that the Minister will respond positively to that.

Mr. Morley: I do not have much sympathy with the new clause—apart from the point, which I have repeatedly made, that biosecurity covers everyone who has contact with livestock farms. I accept that that applies to DEFRA staff. It also applies to people who do business with livestock farms, for example, by delivering feed or collecting milk, and to farmers. The hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) was right to repeat the point that I made in Committee: we are not obliged to pay the 100 per cent. market rate for diseased animals.

We are considering infected premises and we are trying to give people an incentive to focus on biosecurity. We were surprised that the disease was not being spread by wind-borne infection, as we thought originally. It was spread in that way in 1967 and during the outbreak between then and now. The epidemiology showed that in 80 per cent. of cases the infection was locally spread through animal-to-animal contact, movement of people, machines and vehicles. That is serious.

Again, I put it on record that the majority of farmers were considerate and careful and took biosecurity seriously. Early in the outbreak, we wrote to farmers about biosecurity. Later, we sent a video to every livestock farmer. We applied the blue-box control scheme towards the end of the outbreak, when we had the resources to do that. We could not have done that at its height because the resources did not exist. Those biosecurity measures had a real impact on bringing the epidemic under control.

That is one of the issues that we are going to have to examine in relation to the lessons learned, but it appears that biosecurity as a disease-control measure was one of the key factors in bringing it under control. That is why we must take it seriously. It is certainly true that only a minority of farmers apply poor biosecurity, but every farmer can give examples of people they know in their area who do so. It does not take many people to spread the disease and to keep it going. That is why biosecurity is such a serious issue.

Mr. Breed: It is well known that we are talking about only a tiny minority of people here. I call them passive delinquents, in that they often do not breach biosecurity regulations deliberately. Things just happen to them. Perhaps they do not take as much care as they should, but they do not do it deliberately, and I do not think that they should be so harshly dealt with.

In the light of the lessons that we have learned, are there now strategic stocks of disinfectant carefully stored throughout the country? That is the very material that will be required should any terrible occurrence need to be acted on quickly. One of the major lessons that we should have learned is that sufficient stocks should be strategically placed throughout the country.

Mr. Morley: My understanding is that there were always sufficient stocks. The issue was where they were located. When there was high demand in certain parts of the country, the commercial stocks were exhausted quite quickly. There was always plenty of disinfectant; it was just a question of getting it to the right places and meeting that demand. Of course, there is no problem anywhere at the moment, but we need to give some thought to the matter for the future in the light of lessons learned.

I cannot support the new clause, because it singles out DEFRA staff. I repeat that biosecurity requirements apply to everybody. We are not suggesting that we prosecute farmers who are in breach of biosecurity. We are saying that there will be an incentive in relation to compensation payments. Given that the majority of farmers will comply, and that we intend to go out to consultation about the procedures for the assessment, which I believe can be done very quickly, the vast majority of farmers are not going to be inconvenienced.

I agree with the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) that many of the breaches of biosecurity were passive, in that people just did not think about what they were doing. The Bill is an incentive for them to think about that a bit more. So far as our staff are concerned, there were many myths about foot and mouth and some people were always trying to find a scapegoat. It is similar to the question of animal imports; people said that all the problems were to do with imports, that if we could sort them out there would not be a problem, and that no one else was involved.

The theory was that all the problems were to do with DEFRA staff, and if it were not for them, there would not have been a problem, so people felt that they did not have to do anything about it. That was a minority view, of course, but one that is held in some quarters, and I reject it. We have made it clear to our staff that they have to follow good biosecurity. We do not need this new clause because our staff are given those instructions, and we expect them to abide by them.

When complaints were received, every one was investigated. Most of them were found to be untrue, and in many cases there was no evidence. When there was evidence, we did not hesitate to take action against the people responsible, and in the case of contractors, that included dismissing them.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: There appears to be a majority view outside, in the countryside and among members of the farming community, not so much that the Government are to blame for everything that went wrong but that the Government are putting them on trial. That is what is causing so much outrage and concern. That lies at the heart of our opposition to the Bill. The new clause is an attempt to shift the balance back a little in favour of the farming community, and to place some burdens of responsibility on DEFRA officials.

Mr. Morley: But it does not; it seeks to criminalise DEFRA officials uniquely, which is one reason why I reject it.

The view that we are trying to blame farmers is a completely false perception, and it comes from some people who think that farmers played no role whatever in disease spread. We know that that is not so, although in many cases, they spread the disease inadvertently. The Government recognise that we have issues to examine. I, as a Minister, have never ducked responsibility or ducked criticism where it was due. We have to learn lessons from a range of issues over the course of the outbreak, but that applies to everybody, not just to DEFRA officials.

Mr. Drew: Would the Minister care to comment on an answer to a written question that I tabled a week ago, which shows a significant increase in the number of people keeping one farm animal, or one to five farm animals? Contrary to the myth that we have seen the death of the small farmer, there has been a significant increase in their numbers. All those problems need to be factored into how we control disease.

4.15 pm

Mr. Morley: That is absolutely right. Ironically, there seems to be a growth in small farms. Those figures include lifestyle farmers and part-time farmers. That raises a number of issues, including registration—do we know where all these animals are?—that we are going to have to address. I am sure that the independent inquiries are also going to have to address those issues.

It is not fair to single out DEFRA staff in this way. Most complaints against them were completely groundless. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) raised the famous issue of the overalls in the deep freeze. We have checked that out, and the farmer concerned is now saying that the overalls have nothing to do with DEFRA. As a matter of fact, he has some rather interesting theories about them. We have asked him if he will let us have the overalls, so that we can test them, but he has refused, saying that they are not in his deep freeze but in someone else's. So we have not quite got to the bottom of that.

I do not want to go into too much detail because the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton is not here, so I shall write her a letter with all the details. There was another example of a vet who was said to be a "dirty vet". We checked that out and it was also untrue. A lot of claims are being made, but when we look into the details, they do not stand up to examination.

[Mr. Morley]

I want to make it clear that if there are breaches by our own staff—I accept that our staff have responsibilities, too—we shall not hesitate to take action. That being the case, the new clause is completely unnecessary.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: The Minister has given a full response to the points raised during this short debate on biosecurity and officials. We would agree that biosecurity is a very important issue for everyone, and our objective in tabling the new clause was to point out that it was not just the farming community that had a responsibility in these matters. The Minister said that the officials and subcontractors who work for the Department are—or will be—under strict instructions as to what biosecurity arrangements should be in place. That assurance goes some way to addressing our concerns on this matter, and I am grateful to the Minister for that.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 7

DUTY OF MINISTERS TO DISPOSAL OF CARCASSES

'In the 1981 Act the following section is inserted after section 35.

"35A Duty of Ministers to dispose of carcasses

The Minister shall have a duty to dispose of the carcass of any animal slaughtered under the provisions of this Act within forty-eight hours of its slaughter.".'.—*[Mr. Keith Simpson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

On Second Reading, the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), who is not in his place at the moment, said that it might be more appropriate to refer to this Bill as the animal slaughter and disposal of carcases Bill, rather than the Animal Health Bill. That sounds, uncharacteristically, a rather crude and vulgar interpretation of the Bill. I have some sympathies with the hon. Gentleman, however, in that we often dress up in euphemisms of parliamentary language rather brutal and unsavoury facts.

New clause 7 comes to the heart of the matter of public health and of beating foot and mouth. Following Second Reading, the Standing Committee, and through the deliberations of the Select Committee and proposals put forward by various outside parties including the farming community and non-governmental organisations, there is no doubt that a common theme has been that the Bill has been pushed through with insufficient lessons learned from the current and previous foot and mouth outbreaks. There is a sense—not only on the Opposition, but on the Government Benches—that the Government have failed to established a public independent inquiry. Only through that would we learn real lessons.

Owing to the way in which the Bill is framed, we had to table amendments either to mitigate against the Minister acquiring unnecessary and, in some examples, inapplicable powers or to propose measures based on what happened on the ground during the foot and mouth outbreak. Given its nature, the Government's initial dithering, the failure of early measures and the subsequent spread of the disease, Ministers and officials were overwhelmed by events.

I have some sympathy with Ministers and officials in that the speed and extent of the outbreak and spread of the disease meant that the old MAFF organisation was overwhelmed. This is neither the time nor the place to go into that, but I hope that we shall learn lessons from it. A serious consequence was the unedifying spectacle in many areas of large numbers of slaughtered animals lying in fields, farm yards, close to human habitation and by roads and tracks over many, many days.

That was emotionally stressful for farmers and their families, and it was probably emotionally stressful for the vets and MAFF officials involved in the slaughter and the administration. Of course, it was also stressful for local people who had to move around what were, in effect, killing fields. Ultimately, it had a major impact on public opinion, and the Minister will be only too well aware of the great outrage and revulsion in Parliament.

The Minister knows that the failure to keep up with carcase disposals became a logistical nightmare and, as foot and mouth spread, the carcase backlog became even greater. Apart from the emotional upset caused by widespread scenes of unburied dead animals, increasingly they posed a health risk. We know from those recent experiences, which were graphically illustrated by accounts from hon. Members on both sides of the House on Second Reading and in Committee, that there was order, counter-order and disorder from MAFF and then DEFRA, overwhelmed by events.

Undoubtedly, there was serious confusion over the disposal of carcases: whether to bury or burn and whether they were to be buried or burned near to or far from the culling site. Thousands of carcases were transported many miles, and they appeared to be moved at random before being buried or disposed of with little consideration of the environmental impact. All those examples posed a major health problem and I would argue that they effectively lost the public relations war for MAFF.

The Minister made this clear in Committee:

> "Slaughter is the most effective way of stopping virus production, for the reasons that I gave. As soon as the animal is dead, it stops producing the virus."

We still have no definitive proof that vaccination would have alleviated the spread or that it might be the answer for the future. From what the Minister has put on record, I understand that, in the event of another foot and mouth outbreak, slaughter will be the main method of preventing the disease from spreading.

Mr. Morley: I have not put that on record. I said that I would not want culling on the scale witnessed in this outbreak, and we must consider measures to prevent that. On vaccination, one outcome of the conference I attended yesterday is realistic proposals for greater use of vaccination, but that would take place alongside some culling. That would be reduced culling, but we still come back to this issue: if we are to cull, we must do so quickly and efficiently.

Mr. Simpson: I am grateful to the Minister for that intervention, which probably reinforces what I am about to say. There are few lawyers in the Chamber, but, as we are aware, it is always best to know the answer to any question we are about to ask. Given our experiences, it is incumbent on the Minister and DEFRA to ensure that carcases are disposed of within 48 hours of slaughter. As the hon. Gentleman said in Committee:

> "Ideally, we want to remove carcases as quickly as possible".

However, he added that despite being desirable, the proposed 48-hour period was impractical.

The Minister's objections were based on the scale of the epidemic and the logistical problems, including manpower, equipment and vehicular movement:

> "Such practical problems mean that an absolute commitment to a 48-hour target cannot be given. I do not dispute that that target is desirable."

Having said that, however, he used a get-out clause:

> "I am not saying that some of those practical problems cannot be overcome. They will be dealt with in inquiries and in future contingency plans."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 22 November 2001; c. 62-3.]

So, disposal of carcases within 48 hours is desirable on every criterion, including disease spread prevention, public health and public sentiment.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): My hon. Friend mentions a series of matters, including inquiries. Would it not help support the Minister's point of view if all those matters, instead of being kept behind closed doors, were subject to an inquiry in public, so that we would all know precisely what happened? If only we all knew what happened, that would help the Minister enormously in putting his case.

Mr. Simpson: My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct. That point has been made from these Benches and, indeed, from the Government Benches on numerous occasions. In a sense, we are groping in the dark as we consider the Bill, but my line of argument in support of the new clause uses the evidence as provided by the Minister himself.

The problem is organisational and logistical, which is where MAFF-DEFRA so demonstrably failed during the recent outbreak. That is not only the conclusion of the Devon county council report, but what the public observed over several months, and farming communities in such areas had direct experience of it.

The organisational and logistical failure of MAFF-DEFRA was highlighted when the Prime Minister ordered the use of Army personnel, under the command of a solid but inspirational brigadier, to get a grip on the slaughter and disposal of carcases in Cumbria. The Minister will forgive me for saying that my party had recommended that to Ministers over previous weeks, but it was dismissed as largely irrelevant.

The Army provided leadership, organisation and planning, although it went in cold, and worked closely with local vets and MAFF officials, getting the problem under control, dealing with the carcase backlog and, as those events came to an end, disposing of slaughtered animals almost within the 48-hour time frame.

My colleagues and I have tabled the new clause because we believe that, for reasons of science, health and public sentiment, it is right and proper that the Minister should have a duty to ensure that the carcase of any animal slaughtered under the provisions of the Bill be disposed of within 48 hours of slaughter. He agrees that that is desirable, but says it is impractical. We contend that the Prime Minister's decision to use the Army shows that, with leadership, organisational skills and the necessary resources, the desirable becomes the achievable.

The Minister can square the circle only by lobbying the Treasury and the Prime Minister to point out that, as the Minister said today, it is likely that there will be further outbreaks of foot and mouth or some other animal disease in the near future, possibly on the scale of the recent foot and mouth outbreak. Unfortunately we did not learn the lessons of the swine fever outbreak, which affected my constituency. If we do not learn the lessons of this outbreak—if, again, we do not allocate the necessary resources, establish the necessary organisation and set targets—we will, I am afraid, witness a repeat performance.

I urge the Minister to accept that our proposal is not just desirable, but achievable in practice.

4.30 pm

Mr. Gummer: I commend the new clause to the Minister for, dare I say, his own good.

I know exactly what the conversation will have been in the Department when the Minister was preparing to defend his side. His officials will have said "This is a difficult point, Minister, and of course you will be sympathetic, but we should advise you that, all things being taken together and in the round, there may be trouble. It would be much better if you said no. Of course we will try our best. We will do all that we can, and perhaps we will even achieve what we want to achieve—but it would be much better if you gave us the necessary elbow room. You can trust us. It will be absolutely OK." I know that the Minister does not want to rest on that; I am sure that he wants to move a stage further.

The point of placing a duty on the Minister is that it enables him to galvanise all at his command into achieving the desired end. It gives him a strength without which he clearly has serious difficulties, as we have seen during the past few years.

Mr. Breed: Would it also give the Minister a lever in respect of the Treasury, and the costs that might be involved in achieving that aim?

Mr. Gummer: I will come to the Treasury in a moment. I think it needs a paragraph or two to itself.

Mr. Jack: Is not my right hon. Friend's argument entirely compatible with the Government's approach in introducing performance indicators into every area of their activity—health, education and many other areas—and measuring objectively what they hope will be done?

Mr. Gummer: Absolutely—but my right hon. Friend will have noted that the Government are less keen on such indicators when they would indicate the performance of Ministers.

I always want to help this Minister, as he knows. The proposed measure would help him to deal with the difficulty he has encountered with the Government machine in securing the full, fair public inquiry that I know he wants. The Minister has nothing to hide, and I am sure he has no intention of hiding anything; but it is extremely difficult for Conservative Members, or indeed

[Mr. Gummer]

members of any party in the House, to do anything if we do not have a report—not a report that would identify scapegoats, but a report simply detailing what has happened and what lessons should be learned. After all, we have had a number of reports of that kind, and in general they have been able to help future Ministers to conduct their affairs.

If the Minister accepted the new clause, he would be able to say to his colleagues, "If we had been more open about the whole affair, I would have been able to convince the House of the need for a different time limit and a different procedure, because Members would have had all the information they needed at their fingertips. Indeed, if we had not completed the inquiry, I could have promised that they would have the information."

I cannot speak for my hon. Friends on the Front Bench, but I think that the new clause might have been withdrawn on the basis that further and better particulars might well lead them to take a different view; but they cannot do that in circumstances in which those further and better particulars will not emerge, because there is no mechanism whereby they should emerge. That means that we are bound to take only the evidence that we have ourselves, and seek to act on it. As I have said, giving way would grant the Minister greater power in his continuing argument with the rest of the Government, and a few notable colleagues, in favour of a comprehensive inquiry.

Another reason for my view that accepting the new clause would help the Minister was foreshadowed by the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed). I am thinking of the Treasury. The Treasury has a job to do: it is not a nice job or an easy job, but it must be done. The difficulty with the Treasury and DEFRA, as with the Treasury and MAFF, is that the area of choice is very limited.

Quite properly, we are part of the European Union; quite properly, we have a common agricultural policy. The common agricultural policy could be greatly improved, and as part of the arrangements we will be able to improve it. The fact is, however, that the decisions—again, quite properly—are made jointly with us around a table. There is only a bit left for the Treasury to get its fingers on. Thank God there is only a bit left; otherwise, the farmers would have lost a lot more.

I think that some of my friends who are not as happy about the CAP as I am should explain to the farmers whether they would get anything at all if it were all decided by the British. That is one of the facts of life. Happily, however, most of the decisions are made by people around a table. We are part of that, but many of the others are more concerned with the interests of farmers.

Anyway, the bit left over is constantly under the eagle eye of the Treasury. The Treasury loves to look at that bit. That is why it has cut back on our flood defences. That is why the poor Minister had to admit to me the other day that less was being spent. He said that spending went up and down, but we were in the "down" phase at the moment, so things were rather difficult. Why did he have to explain that to me, at a time when my constituency—which contains 74 miles of coastline—is experiencing its worst-ever circumstances? Because the Treasury can only get its fingers on to the bit that is there—and those fingers creep out to grab whatever is around.

I want to help the Minister in this regard. If the House of Commons decides that there is a performance target—a duty or a requirement—the Treasury can huff and puff as much as it likes, but it must provide the means. I am keen for the House to get its fingers around the throat of the Treasury, because if it does not we have no hope of controlling the Executive.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: I suppose my right hon. Friend would think that it meant nothing to the Treasury, but may I draw him a little nearer to the new clause? Its purpose is to avoid the horrific scenes of carcases lying rotting in fields, the terrible scenes of carnage that caused enormous problems to our image around the world and had a devastating effect on our tourism industry, which cost us many millions of pounds. My right hon. Friend may like to consider that, even though perhaps it is optimistic to think that the Treasury is capable of taking such issues into consideration.

Mr. Gummer: There is a problem with my hon. Friend's analysis. In looking at the consequences of such a new clause, the Treasury will think only of the narrow immediate expenditure. It will find it difficult to recognise that the new clause is intended to help the Treasury to defend the greater sum of resources available to it. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the huge cost that was paid because of the insufficient funding of the culling operation. The cost is one which we pay today. I happened to be in the United States when the televisions were filled with pictures of fires and the whole situation, but much worse were the photographs of the animals lying dead in piles. That did huge harm.

I remind the House of an experience that I had. It will help the Minister to deal not with large carcases, but with the smaller carcases of hens. I remember being faced with the problem of a number of nuns who were keeping hens and who had a salmonella difficulty. Of course, hon. Members can see immediately the public relations disaster of a whole lot of nuns seeking to protect their hens from the arrival of those who were going to kill them. That did not seem to me to be good news. In the end, we went early, even before they had begun to see the crime. We destroyed the hens before either nuns or journalists were up. I am not suggesting that it would be possible for the Minister to deal with a great mound as quickly as that, but in public relations terms, the quicker, the better. If it has to be done, it has to be done quickly. The hon. Gentleman admits that.

I hope that the Minister will understand that we press the new clause not out of antagonism to him or indeed to what was MAFF and is now, at least in part, DEFRA, but to give him the power that is necessary if he is to win battles within his Administration. Although I was a member of an Administration who by nature, support and backing were closer perhaps to rural areas than his, it was not always easy to win what I needed to win. Often I needed support. From time to time, the hon. Gentleman and his friends gave me that support by making it very difficult for people not to ante up the money. That is all we are doing today.

I hope that the Minister will take seriously the proposition that, by setting him a target, we enable him to set a target for the rest of the Government, achieve the resources necessary and deliver the necessary result. I hope that he or any future Minister will never face such an outbreak again, but the position needs to be put right.

Otherwise, the cost to our national exchequer will be enormous and the damage to our farming community huge.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): The Bill is ill advised and ill timed. A touch of optimism is returning to the farming community. I hope that foot and mouth has been defeated, but the Bill again drives a wedge between the industry and the Government. Any co-operation that we would like to engender and encourage between the two seems to be ill fated.

MAFF set targets on slaughter and disposal. Those targets were not met because the disease completely overwhelmed the organisation that was in place. The Minister has told us that there was a national contingency plan but whatever it was, it was clearly not sufficient to deal with the disposal of the number of carcases that were on farms and in fields around farms.

4.45 pm

There were three ways of disposing of those carcases—burial, burning or rendering. Clearly, rendering was the preferred method, because it took place in well controlled environments. Sometimes, however, carcases had to be transported through clean areas that had not had the disease. Rendering capacity was limited, so burning and burying had to be contemplated.

Lessons from the previous outbreak did not seem to have been learned, because the report on that outbreak said that on-farm burial was the favoured method of disposal. That had been accepted by the farming community.

Tony Cunningham: Does the hon. Gentleman appreciate that one of the problems with on-farm burial—I am a Cumbrian MP so I know what I am talking about—was that often the water table was too high and it was impossible to bury the animals on the farm where the disease had broken out?

Mr. Williams: I accept that concern for the environment has increased since the 1967 outbreak, but instead of on-farm burial, it was decided to have mass burial and burning pits. The experience in my constituency was that concern for the environment was fairly minimal. One area on the Eppynt, an army range in my constituency, was designated and, until prompted by local farmers and villagers, no environmental assessment was even performed. However, one of the reasons given for not using on-farm burial was that an environmental assessment of each site would have to be carried out, which would be time-consuming and difficult to achieve given the resources available.

If the mass burial and burning sites were included in the national contingency plan or the local contingency plan, that was not thought through very well. The new clause would encourage the Minister to ensure that any contingency plan, and any lessons learned from the inquiries that are taking place, would put more emphasis on deciding how to deal with the number of carcases that are generated.

It was an upsetting time for the farming community. It was the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) who mentioned killing fields, but it was often killing yards. The animals were brought in close to the farms to be slaughtered and the carcases remained there for many days. Families, including children, were trapped on the farms and had to live with the carcases close by, which was an horrific experience for all.

It is important that carcases are disposed of to prevent the spread of the disease. Although the animals produce no more virus when they are dead, the carcases can be torn apart by vermin, and the disease transported to other farms. The tourism industry also suffered because the animals were seen to be left unburied and when they were disposed of it was done in a way that deterred people from visiting areas that depend on tourism as well as agriculture for their livelihoods. I supported an amendment in Committee that was not framed as tightly and simply as the new clause, but the present proposal would help the Minister and it should be supported.

Mr. Wiggin: It is a pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson), who made tremendous and well informed speeches. The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) also made a passionate speech.

When the decision to cull was taken, the Minister will have thought, "I must cull, otherwise our export market will be lost." That is a proper commercial decision. It was not done for humane reasons. There are not 5 million fewer farm animals because the Minister had humane reasons for his decision. We know, however, that the Minister will not slaughter on that scale ever again, thanks to the developments in vaccination.

If the new clause has one purpose, it is to act as a brake on the Minister's decision-making process. Never again must carcases lie for nine days, as they did in Winforton in my constituency. Herefordshire relies heavily on its huge agricultural sector, and on tourism. Never again must we allow one market to be sacrificed so completely, and then watch with horror as another is taken down with it, leaving people in the countryside with virtually nothing.

The new clause would encourage the Minister to vaccinate first. The Bill closes the stable door long after the horse has bolted, and any efforts that we can add to ensure that the Minister vaccinates first will improve life in the countryside.

The new clause would mean that any future Minister facing a similar crisis would almost certainly be obliged to call in the Army at the earliest possible stage. That would naturally be part of any contingency plan, and would mean that some of the horrendous abuses of animal and human rights would be avoided. It would also prevent the horrendous mental damage suffered by people whose livestock were slaughtered.

The new clause would also prevent the terrible smell from pyres, which did so much damage to the tourism and agriculture industries, and to connecting businesses across the country. I therefore urge the Minister to change his mind and support the new clause.

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) speaks with great authority from his experience of dealing at constituency level with the tragic consequences of foot and mouth disease. I rise merely to emphasise to the Minister the importance of this new

[Mr. Jack]

clause. The part of the Bill that it seeks to amend gives legal comfort to the Minister that he has the power, at his discretion and decision, to slaughter in the first place.

However, if the Minister is unable to agree to the provisions of the new clause, he must explain to the House why, given the lessons that have been learned and the findings of the two inquiries that are being held, he would not be able to dispose of carcases within the time scale that has been laid down. If he cannot explain that, it will be tantamount to an admission that, in another foot and mouth outbreak, he could not sustain the performance of disposal that was eventually achieved at the end of this outbreak as a result of the lessons that had been learned.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson), in his elegant speech, mentioned the Army's logistical input. Subsequent new clauses deal with the matter of a national strategy, which should incorporate the type of performance indicator and requirement contained in this new clause. In the interests of sending a powerful message to farmers that the Government have learned their lessons and that if—God forbid—there were to be another outbreak, it could be dealt with effectively, the Minister should agree to new clause 7. However, if he is fearful of accepting it, he must explain why he will not.

Mr. Morley: I am happy to explain why there are problems with the new clause. I am not against the principle behind it, as I said in Committee. It is desirable to have targets for disposal, as the new clause suggests, but the question is whether circumstances could arise in which those targets could be met, and what the implications of that might be.

I shall explain that in a moment, but first I want to correct some of the statements that have been made. The first has to do with calling in the Army. I think that the independent inquiries will show that the Army was put on alert at the very beginning of the outbreak.

I have been in my post for some time, so I was around at the beginning of the outbreak—and perhaps that is an indication of my own performance. I remember that the Conservatives were calling for the Army to dispose of and remove carcases. That was never really an issue—there was no shortage of civil contractors to do that. The Army played an important role in the logistics and organisation, in making sure that the right thing was in the right place at the right time. As the epidemic spread, it was important to have that support, which was brought in when it was needed.

On the new clause, it is a case of not being able to win either way. During the epidemic, the Government were under pressure to kill animals as quickly as possible. That pressure came from farmers desperate to see the disease being stopped from spreading and those who did not have the disease but wanted to make sure that it was stopped from coming down the valley or moving down the county. Once an animal is killed, it stops producing the virus. The changes in the pH in the animal's body quickly neutralise the virus, and when the animals were killed they were also sprayed with disinfectant.

There was also enormous pressure to take the bodies away as quickly as possible. That is an understandable and reasonable reaction from people facing the epidemic. However, there were logistical problems, given that this was the biggest outbreak of its type that the world had ever seen, such as obtaining leakproof lorries and disposing of the animals.

My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) is right that people keep mentioning the Northumberland report, which recommended burial. It did, but things have moved on since then. Issues relating to the water table in Devon, in particular, meant that on-farm burial was often not an option, as was also the case in Cumbria. In addition, the BSE outbreak in the cattle herd since the Northumberland report was published led to a restriction on burying cattle over 30 months and they had to be burned or, preferably, rendered. However, we did not have the rendering capacity to deal with the number of animals affected.

The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) gave me some helpful support. I always appreciate a bit of encouragement. The right hon. Gentleman knows all about the procedures, given his long experience in Government. I suspect that some of the people who advise me advised him. They are probably giving me the same advice, on occasion. However, the reason I cannot accept the new clause is not that I disagree with the principles behind it. It is desirable to set a target. There are valid arguments for setting such indicators, and we may be able to look at that in the future.

The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) mentioned vaccination as an alternative. I have always been keen on vaccination and on a range of other options, which is why I strongly support the Bill. It will give us as wide a range of options as we need in dealing with all circumstances. We should not forget that the Bill also deals with vaccination, sampling and blood testing—all the criteria that should be applied to any type of disease control.

I am keen on getting these measures in place as quickly as possible. It can be argued that we are shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted, but this was an outbreak like no other. We have to learn from that. I believe that we can learn lessons from the inquiries. I also genuinely believe that the structure of the inquiries is the right one. I am fairly relaxed about structure. The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal mentioned a public inquiry; he had experience of the Phillips inquiry, which was a useful investigation which provided some useful information, but it took nearly three years.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: You set it up.

Mr. Morley: I accept that. It cost between £30 million and £40 million—about £10 million was spent on lawyers' fees. I am not altogether keen on that approach. I am much keener on an open process that is in the public domain and deals with the issues. I believe that our approach is the right one.

5 pm

Mr. Wiggin: Does the Minister agree that, given the speed of policy changes—including EU policy—and the fact that none of the three inquiries has reported, he should not legislate until at least one of those inquiries has reported?

Mr. Morley: No, because time is of the essence. I repeatthat the Bill contains nothing that pre-empts any recommendation from the inquiries. Indeed, nothing in the Bill should be taken as the Government's definitive future policy for dealing with any disease outbreak.

The hon. Member for Leominster is a strong advocate of vaccination, but some of the points that he made about new tests are not yet fully validated. The information is not yet available to us. I must correct him on one point: the culling programme was designed not to deal with trade issues, but to stop the spread of disease.

Mr. Breed: Does the Minister agree that the Phillips report was lengthy and costly because it related to BSE—a disease that was new to us—but that we know all about foot and mouth? There is not much more that we need to know about the disease; we need to concentrate on how it was effectively controlled and eradicated. That would take far less time and would cost much less.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman makes my case for inquiries that are short and to the point—exactly like those that have been set up. A full-blown judicial inquiry will go on for several years, so I much prefer the approach that we are taking. Nothing in the format of the inquiries is different from the Northumberland inquiry—there is no difference at all. People sometimes get hung up on definitions when they are talking about inquiries. I think we have chosen the right way: it will put all the information in the public domain, and will show us the lessons learned from the management of the epidemic, in the Anderson report, and the scientific questions—not only those relating to foot and mouth—that will be addressed by the Royal Society.

Mr. Gummer: The Minister is trying to help the House, but the matter is not new, and the inquiry need not be as complicated as the Phillips inquiry, so surely it would be possible to set up a single, more public inquiry with a clear date line and the resources to produce a report within that period. It would have been quite possible to do that. The reason why the Government failed to set up such an inquiry continues to escape me. Everyone would have been much happier because its workings and results would have been open—as the proceedings of the Government's inquiries do not seem to be, at least to the public.

Mr. Morley: The right hon. Gentleman should wait and see how the inquiries are set up. I understand that Dr. Anderson will shortly announce how he intends to proceed. The right hon. Gentleman will find that the process is more open and transparent than he thinks and that people will have the opportunity both to make their case and to see the outcome—it will all be in the public domain. Of course, we can argue over these points, but I believe that our approach is the right way to obtain the answers that we need as quickly as possible.

The reason why I cannot accept the new clause is that if we set up such a target, with all the unknowns and variables that I have described, it could have the perverse effect—certainly not intended by the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson)—of discouraging rapid slaughter in some cases. If there is a target of 48 hours and it is difficult to meet that target—for whatever logistical reason—there would be a disincentive to slaughter as quickly as possible. If we are to use culling as part of disease control—we can argue about the alternatives to culling—the key is to carry it out as quickly as possible. The new clause would undermine that principle.

Mr. Keith Simpson: We have held an interesting, short debate. My hon. Friends and I and Liberal Democrat Members are not especially convinced by the Minister's argument. In fact, I am not even sure that many Members on either side of the House are convinced of the general arguments in favour of the Bill. The Minister is a fair man, who is frequently left by his ministerial colleagues to bat alone, and he is only too aware that there is silence about the measure—at best—and some criticism. It is always difficult for Government supporters to criticise their own Government.

The debate has shown, first, that the Minister accepts that, in principle, he believes there should be a 48-hour target and, secondly, despite what the Minister has said, that most hon. Members on both sides of the House believe that it would have been possible to have had a short, open and public debate on the lessons learned. Rather than looking for scapegoats, we are looking for practical lessons to learn.

Tony Cunningham: It has been announced that one of the three inquiries will take place shortly, but that will take six months. The great fear among farmers in Cumbria and all the tourism-related industries is that, if there were an outbreak of foot and mouth next February or March, it would decimate agriculture in Cumbria and destroy many of the tourism industries in that county. I support a broad range of measures that can be used to ensure that we do not get ourselves into the position that we faced with the original outbreak of the disease.

Mr. Simpson: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but this is pure Corporal Jones—people cry, "Don't panic," but that is exactly what the Government are doing. I have long experience of defence matters, and however appalling the Ministry of Defence has been at times, the one thing that it has learned from experience is that lessons have to be learned very quickly. In fact, the Minister wants a shotgun version of legislation to cover all kinds of contingencies because, frankly, neither first MAFF, nor now DEFRA knows what went on and has got the answers.

The majority opinion on both sides of the Chamber is that a short, sharp inquiry could have been held and that the organisational and logistical lessons could have been learned very much in accordance with the standard operating procedures that the MOD applied in Cumbria.

I hope that we have established that the Minister accepts the 48-hour target in principle. He is less sure in his rejection of the fact that we would like that target to be included in the Bill. My hon. Friends and I will not press the new clause to a Division, but I suspect that the issue may be taken up in another place. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 9

TRANSPORT OF ANIMALS DESTINED FOR SLAUGHTER

'In the 1981 Act the following section is inserted after section 8—

"8A Transport of animals destined for slaughter

A person commits an offence if without lawful authority or excuse (proof of which shall lie on him) he transports, or knowingly causes or permits to be transported, any animal destined for slaughter for more than 8 hours".'.—*[David Taylor.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

David Taylor: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to discuss new clause 10—*Bringing of animals to markets*—

'In the 1981 Act the following section is inserted after section 8—

"8A Bringing of animals to markets

A person commits an offence if without lawful authority or excuse (proof of which shall lie on him) he brings, or knowingly causes or permits to be brought, to market any animal which has been brought to a market in the previous 20 days.".'.

David Taylor: Parts of the Bill deal with the control of foot and mouth disease when an outbreak is under way, and other parts deal with minimising the risk of such outbreaks occurring in future. We are not certain how foot and mouth disease got into Britain, but it is widely accepted that its rapid and extensive spread was due to at least two factors.

The first factor was multiple movements, especially of sheep. Animals were transported in and out of markets and other premises several times in quick succession by dealers who tried to turn a quick profit by, for example, buying animals at one market and selling them at another a few days later.

The second aspect was the fact that animals travelled long distances to slaughter, which has become more common in the past few years. Long journeys to slaughter and multiple journeys in and out of markets risk spreading infectious animal diseases, and lead to poor welfare—the two are clearly connected. Long journeys are more stressful than short ones, and multiple journeys involve repeated loadings and unloadings, with animals frequently being mixed with unfamiliar animals. Both those consequences are regularly identified as major stresses for animals.

New clause 9 aims to tackle one of those problems by imposing a maximum limit of eight hours on the time it takes to transport animals to slaughter. The tendency for animals to be taken on much longer journeys to slaughter is greater than it was a few years ago, and it has arisen for a number of reasons. The first is the closure of many local abattoirs. In England, almost two thirds have closed in recent years, leaving us with about 300. Secondly, farmers and dealers drive animals past nearby abattoirs and take them to much more distant ones.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I seek clarification on what the eight-hour limit involves. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that eight hours in total is all that would be allowed, or is he saying that, if there were a break after eight hours, a further journey could be permitted? That is an important matter for those in the north of Scotland. Although the Bill does not at present apply to Scotland, if by some unfortunate chance subsequent amendments are passed, it may do so. The cumulative effect of those amendments and the hon. Gentleman's new clauses would lock out many people in the highlands and islands of Scotland from valuable markets.

David Taylor: If the hon. Gentleman could contain his curiosity, I shall come to that point. I have a specific example that relates to the western isles.

A further point about abattoirs is that supermarkets too frequently insist on sourcing all their meat from just a few large industrial-scale abattoirs and often refuse to use local ones.

A maximum time limit of eight hours, as envisaged in new clause 9, would halt the worst of the long journeys. Indeed, I believe that the journeys should be much shorter than eight hours; animals should be slaughtered as near as possible to the farm on which they were reared. Eight hours, however, is the shortest limit that the European Union allows member states to impose on slaughter journeys. The relevant EU provision authorises member states

"to provide for a maximum non-extendable journey time of eight hours for the transport of animals destined for slaughter, where the transport is carried out exclusively within their own territory".

We have spent some time in the debate looking back at the lessons, if there were any, of the foot and mouth outbreak in 1967. The world has moved on in many ways. For example, 34 years ago, there was an established network of local abattoirs, which we think might be connected to the fact that the disease was located substantially in just one region of the country. Hon. Members should bear that point in mind when considering whether to support the new clause.

The maximum eight-hour limit is in line with the EU directive and it would have more effect in preventing the causes of an epidemic and would not allow the previous culture to continue of getting the cheapest price for slaughter no matter the distance involved in getting the cattle, pigs, sheep or whatever to slaughter.

I draw a specific example to the attention of the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir). In September this year, several consignments of sheep were transported by sea from the Scottish islands to the west coast port of Oban. From there, they were taken by road all the way to Birmingham, not far from where I live, for slaughter. In the interests of animal welfare and health, those animals could and should have been slaughtered at an abattoir on the Scottish mainland. They should not have been brought on a very long journey to the midlands of England. Surely, such journeys cannot be allowed to continue for very much longer.

In the long term, the eight-hour limit that the new clause would introduce should be reduced further still. Of course, there is commercial anxiety in the farming community, which has endured one of its worst periods in decades, and the imposition of any new limit should not be economically damaging. Central Government could provide encouragement by giving short-term financial support, beginning, perhaps, with small, local abattoirs.

5.15 pm

The EU directive, which is incorporated in UK law, is weak in several respects, and the new clause aims to strengthen it. For example, the directive allows calves in so-called higher standard vehicles to travel for a total of 18 hours with a one-hour stop mid-journey to give them water and, if necessary, feed. In its 1992 report on the transport of farm animals and pets, the European Commission's Scientific Veterinary Committee recommended that calves should travel for no more than eight hours before a break, which should last for at least three hours to allow them to drink to repletion.

Similarly, the RSPCA is very concerned about the provisions of the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997, which implements the EU directive, because it fails adequately to safeguard the welfare of transported animals. With poor welfare come stress, a predisposition towards infection and all the animal health problems that the Bill will tackle. The EU directive and the 1997 order need strengthening if animal welfare problems are to be avoided, and we need to press for a review of them. Many organisations have pressed for a review and highlighted the points that particularly need to be addressed.

There are unsatisfactory and inadequate practices in existing abattoirs that receive animals that have been transported on long journeys. Indeed, their practices generate those long journeys because they will only take animals of a certain age and species, and therefore of a certain market value. That unnecessarily increases pressure on the UK's shrinking network of abattoirs, to which I have referred, and can only serve to push up average journey times to slaughter even further.

We need licensing. We want to maximise journey times, but if we cannot monitor those journeys, the provision will be a dead letter on the statute book. We need to license all individuals involved in the transportation of live animals, and that should be a legal requirement. Transportation is an intrinsically stressful experience for farmed livestock. They are exposed to unfamiliar experiences, environments and animals, and can suffer physical discomfort and/or injury, as well as mental distress. The duration of the journey, the conditions on board, the handling during loading and unloading, the frequency of travel and the provision of water and feed can all have a stressful impact on animals, and the licensing of individuals involved in transportation will help us to monitor the implementation of the new clause. /

Perhaps we can encourage improvement by fiscal means. Perhaps the subsidy received under the common agricultural policy should be dependent on observance at particular farms of agreed animal welfare standards, including limits on journey-to-slaughter times. Linked to that would be more detailed recording of individual farm animals, which would assist in tracing their journey to slaughter in the event of another outbreak of a farm animal disease such as foot and mouth. Farm animal welfare concerns such as a limit on journey-to-slaughter times should in any case be included in the so-called non-trade concerns of the World Trade Organisation. That would lead to negotiations on a global platform to raise the profile and legitimacy of these concerns.

Of course, the impact on farmers and consumers has to be considered whenever we in this place legislate to improve animal health and welfare. The new clause would have a very limited impact on consumers. I hope that DEFRA Ministers and representatives can enter into discussions with the five mega-supermarket chains to ensure that their corporate appetites do not distort the animal and public health-based reasoning that motivates the clause. Supermarket distribution networks should not be allowed to continue to dictate journey-to-slaughter times.

New clause 10 provides that, once an animal has been brought to market, it cannot be brought back to that market or taken to another one for 20 days. That would make an important contribution to stopping animals being taken in and out of markets in quick succession and would prevent the mass exposure of vulnerable animals. At the outset of the foot and mouth crisis, it became clear that many sheep were moved in quick succession in and out of markets and other premises as dealers tried to make small, rapid profits on them. For example, a dealer might buy animals at one market then, a few days later, sell them at another market hoping to make a small mark-up. Dealers make no contribution to farming in my estimation; they do not involve the animals in a genuine farming operation and simply trade them as commodities.

Multiple journeys played a major role in the rapid spread of foot and mouth and led to poor welfare, as animals were subject to frequent loading and unloading, mixed with unfamiliar animals and encountered other highly stressful circumstances. Such journeys have to be stopped as they can lead to serious problems and are not a necessary part of farming. New clause 10 would end the practice of animals being moved in and out of markets in quick succession and would not allow them to be brought to the original market or any other market in a 20-day period.

The provision would tackle a problem recognised on both sides of the House, and by all parts of the farming community, veterinary practitioners and others. It would prevent a current practice in British farming that accelerated the rapid spread of the disease earlier this year. In many cases, multiple journeys prevented the successful tracing of the origins of the disease. The number of times that animals were transported between markets, often in a single day, resulted in mass exposure to other fatigued and traumatised animals. The 20-day moratorium on market-to-market journeys provides sufficient time for a disease such as foot and mouth to show up in infected animals. Not only would it allow infected flocks and herds to be isolated, but it would allow local conditions to be assessed for compatibility with the spread of the disease, thus reducing the possibility of an indiscriminate cull, frequently referred to not only by Opposition Members but by Government Members, in a designated area.

Animal licences should be reviewed and revised to include the number of journeys that animals have undertaken in their life. Vulnerability and possible exposure to disease can then be assessed in the event of the outbreak of a farm animal disease such as foot and mouth. A reduction in the number of journeys between markets would result in long-term savings for farmers and a reintroduction of the abattoir in the local economy. Multiple journeys were born out of the drive to maximise profit per animal with such intensity and frequency that the inherent short-termism of that behaviour inevitably led to problems—and what a massive problem it eventually led to.

[David Taylor]

Reducing the frequency of journeys would make farm animals healthier, and indeed create a more viable acceptable and higher-value product. Members in the Chamber today and members of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee who have come into contact with farmers and others agree that farm animal welfare is high on their list of priorities. The provision would allow them to make more concessions to farm animal welfare, such as space for animals when being transported, regular watering stops and standardised qualifications for those loading and unloading animals.

I regularly meet farmers in my constituency—I had a delegation from the National Farmers Union at my last advice session on Saturday. Although, fortunately, we in the midlands were largely unaffected by the disease, the farmers note that the Government did not introduce an immediate ban on all animal movements once the first case had been discovered in the abattoir in Essex. Had a 20-day moratorium on market-to-market journeys been in place, that infected animal would have been identified before it got to the abattoir, which would have reduced the exposure of other animals to foot and mouth disease.

We Labour Members are keen to ensure that in our policies and practices we deliver what we promised to the British people. Our manifesto commitment was to

> "create a sustainable, competitive and diverse farming and food sector within a thriving rural economy which advances environmental, health and animal welfare goals."

Those elements are not mutually exclusive, as local abattoirs have found to their cost.

A 20-day moratorium would restore some sanity and community considerations to a market that has been voracious in its consumption of animals for profit. It would also be vital insurance against another epidemic, and would buy the Government of the day—we hope that that would be decades away and that Labour would still be in power—some diagnostic breathing space, which was unavailable earlier this year. I look forward to hearing from my hon. Friend the Minister an encouraging response to both new clauses.

Mr. Morley: New clauses 9 and 10 are important. My hon. Friend is right. If the aim is to stop disease spreading and to control and manage disease, the movement of animals is key. During the outbreak, a 20-day stop was put in place. My hon. Friend is also right about the long-distance movement of animals and the growth of livestock dealers. In the period between the introduction of the disease into this country and its identification, there were probably 1.3 million sheep movements, which spread the disease through the markets all the way down the west coast and into the west country.

Those are serious issues, which we must address. My hon. Friend is right to raise them, and he might take some encouragement from what I am about to say. On the transport of animals, there is currently an eight-hour limit within the UK. Under EU rules, longer journeys are permitted in a higher standard of vehicle. The long-distance movement of animals is not just a UK issue. The conditions for the movement of animals over long distances throughout the EU and across boundaries is an EU issue.

I was pleased to hear yesterday that Commissioner Byrne identified animal movements as one of the matters that the EU will have to address through the Council of Ministers as part of disease control. The place to consider time restrictions on the long-distance movement of animals is in the EU, because the limits must apply to all farmers, not just those in the UK. They must apply to the long-distance transport of live exports for slaughter from this country all the way down to Italy and Greece, which I find very hard to justify.

Tony Cunningham: Given that by 2004 an enlarged European Union may include 25 countries, and given that there are probably more farmers in Poland and Romania than in all the current 15 EU countries combined, will not the problem be even bigger in the future?

Mr. Morley: That is absolutely right, which is all the more reason why we must address the problem now in terms of European directives. I assure my hon. Friend that that is what we will do and that we will press the matter in the Council of Ministers.

5.30 pm

On the 20-day stop, my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) was again absolutely right. I not only accept his argument in relation to markets, but believe that we need to go further. Animals are moved around for a range of reasons. We need a package of measures dealing with a series of scenarios in which animals need to be stopped for disease-control purposes, which go beyond the issue of markets. There are also issues in relation to the practicalities of the livestock industry. In that respect, we must take into account some of the legitimate concerns of livestock farmers about quarantine stops, and we intend to do so. So, the other assurance that I can give him is that we take absolutely seriously the point that he made, but will deal with it in a package of measures that includes that point but also goes a bit further.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): That is very welcome news. Can my hon. Friend give a timetable that tells us when the package of measures might be introduced? The package will be well received in my constituency and more widely.

Mr. Morley: Yes, I can. The 21-day stop is currently in place as a disease-control measure. We sympathise with livestock farmers in terms of some of the practicalities of the livestock trade. We want to address those issues, but we also want to put in place a package of measures in relation to stops, including markets and other scenarios, as part of a disease-control measure. We will start discussions with the agriculture and livestock sector immediately with a view to securing agreement on the matter some time in the new year.

David Taylor: My purpose in tabling new clauses 9 and 10 was rooted in my belief that animal welfare and therefore animal health are seriously compromised both by the length of journey times and the number of journeys that individual animals make. The review this year of the European directive on transportation is indeed a good opportunity to reduce the maximum journey time to eight hours and I am encouraged by what my hon. Friend said in that regard. The system of multiple journeys in the United Kingdom, which is often related to the involvement of dealers, must be reviewed without delay.

Animal welfare and animal health are twin themes and have been interwoven throughout this whole debate. They are part of the same issue. We need to reflect on that issue and tackle it as a Government. I am encouraged by what my hon. Friend said about the standstill proposals that he hopes to bring to the House at some future date. For that reason, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 11

NATIONAL CONTINGENCY PLAN

'In the 1981 Act, the following section is inserted after section 36—

"36A National Contingency Plan

The Government shall prepare and regularly maintain in consultation with interested public and private bodies a national contingency plan for foot-and-mouth disease, which shall be laid before Parliament.".'.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The purpose of the new clause is to require the Government to draw up, maintain and publish a national contingency plan for dealing with future outbreaks of foot and mouth disease. There is widespread evidence that the Government and their agencies were wholly unprepared for the emergency that broke earlier this year. I have looked at the Government's published contingency plan, which is available on the internet. To say that it is rudimentary would be an understatement. It turns out to be very much what the Minister himself described as an outline strategy. It is our contention that an outline strategy is insufficient to deal with an outbreak of foot and mouth, as we found in the course of this year. That might explain why the strategy was so hopelessly inadequate and had no identifiable bearing on the way the Government carried out their duties in the event of this year's outbreak. An outline strategy was a recipe for chaos and confusion, and I am afraid that that is precisely what we got.

The evidence of the public inquiry in Devon, which was chaired by Professor Mercer and was mentioned earlier, is especially revealing about the state of preparations in the Department. It reported:

> "It was not obvious to us from the evidence received that MAFF was working to any form of coherent contingency plan. This, in spite of actual evidence that the Government had submitted such a plan to the European Union in 1993 and that some low level MAFF planning was proceeding in 1999. Lessons, which should have been learned from the outbreak in 1967, did not appear to have been implemented, and recommendations of the official report into that outbreak were ignored."

That point was supported by Mr. Alan Richardson, a retired vet who was involved with the 1967 outbreak and offered his services in Cumbria on the outbreak of the disease this year. He said that the lessons learned from the 1967 epidemic were set out in the report of the Northumberland committee, and that

> "the public had every reason to suppose that its conclusions formed the basis of the contingency plan in place in January 2001."

It is curious that Ministers are at pains to point out that the circumstances have changed greatly since 1967. The Minister did so in an earlier debate. The Government have published a document called "Comparisons with 1967: How the 2001 outbreak of Foot and Mouth differs from the 1967 outbreak". The aim of the paper is not only to let them off the hook but to boast about how well they did in controlling the latest outbreak. That is incredible. It is one of the most unjustified pieces of self-congratulatory humbug that I have come across for a long time.

The Government have gone to enormous lengths to point out the differences between 1967 and today. One would therefore expect them to disagree with Mr. Alan Richardson's comments that the public had every reason to suppose that the conclusion of the Northumberland report formed the basis of the 2001 contingency plan. However, in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) on 13 July, the Minister stated:

> "The recommendations in 'The Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Foot-and-Mouth Disease', parts 1 and 2, published 7 March 1969 and 3 November 1969 (the Northumberland report) formed the basis of the Government's policy for keeping the disease out of the country, and of our contingency plans for fighting an outbreak of foot and mouth."—*[Official Report*, 13 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 686W.]

On the one hand, we are told that there are enormous differences between 1967 and now, and on the other, that the 1967 experience formed the basis for the contingency plan that was in place in 2001. We have a mess that is riddled with contradictions. That may help explain the subsequent problems. Alan Richardson reported for duty at the Carlisle office on 1 March. If a proper contingency plan had been in place, would he have said:

> "At the Carlisle Office . . . there was inadequate office space and very few supplies of any kind . . . There was not a spare thermometer in the office . . . The organisation was completely overwhelmed and the bemused confusion among the staff of all ranks proclaimed that there had been no contingency planning at all. This situation persisted for some weeks"?

The evidence from Devon and Cumbria, from one end of the country to the other, clearly established that there was no effective contingency plan in place. We therefore entirely endorse the recommendation in the preliminary findings of the Mercer inquiry. It states that

> "a National Contingency Plan . . . needs to be developed. It should identify the organisations that will be involved in response to Foot and Mouth in a County or Unitary authority area, and explain their responsibilities and the ways they will work together. It should be part of an emergency planning process that involves all the main players in its construction, testing and regular rehearsal."

For geographical equilibrium, I should say that we also support the first recommendation of the Shropshire county council inquiry. The Minister said that he had not seen it. That recommendation states:

> "It is essential that a high level Foot and Mouth Contingency Plan is prepared by DEFRA to link in with Local Authority emergency plans in general and animal health and welfare contingency plans in particular."

Like the Mercer inquiry in Devon, the Shropshire inquiry found evidence of serious and avoidable flaws in the way the outbreak was handled. The inquiry heard about the

> "lack of a consistent policy from MAFF on the culling of animals . . . a lack of communication"

from the local office,

> "problems in having to deal with different veterinary regions".

[Mr. Peter Ainsworth]

and the

> "frustration caused by the lack of communication from DEFRA on issues relating to the licensing and movement of animals".

I could go on, but time is pressing. The Minister really should have looked at the Shropshire county council report, and I recommend that he does so as soon as possible. He might learn some useful information from it.

From Devon to Cumbria to Shropshire we find that the problems on the ground were the same. They were avoidable problems that affected every area of the country in which foot and mouth broke out. If there had been a proper contingency plan, action would have been swifter, the damage could have been dramatically limited and the cost—in every sense—could have been dramatically reduced. If there had been a proper contingency plan, all animal movements would have stopped as soon as the outbreak was officially reported, the Army would have been brought into play sooner, and we would not have had the dithering and confusion over the benefits or otherwise of vaccination which characterised much of the debate earlier in the year.

In the light of the terrible experience suffered by rural communities, businesses and families, the massive cost to our economy which will be counted for months if not years to come, and the tragedy for animal welfare, I have to ask the House whether an outline strategy is really enough. The Minister has asserted that, despite all the differences between 1967 and now, the Northumberland report forms the basis of the Government's policy for foot and mouth disease.

Recommendation 5 of the report states:

> "A comprehensive plan should be in readiness for the mobilisation of resources within and outside the Ministry . . . in the event of an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease."

In other words, it recommends a contingency plan. That is what the new clause would achieve, and I commend it to the House.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): I do not want to hold the House up, but may I ask one small question of the Minister? I hope that, with all this review of national contingency plans, some thought will be given to whether there was merit in having a slaughter at all. The Minister will be aware that foot and mouth is rather like flu, in that it lasts a short period of time, and does no long-term damage to animals or to those who consume them.

The real problem is one of export and of massive over-production in the European Union. Instead of thinking of new slaughter policies, it would be infinitely better if the Government and their colleagues in the European Union could find a way of dealing with the massive problem of over-production, which is getting worse and will become infinitely worse with the extension of the European Union. As an Opposition Back Bencher, it seems to me that neither the Government nor anyone else are willing to look at the issue of over-production. It is a nightmare, not a matter to be laughed at or scorned. It is eating up massive amounts of money, and we should at least consider it in the long term.

Mr. Morley: I shall deal with the points raised by the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who I know has a long-standing interest in animal welfare. I do not disagree with his point about production numbers, and about the drivers associated with the common agricultural policy, which in some cases can add to the over-production. Those issues must be addressed.

The hon. Gentleman is also right to say that we need to consider all alternative methods in relation to disease control, which means looking into alternatives to large-scale culling of the kind that we witnessed. I expect that the inquiries that will take place will find that the strategy that was applied was probably the only strategy that would have brought the disease under control in this outbreak. But that does not mean that we should not think of alternatives, which would also be part of a contingency approach.

5.45 pm

I do not dispute that we should have contingency plans, but I must disagree with the hon. Gentleman on the suggestion that foot and mouth disease is like flu to the animals affected. That is just not true. It has severe welfare consequences, particularly for pigs and cattle, and it is a horrible disease that may cause genuine suffering for those animals. Even in sheep, which do not show the symptoms as much as cattle and pigs, it can lead to severe mortality rates in young animals, and to spontaneous abortion. It can also leave the animals sickly and weakened. Foot and mouth is a farm animal welfare issue; it is a disease. We must take its control seriously for farm animal welfare reasons, let alone all the others.

On the new clause, of course it is important that we have contingency plans, but it is no surprise that the existing one is based on the Northumberland plan. That involved the most thorough review, although issues have changed and time has moved on.

It is wrong to suggest that the contingency plan was not exercised, because regular exercises did take place. Indeed, a regional office that was involved in an exercise rang round to check the availability of supplies needed to deal with a foot and mouth outbreak, which was a cause of the myth that the disease arrived in the country before it did. The exercise was part of keeping the contingency plan up to date and ensuring that people were familiar with it.

It is fair to say that the scale of the outbreak went beyond that for which the contingency plan was set up. There was no experience of such an outbreak in our country or, for that matter, in any other country, so there are serious issues to address. That forms part of the inquiries and there are lessons to be learned: we must introduce an amended and updated contingency plan, which brings me back to the point that the Bill gives us more flexibility and a wider range of options to include in a contingency proposal.

I accept that, these days, it is important for contingency plans to be put in the public domain and people should have the chance to comment on them. The existing contingency plan, which has been made public, as the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) said, was designed to deal with operational issues. It did not deal with disease control policies, which are a different issue. That is a difference in respect of the contingency plan to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

I have no objection to pulling together the lessons that will emerge from the inquiries, making them public, having a public consultation, producing an updated and revised contingency plan and ensuring that there is public involvement, but we do not need to include all that in the Bill. The Phillips report charged the Government with ensuring that contingency plans are in place to meet a range of issues, and that is what we have done.

For example, a later contingency plan dealing with the risk of BSE in sheep has been published. I put it in the public domain and ensured that it was available for public comment, although it is unfortunate that the press jumped on the bits that they found most interesting and appeared not to have read the rest. Contingency plans need to be updated and reviewed regularly and it is reasonable that they are put in the public domain for comment, but I give the assurance that there is no need for the new clause.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: The Minister makes helpful remarks. Throughout, he disagrees with nothing, but he agrees with nothing as well. We are always tempted to believe him, but we do not trust the Government, so we shall press the new clause to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 191, Noes 332.

Division No. 112] **[5.49 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson
and
Mr. Stephen O'Brien.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*

Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles
(Norwich S)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Wright, David *(Telford)*	**Tellers for the Noes:**
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*	**Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe and**
Wyatt, Derek	**Mr. Fraser Kemp.**

Question accordingly negatived.

6.3 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you are aware, there is a well established convention of the House called the Sewel procedure, which has been exercised some 28 times in the two and a half years since the passage of the Scotland Act 1998. If the House intends to legislate on areas that were devolved under that Act, the Scottish Parliament has to have a debate on a so-called Sewel motion to transfer those areas to this place. Amendments Nos. 21 and 22 would have the effect of amending the Scotland Act 1998 and taking back to this place subjects that were devolved to the Scottish Parliament. The Sewel procedure was introduced as a protection against anti-Scottish elements in this place reversing devolution.

The Tory party may say one thing in Scotland and something entirely different here. Can you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, say whether the Scottish Parliament has exercised the Sewel motion? Has there been any communication or consultation with the Scottish Parliament, or are amendments Nos. 21 and 22 a back-stairs attempt to take away powers devolved under the Scotland Act?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): We are not going to reach the amendments to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but will now move on to Third Reading.

Order for Third Reading read.

6.5 pm

Mr. Morley: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

We have had a detailed debate in Committee and on Report. I sometimes felt that it was not altogether focused and earlier thought that we had spent two hours on some other Bill, but all the principal issues have been covered nevertheless. Hon. Members have made some sensible, reasonable and constructive suggestions and comments.

Concerns have been raised about the timing of the Bill, but I repeat that the epidemic is not over yet. The Government are not complacent: we still think that the risks are comparatively high and, although they will diminish proportionately as time passes, we will not drop our guard. It is important that the Bill contain measures to increase the range of options available to fight disease, and to ensure that any option that is used is applied efficiently and without the undue delay that can allow disease to spread and jeopardise a great many people.

I recognise that there is a need for consultation on all aspects of the Bill, but it is not true that the consultation has been insufficient and rushed. For example, there has been extensive consultation about the part of the Bill dealing with scrapie. It was made clear in that consultation that the Government would bring forward compulsory measures at some stage, and that is what we are doing.

Also, we are engaging with the industry to sort out details of the time scale of the national scrapie plan. We very much welcome those negotiations, in which industry representatives have been very helpful and constructive, as they have all along.

In addition, I discussed the Bill with the foot and mouth disease stakeholders group set up by the Department, which used to meet every week at one stage of the outbreak. It includes representatives from every species organisation in this country, and everyone involved in the livestock sector is represented in the group. I was able to have a long discussion with the group about the Bill and its details, and I also had further discussions with industry organisations. Therefore, there has been a lot of consultation and discussion about the Bill.

The House might be interested to know that the stakeholder group has been so successful that the Government propose to retain it and to form it into an animal health group. That will mean that the livestock industry will be permanently involved in consultation with the Department on all issues of animal disease. The proposal has been very much welcomed by members of that group.

The Government also propose to be open and transparent in our implementation of the measures. In Committee, I gave a detailed commitment to bring forward wide-ranging consultation on key provisions in the Bill in the new year. My officials are working on that at present. That consultation will include the criteria governing the use of new slaughter powers and the implementation of the scrapie provisions that I mentioned earlier.

It has been suggested that we should wait for the results of the independent inquiries before introducing disease-control measures. However, I think that the matter is too important. I repeat that the Bill contains nothing that precludes the findings of the independent inquiries, or to suggest that the Government prefer one disease control measure over another.

I am anxious that we have as wide a range of options as possible. No one wants there to be culling on the scale evident in this epidemic, given all the associated problems that went with it. I repeat that I suspect that the inquiries will probably conclude that there was no other option but to deal with outbreak as we did—that is, by implementing the culling programme. However, new technology is on the horizon, and changes in the role of vaccination will give us a wider range of options.

I remind the House that the international conference will have to consider matters such as trade rules, as they place a restraint on vaccination. Again, the aim is to achieve as wide a range of options as possible.

I welcome the scrutiny that the Bill has had. It also received detailed pre-scrutiny by the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which was a useful experience.

I agreed in Committee to consider a number of useful suggestions arising from amendments such as the time scale of the appeal period in which farmers can make representations about the disease risk assessment and the level of the adjusted compensation award. I intend to take those issues forward, along with points raised by my hon. Friends today. We might include those as part of our consultation on the implementation of the powers in the Bill. If appropriate, I am prepared to ensure that amendments are brought forward when the Bill reaches another place.

Mr. Simon Thomas: The Minister mentioned the Select Committee's scrutiny of the Bill. However, I think

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

that he will accept that the Bill was put together and has gone through at a fair lick. The one legislative body that has not had the chance to scrutinise the Bill so far is the National Assembly for Wales. If it brings forward any amendments or suggestions between the Bill leaving this House and being debated in another place, will the Minister confirm that he will consider them and that he will involve the assembly in the consultation?

Mr. Morley: I will ensure that the National Assembly is involved in the consultation because it will be as wide as possible. We have been in close touch with our colleagues in the National Assembly in relation to putting the Bill together. However, I refute the point that the Bill has been rushed. We are still in a serious situation—the epidemic is not yet over. We need to consider that, and the sooner these measures are in place, I believe, the better it will be. We will arrange consultation on the aspects that I have mentioned as quickly as possible.

Much of the focus has been on slaughter, which is understandable. People are concerned about their animals being slaughtered. There are also the issues of pet farm animals and sanctuaries, which we want to address. If we are to use slaughter, whether as part of a wider strategy or on its own—the options are open—it must be done quickly and effectively. The quicker we do it, the fewer animals will be culled. Part of the reasoning is that if we are to use a culling policy, we should minimise it to minimise the number of animals affected.

I emphasise that the Bill is not just about powers to slaughter animals. We should get away from that idea. It also provides powers to enter premises for the purposes of testing, sampling or conducting a vaccination programme, should those options be appropriate. Some Members who have spoken are in favour of vaccination as an option; measures in the Bill strengthen the position on vaccination, so I hope that we will have their support.

We want to ensure that in the appeal process, sensitive issues such as pet farm animals are taken into account. However, the Bill does not take away the right of appeal on slaughter. People will still have the right to appeal to the divisional veterinary manager. It is my intention to publish the criteria on which that will be based. I intend to clarify the process with farming representatives and other interested groups during the consultation process in the new year.

I am surprised to see some reports suggesting that the Bill will give us powers to kill horses, dogs, cats, goldfish and hamsters. It will not. I made it very clear in Committee that the criteria in the Bill apply to susceptible animals. *[Interruption.]* We cannot kill anything we like. The position is defined in the Animal Health Act 1981 and it can only be changed by order. I cannot imagine circumstances in which it would be changed.

We are also taking a new approach to compensation on affected premises. I make no apologies for that. We have had a very good debate on it. I accept that only a minority of people are concerned, but I do not see why the rights of the majority should be put at risk because of the actions of a minority. The proposed measures are proportionate and balanced. We intend to take them forward.

The scrapie proposals have been generally welcomed. The vast majority of people in the sheep industry believe that scrapie eradication is a sensible and desirable objective. We want to bring that forward. We are obtaining good co-operation, and I have made it clear to the industry that the powers are enabling and that it is unlikely that the compulsory element in the national scrapie programme would be needed until some years down the line, as part of the agreed discussion on that plan.

I welcome the debate: in general, it was sensible and constructive—although perhaps rather long at times. We might have moved faster, although I certainly do not criticise the involvement of Opposition Members. However, I have a serious point to make. If they are still thinking of opposing the Bill, they should consider what they are opposing: the opportunity to bring in a range of options—including strengthening the vaccination option, and taking blood tests and samples. They will be undermining the rights of the majority who are put at risk by the actions of a minority. They will be undermining the Government's speed of action in response to such outbreaks. That response would reduce the number of culled animals—surely that is everyone's objective.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morley: In a moment.

Hon. Members who oppose the Bill would also be opposing measures to impose sanctions against people who bring about deliberate infection. Opposition to the measure would mean opposing the introduction of the national scrapie plan. That eradication programme is good for consumers and for the sheep industry, and has been generally welcomed.

I cannot believe that the Opposition want to oppose all those objectives; nor can I believe that they have failed to realise that, during the Bill's proceedings, I have given a series of undertakings to address the reasonable concerns expressed by organisations outside the House. That will form part of a public consultation in the new year.

When the Bill is finalised, the current provisions of the Animal Health Act 1981 will be better, more transparent and flexible, and will take into account a wider range of circumstances.

6.17 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: I am sorry that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is not present for the Third Reading to support her hard-working Minister.

I pay tribute to hon. Members on both sides of the House who have contributed to today's debates and to the Standing Committee: they deserve particular congratulations. I mention my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) and our esteemed colleague, the Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan). For my hon. Friends the Members for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) and for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin), it was their first experience as members of a Standing Committee—[HON. MEMBERS: "It did not show."] Indeed. They acquitted themselves with great distinction. Sadly, they have also learned that it is one thing to win the arguments, but another to win the vote.

Particular praise is due to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) on whom much of the responsibility for opposing the Bill has fallen. She led her team with her customary vigour and thoughtfulness.

When the Bill began, it was bad. We can welcome some of it, but all in all it was a bad Bill and it remains a bad Bill. It is greatly to be regretted that, despite all our debates, nothing substantial has happened to alter that.

Anxieties about the Bill have brought together some strange bedfellows. Throughout, although the Minister sounded conciliatory, he was in fact unyielding. For the most part, he brushed aside the objections of animal welfare groups, environmental bodies, veterinary surgeons, farmers' representatives and other outside bodies. In doing so he has reinforced the growing feeling that this is an arrogant Government who are intolerant of criticism, closed to other people's views and careless of civil liberties.

Throughout these proceedings we have tried to stand up for the rights of individuals and for fair treatment. We have sought to persuade the Government that many of the new powers that they seek in the Bill are unreasonable, unfair and illiberal. On every occasion, the Government have rejected our arguments. It is wrong in principle for the state to assume new powers without seeking to balance them with adequate rights of representation for ordinary citizens. That is the way of totalitarianism.

I have said before that written into the heart of the Bill is an assumption that farmers were to blame for the foot and mouth outbreak. That is the basic premise on which the Bill rests, and it is untrue. From that starting point, Ministers have proceeded to seek to justify overturning the normal burden of proof in the compensation arrangements, assuming powers to enter property and slaughter livestock as they see fit, denying adequate rights of appeal, and suborning to their will, under threat of imprisonment, anyone who happens to be around at the time, regardless of any moral, ethical, religious or physical objection. They have refused to acknowledge the inadequacy of their own scientific advice, the risk that their actions may have caused to biosecurity or the bungling incompetence of their own procedures.

Something is clearly very wrong when a Government decide to push through legislation under the heading, "animal health" and then ride roughshod over the concerns of vets. Any legislation demands for its effectiveness the compliance of the people on whom it has an impact; the Bill certainly demands the compliance of the veterinary profession. It might be thought that the Government would pause when a senior vet can publicly say:

> "If this Bill is passed I will do everything in my power to stop the veterinary profession taking any part in its implementation."

When the president of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons writes to a national newspaper to express the

> "increasing level of serious concern"

among its members on the grounds of ethics and the use of "unsupported scientific judgments", it might be thought that the Government would stop.

Mr. Morley: Of course, I saw that letter, but I should inform the hon. Gentleman that the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons has had no contact with DEFRA and has raised no objections to the Bill.

Mr. Ainsworth: If the Government had carried out a proper consultation exercise, they would have had plenty of contact with the college and the Minister would be better informed, so the Government carry on. Laws only work by consent. Laws that do not command consent rely on coercion, and coercion, as well as being objectionable, does not work.

Mrs. Browning: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: I am aware of the shortage of time, but I shall give way.

Mrs. Browning: Is my hon. Friend aware that, in Committee, when I raised the moral dilemma of vets being asked to do something against their better judgment, the Minister replied:

> "If they do not want to work for the Ministry, they do not have to. We are not dragooning vets against their principles."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E,* 4 December 2001; c. 218.]

In other words, the veterinary principles did not matter.

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend makes a very disturbing point, but it merely confirms what I have said—Ministers are riding roughshod over the opinions of professional people whose good will is needed if the Bill is to be in any way a success.

If the Government had taken the trouble to consult before rushing to legislate, many of the problems might have been avoided, but they are seeking to push through the Bill having consulted no one but their own advisers on large parts of it. If the Government had waited to hear the outcome of their own inquiries into the foot and mouth outbreak, they might have been able to produce more proportionate legislation. If the Government had decided to hold a full, independent public inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreak and waited to legislate on the basis of its findings, they would have done the right thing.

The Prime Minister is shortly due to receive a petition signed by well over 100,000 people, demanding a public inquiry.

Mr. Wiggin: Two hundred thousand.

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend says that there are 200,000 signatures. Organisations as diverse as the Countryside Alliance and Friends of the Earth have demanded such an inquiry. Conservatives have called for a full public inquiry into the origins and handling of the disease since March this year, but it is important to recognise that not only Conservatives have done so.

Diana Organ: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: No, I do not have the time.

The public, national and regional newspapers and magazines, animal rights and environmental groups and farmers are all demanding a public inquiry. Even the Liberal Democrats are demanding a public inquiry and yet the Government have consistently set their face against such an inquiry. Why?

We are told that this is a listening Government. Why are the listening Government deaf to the demands for an independent public inquiry into the terrible impact of foot and mouth disease, which has cost the country billions of pounds, caused misery to families and businesses across the country, caused millions of healthy animals to be slaughtered and left a legacy of economic hardship that will take years to overcome?

[Mr. Ainsworth]

What have the Government got to hide? Is the truth so very shameful? Just who is calling the shots? We know that, when asked about an independent inquiry on 3 April, the Minister for the Environment, said:

> "Unquestionably there will be one this time, to ascertain the cause and how it happened, and the way we can prevent it happening again. We will want to know how the disease got such a hold."

That perfectly decent and reasonable commitment was immediately repudiated by Downing street. Not for the first time, the Minister for the Environment was left hanging out to dry. What has the Prime Minister got to hide from a full public inquiry?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: I am sorry, but I am not giving way.

The Government's refusal to hold an independent inquiry kicks away the last strut of respectability from the Bill. It is not only foolish, hasty, badly drafted, misdirected, excessive and offensive, but it lacks moral justification. If it becomes law, I have every reason to expect that it will quickly become the subject of at least one legal challenge.

We in this House can only hope that the Bill will be substantially amended in the upper House.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: I am sorry, but I will not give way to my hon. Friend.

Better still, the Government should withdraw the Bill altogether and come back with proposals that are proportionate, reasonable and based on considered opinion and recognise the meaning of justice.

6.27 pm

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): It has been a pleasure and an honour to serve on the Standing Committee and to listen to the arguments. I have no doubt that all the Committee's members have experience of representing constituencies where foot and mouth was a serious problem. It certainly was in my constituency of Monmouth, which can be said to be contiguous with the constituencies of my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ) and the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams), who were also on the Committee. In fact, some farmers in my constituency believe that foot and mouth came from the hon. Gentleman's constituency and that of the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch).

The Bill is an important emergency measure. There are times of crisis, such as BSE and foot and mouth, when the Government have to introduce emergency measures. It would have been wrong to wait for one or two years for inquiries to report and to make recommendations before the Government acted. We all hope and pray that there will not be another outbreak of foot and mouth in next few months but, if there were to be one, can one imagine the criticism that would be levelled if the Government had introduced no measures whatever following the outbreak of 2001 and if they did not have the opportunity to vaccinate and to pay compensation for vaccination?

There has been a strong debate in my constituency, but the local farmers who were most directly affected by foot and mouth believe that the culling policy, though distressing, was necessary. It was necessary to get ahead of the disease. They were frustrated at the delays that took place in other parts of the country. For example, farmers in my area criticised the delays that occurred nearby such as in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean.

Diana Organ: Does my hon. Friend accept that, given the greater good of defeating the disease, the one or two objectors behaved in rather selfish manner in that they probably exacerbated the situation by allowing the disease to spread? We ended up with more animals being culled as a result of their selfishness.

Mr. Edwards: My hon. Friend has represented her constituency very well on this matter. Concern was expressed in my constituency that the culling process was halted for one reason or another, including the delays caused by ministerial officials. Nobody can deny that. It was a catastrophic event that overwhelmed the whole country.

It is absolutely necessary to fill the legal loopholes in the Animal Health Act 1981. It is important that we will now have greater incentives to ensure that biosecurity measures are taken. It is to the great credit of the farming community that there has been no further outbreak for some time now. We were absolutely delighted when Wales was declared free of the disease last week. The meat export trade is resuming, and I hope that it will resume in my part of Wales as soon as possible.

We do not want to be overwhelmed by such an event again, but many lessons have to be learned. We must ensure that livestock travels shorter distances. I listened with interest to the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) about the long distances over which much livestock is transported. In south-east Wales we have no major abattoir facility, and much of the livestock in the area is transported unnecessarily long distances. I wish that the farming infrastructure in my area had received greater investment. We need to reopen and modernise our livestock markets and invest in abattoir capacity.

David Taylor: Does my hon. Friend recall that the running down of this country's abattoirs mostly occurred in the 10 years before the 1997 election? Closures have continued, but at a much slower rate.

Mr. Edwards: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. There has, however, been a further rundown in recent years, and we need to arrest that trend. We need to use bodies such as the Welsh Development Agency to invest in those areas. I wish that we could have objective 1 funding in Monmouthshire to ensure the provision of more abattoir capacity, but we are outside the objective 1 area, so we are unable to invest in the economic development of an industry that has suffered most in recent years. I would be the first to admit that my constituency is relatively affluent, but its farming community has suffered badly in recent years.

We need greater investment in meat processing facilities, and we need new livestock markets. There is great controversy in my constituency because Monmouth livestock market is fairly run down and does not have as much trade as it should have. Abergavenny market is in need of investment and there is a debate about the creation of a new, modern livestock market that will serve not only Monmouthshire but south-east Wales and beyond, over the border into England.

The Minister has conducted proceedings on the Bill in his usual expert way. Not every farmer in Monmouthshire will agree with his policies, any more than they agree with my approach on every aspect of agriculture, but there is no doubt that he is dedicated to farming. His tremendous expertise is acknowledged on both sides of the House.

May I put one point to my hon. Friend? Recently, I attended a meeting of farmers in my constituency in the Cross Ash area, which was very badly affected by foot and mouth. I thought that they might be a little hostile because of the events of the past few months, but they were quite welcoming and hoped that I would take up a particular cause about which they are concerned—the payment of slaughter premiums. Many were not paid the premium although they believe that they are entitled to it. I shall write to my hon. Friend on behalf of Mr. Probert, Mr. Williams, Mr. Sevenoaks and a number of other farmers in my constituency. I sincerely hope that he will be able to consider their case, which I believe to be very strong. I assure him that I will be very happy to talk about the matter in the Lobby tonight.

6.34 pm

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): We are 26 minutes from the end of the proceedings on the Bill in this House. It is interesting that the Minister has consistently said that plenty of time and thoughtful discussion have been devoted to it, but the Committee debated only six of its clauses in six sittings and returned the Bill to the House completely unamended. It does not look like a Bill that has gone through effective consultation. That is particularly disappointing when one considers that, according to the reports that I have read and the accounts of my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed), the atmosphere in the Committee was constructive and engaging. The Under-Secretary is a constructive and engaging Minister, but the fact remains that he has not accepted a single amendment or undertaken fully to introduce any amendments before the Bill completes its final stages.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman may have missed what I said about that. A number of issues came up in Committee, and I gave undertakings that I would consider the best way forward which, of course, involves taking advice and looking at legal aspects. I said that, if appropriate, certain provisions that we discussed in Committee which, I conceded, I was willing to look at, could be added to the Bill in another place. There is work to be done on that. We have consulted widely with a range of bodies. To be fair to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, although it has not approached me directly, it went to the Department to discuss the issues with the chief veterinary officer. It has not raised objections to the Bill.

Malcolm Bruce: I appreciate the Minister's intervention, which was characteristic of his style and, I am sure, is backed by many good intentions. However, at the end of the day, one can only judge the Bill on what it says when it completes its passage through the House. In January, we may be back here with a Bill that has been altered; the Minister will then be able to say, "I have been vindicated." However, until he has said that, he can hardly be surprised if we consistently take the view that the Bill is not acceptable in its present form and should be opposed. If our roles were reversed, I do not think that he would expect any opposition party to behave any differently at this stage and in these circumstances.

The Minister made specific mention of the scrapie provisions and we should be clear that, in fact, the Bill was supposed to deal with scrapie. There was agreement that the voluntary scrapie plan was not working fast enough and that legislation was needed. All parties in the House and all those trying to eliminate scrapie support that. Obviously, there are concerns about rare breeds and questions need to be asked, but that could have been dealt with amicably and constructively in Committee. In reality, reference to scrapie in the Bill consists of one line in the main body of the Bill and one schedule. The rest of the contents have been plucked from the air and that has given rise to contention. The fundamental problem is not the scrapie provisions, but all the other provisions.

The Minister said that he would consult. Here we are on Third Reading, and he is going to consult. We hoped that the consultation would have taken place first and helped to inform the shape and structure of the Bill. That is what consultation ought to do; it should not take place after the event. Although there has been constitutional adjustment in recent years so that Ministers' words in *Hansard* can be used in the legal interpretation of an Act, as the Minister well knows, the first thing that any court will look at is what the Act itself says; it is difficult to add the qualifications of Ministers unless the court interprets them as effectively part of the legislation. The Minister is reasonable and is behaving in a reasonable way, but his reasons for not accepting amendments may not be persuasive in the courts at the end of the day.

The Minister has not succeeded in persuading me or my colleagues of the emergency nature of the Bill. He kept saying—and it is obviously true—that we are not yet at the end of the foot and mouth outbreak. I would like to think that we are close to that. In Scotland and in Wales, technically, we are; in England we soon will be, we hope. Most of us believe that the possibility of a flare-up at this late stage is the Minister's only justification for forcing through the Bill in the time scale. However, there is not an overwhelmingly convincing argument for doing so. After all, southern Scotland was affected by foot and mouth, yet the Scottish Executive did not take DEFRA's view that emergency legislation was needed. I understand that the Scottish Executive will introduce legislation but, unlike DEFRA, will do so after they have consulted the farmers, not before. They will endeavour to take account of their experience and the views of farmers' organisations in Scotland before they introduce legislation in the Scottish Parliament. That approach is commendable and would have been much more acceptable to the House if it had been adopted by DEFRA.

With the end of the outbreak, we are looking for the re-establishment of export markets. I asked the Minister about that at Question Time today. Farmers in my part of Scotland and sheep farmers in other parts of the United Kingdom would like to think that getting those export

[Malcolm Bruce]

markets back in the face of obstructive behaviour by France, which is a vital export market, was more important to Ministers than steamrollering the Bill through Parliament. Ministers should devote all their time and energy to a constructive commitment to farmers.

The Government have not amended the Bill at all, in spite of strong arguments well supported from various quarters. Those arguments were not party politically motivated, but motivated by a genuine concern to end confrontation between Government and farmers and to secure co-operation, so that together we can stop diseases occurring and spreading. To do that, the Government need everybody on side, not the threat of powerful criminal legislation and powers which, if executed, most people would find offensive and contrary to civil liberties. I am not convinced by the Government's claim that the Bill does not contravene the European convention on human rights.

On that basis, my colleagues and I will support other hon. Members who find the Bill unacceptable. We will vote against it, and we will not support it until it has been properly amended in another place.

6.41 pm

Diana Organ: Hindsight is a wonderful thing. We can all say how things should have been, but we would all be severely criticised by the farming community and the general public if, as a result of the horrendous outbreak during the spring and summer, we had taken no action to deal more effectively and speedily with another potential outbreak in the future. We still face a risk. If the disease flared up again into a major outbreak, heaven forfend, and we had taken no action, we would look extremely stupid—

David Taylor: And have been irresponsible.

Diana Organ: Indeed. We recognised in the summer that speed and efficiency were essential in dealing with the outbreak. It is important that we have the ability to fight the disease. We had the worst-ever outbreak of foot and mouth and we need effective weapons to fight it. The Bill strengthens our options. Many felt that vaccination was an option that could have been deployed last time, but for various reasons it was not.

Widespread concern has been expressed about the Bill and its timing. As the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) mentioned, many people have called for a public inquiry. I, too, have expressed my view that there should have been one. However, other public inquiries have taken years to report, in which case we might not have been able to enact the Bill for another five or six years, until the results of the inquiry had been published, whereas the Anderson inquiry will report within six months.

David Taylor: At the time of the last Conservative Government, when an even greater disaster on a grander scale in every sense occurred, does my hon. Friend recall whether there were calls from the Conservative party for a public inquiry?

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Double standards!

Diana Organ: The silence was a little deafening, and it was a case of double standards, as the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) said.

Concern has also been expressed about the scope of the Bill. Much of that concern is based on misinformation. My hon. Friend the Minister rightly said that the Bill does not apply to all animals, such as goldfish, guinea pigs, pot-bellied pigs, which I called pot-bellied sheep in Committee, cats, dogs or horses. It is clear that the Bill relates only to animals that are susceptible to foot and mouth and other animal diseases. There has been much misinformation about the scope of the Bill. In the same way, misinformation has been propagated about the appeals procedure and the right to judicial review.

Mr. Bacon: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Diana Organ: I am afraid not. The hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) had little time to speak, and neither have I.

There has been a lot of misinformation about the Bill, which has caused concern that might not have been engendered if hon. Members on both sides of the House had been a little more honest.

The Government have taken the opportunity to listen during the scrutiny process. Many issues have been raised and my hon. Friend the Minister has responded very positively. I emphasise the key provisions on consultation, new protocols and new guidelines for vets, as well as new criteria on rights of appeal and on the slaughter power. I have two questions in that context. First, my hon. Friend said that the consultation would occur in the new year. Will he give us a tighter time scale on how long the consultation will last? Secondly, how do people other than stakeholders feed into that consultation? For instance, how do farmers in the Forest of Dean and others there who wanted to object fit in?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. It is worth saying for the record that it was she and other hon. Members who convinced me to introduce the protocol on which we will be consulting. Of course, we will put the information on the DEFRA website, contact hon. Members who have expressed an interest and make the consultation public to the local press.

Diana Organ: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments.

My hon. Friend and the Government have been listening to the issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) about the transportation of animals and the maximum time of eight hours. We recognise that the issue of resubmission to market within 20 days, which also arose earlier, is not only an animal welfare matter, but one of the measures that we can put in place to fight disease. I think that we have made progress. The Government have been listening to concerns and looking at the way forward on making the Bill better, perhaps with the insertion of provisions in another place to strengthen it.

Admittedly, the Bill was considered for a short time in Committee, although I understand that no objection was made about having three days of sittings and that nobody called for further days. We gained from the pre-legislative scrutiny that was undertaken. This is a useful model that helps hon. Members on both sides of the House to consider the effects of legislation before it goes into Second Reading and Committee. I commend the process as a model that we can use in respect of other measures.

Obviously, all of us are looking forward to the reports of the three inquiries—especially that of Professor Anderson. The lessons to be learned from the devastating outbreak that occurred will be most important for all of us. I hope that the measures in the Bill, which may be amended in another place, are a means of answering the lessons that will identified and will help us to fight this terrible disease in future, so that we do not have to suffer again the misery, destruction and distress that we went through this summer.

6.48 pm

Mrs. Browning: I shall be brief, as I realise that other hon. Members want to contribute.

The Bill is disproportionate and will almost certainly be challenged under the European convention on human rights. I look forward to seeing it challenged in such a way. The Minister has taken unto himself in the Bill powers that he already has under the 1981 Act regarding the slaughter of diseased animals. He is putting on to the statute book additional powers for slaughter and powers that allow Department officials to come on to people's premises in respect of contiguous culls. I am not talking about animals that are clearly showing clinical signs of disease. I have no opposition at all to such animals being slaughtered out immediately and disposed of as quickly as possible, but the question of how a contiguous cull is identified and expedited is one of the big problems in terms of our experience during the past few months. It was in relation to the contiguous cull that the Government fouled up—and they did so in a big way.

People's rights—they had them until the Minister produced the Bill—should be respected. The measure is not about controlling animal disease. The Department uses computer modelling to identify the farms, but cannot even find them on an Ordnance Survey map. The Government need to sort out the mess before introducing measures that give the Minister additional powers.

Hon. Members from all parties have pointed out that the Minister is prepared to take the Bill through without accepting any amendments, even Labour amendments. In Committee, Labour Members tabled reasonable amendments and voted against them under duress. That is astonishing and nonsensical. The measure is not about animal health, but Government power. I hope that it will be challenged in the courts as soon as possible.

6.50 pm

Tony Cunningham: I shall be brief. We all agree that we cannot deal with a future outbreak of foot and mouth in the same way as we have tackled the current outbreak, especially in my constituency, which is in Cumbria and has suffered enormously. I feel tremendous sadness for farmers whose animals have been slaughtered and for those whose animals have not been culled but who have suffered all the associated pressures and stress, such as not being to able to move from their farms.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ), but I want to enlarge on her points. Prevention is a key element in the fight against foot and mouth. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, we need continued vigilance and the tightest biosecurity. However, as I said earlier, we also need to ensure that security at our ports and airports is as tight as possible.

I support the Bill because it allows us to deal with the epidemic through a different approach, which may include vaccination. Several farmers in my constituency would view that favourably.

As the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) said, scrapie formed the basis of the Bill. That was discussed and debated at length in Committee, but not on Report. Will my hon. Friend the Minister consider traceability and identification for sheep? Will he propose a scheme for that? If so, will he consider the superb model in my constituency? The successful British Cattle Movement Service deals with the traceability of cattle. I hope that my hon. Friend will examine it and use it as a model for the future.

6.53 pm

Mr. Wiggin: I shall be brief. Farmers' incomes have fallen by 72 per cent. since 1975 and 40 per cent. of farmers are on family credit and working families tax credit. We have experienced the worst period in the history of agriculture and 5 million animals have been slaughtered. Yet the Government introduce a Bill that will force people not only to lose 25 per cent. of their compensation but to pay to appeal. The Bill will penalise farmers who practise proper biosecurity but will not punish those who deliberately infect. They will be allowed to keep 75 per cent. of their compensation.

This is a Bill of shame. The part relating to scrapie is based on extremely difficult science. Codon 136—which is involved in the testing for the valene codon—is extremely difficult to identify, and in 80 per cent. of the tests carried out on sheep in my constituency, the tests were incorrect. We have evidence for that. I hope that, when the Minister considers the time frame for the scrapie plan, he will consider the testing methods to be used. It is difficult to find anything good to say about such a punishing Bill. If there is one word that sums up my feelings, it is rage.

6.55 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): The hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ) spoke of the dangers of hindsight. This is a remarkable Bill in that it is the first example of perfect foresight. It is perfect because not one amendment was deemed necessary during the passage of the Bill—because of the inadequate time that it has had in Committee and now on the Floor of the House. It demonstrates foresight because it comes before the Government's inquiries have produced what they think is necessary to control foot and mouth disease.

This is a first: 19 pages of legislative perfection. But it is just not true. The Bill is not needed; it contains nothing on the important issues about improving liaison with the Environment Agency and the Department of Health concerning disposal techniques. All that the Bill will do is make the contiguous cull easier. The contiguous cull is still a matter of deep controversy in the farming community in my constituency. I am thinking of Nicola and Andrew Morris, who have produced compelling evidence that 85 per cent. of the animals slaughtered in this epidemic had no symptoms of foot and mouth disease. We are making a controversial policy easier.

The Minister is introducing a Bill that is premature, draconian and unwanted. Yet again, this House is going to have to look to another place to do the real business of a democracy and improve a piece of legislation.

6.56 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas: This was a poor Bill when it was first introduced. It remains a poor Bill as it is unamended, and it does not deserve support. The Minister has been emollient tonight on many issues, but it is not good enough to suggest that amendments may be tabled, or that undertakings may be given, in another place. This House is the representative body for England—and Wales, still. I may not agree with that, but it is. It is important that those amendments should come before this body so that we can discuss them here and with our constituents, whom we are here to represent.

The Government have taken a soft option with this Bill. They had difficulties with the contiguous cull, and with dealing with other aspects of foot and mouth. They have sought to legislate their way out of the situation—as is always their first instinct when they have difficulties—rather than discussing the way forward with the farming communities. The Department that could not get the difference between sheep's and cows' brains right, and could not map out Wales correctly in relation to the contiguous cull, does not deserve to hold these draconian powers.

Finally, it is a travesty that the Bill was introduced without discussion with the National Assembly for Wales. That flies in the face of the undertakings and the protocol that exist between the Government and the National Assembly. It is not right that the National Assembly did not know about the Bill until First Reading. I am talking about the Assembly rather than the Minister's friends in the Administration. It is important to underline the difference between the two. The Bill does not deserve the support of the House, and I hope that it will be voted down.

6.58 pm

Mr. Bacon: The powers in the Bill have been discussed a great deal. Every time the Minister hears something reasonable from the Opposition, he shakes his head. All we have to do is look at what section 32 of the Animal Health Act 1981 says about the animals that can be killed, and what section 87 says about the ways in which those animals can be defined and those powers can be extended. The Minister talks about the fact that that would require an order—big deal! That requires a rubber stamp and takes 90 minutes. The combination of sections 32 and 87 of the 1981 Act and this Bill will mean that the Minister can kill whatever he wants, whenever he wants, without giving any reason for doing so.

Mr. Wiggin: Without paying for it.

Mr. Bacon: The second problem with the Bill, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) says, is the question of compensation. The people in the farming community in this country are burning, and they are bleeding. Total income from farming has gone down from £5 billion five years ago to less than £2 billion. The income of the average farmer is £5,000 or less, and it is a disgrace that the Government are making farmers pay penalties, in many cases for the mistakes of the Department.

The third problem is human rights. The front page of the Bill says that the

"provisions of the Animal Health Bill are compatible with the Convention"

on human rights. What a ludicrous statement! The Bill is plainly incompatible with article 6, which provides for the right to a fair trial, and with article 8, which provides for the right to respect for private and family life.

The fourth problem is illegal imports. The Minister said that he was minded to listen to us, but he would not accept our reasonable new clause, which required no more of him than simply to return to the House once a year to report what has been going on. He took absolutely no notice.

The problem is that the Bill's real agenda is to make legal what was done that was illegal, namely killing 5 million animals of which 4 million were healthy—

It being Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [4 November].*

The House divided: Ayes 331, Noes 189.

Division No. 113] **[7 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles
(Norwich S)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise

Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, [illegible]ory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Fabricant, Michael
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric

Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
[illegible], Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson
and
Mr. Stephen O'Brien.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Points of Order

7.15 pm

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Have you received a request for a statement in the House on the consequences of today's judgment in the other place that convicted Dame Shirley Porter, former Conservative leader of Westminster city council, of political corruption arising out of her role in the Westminster homes for votes—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I have heard enough already to tell the hon. Gentleman that that is not a matter for the Chair.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You may be aware that the Adoption and Children Bill is in Committee and that next Tuesday the Committee will discuss the most contentious provisions of the Bill on access to information. It transpires that after the Committee rose this afternoon a copy of a letter to the Chairman saying that the Government had done a complete U-turn on those clauses was released to members. However, I gather that Labour members of the Committee had access to the letter earlier during the Committee sitting this afternoon.

Is it not a gross discourtesy that the information was not made available to all members of the Committee, given that today is the last date for tabling further amendments, and that those who have tabled amendments, including my hon. Friends and me, were not personally told about the radical changes to the Bill that will be discussed on Tuesday? Would you care to investigate that, because a discourtesy has been done to Conservative and other Opposition Members who sit on that Committee?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have no knowledge of the matters that the hon. Gentleman has raised. He has made his point and put his thoughts on the record. No doubt the people responsible for those matters will read it and take note.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), Mr. Deputy Speaker. In view of your earlier ruling and in view of the fact that the so-called party of law and order, as the Conservatives used to call themselves, has not raised the matter, if we have a situation in which somebody owes £27 million, this House should do something about it—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a matter for the courts, not for this House.

Mr. Skinner *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already dealt with that point of order and I do not intend to return to it.

Mr. Skinner: It is about free speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have dealt with that point of order and I do not intend to return to it.

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does it relate to the same of point of order?

Peter Bradley: Well—*[Interruption.]*

Hon. Members: Yes, it does.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must tell the hon. Gentleman two things. First, when I am on my feet, the hon. Gentleman must resume his seat, and secondly, I have no intention of returning to that point of order.

7.18 pm

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Order [5 December].

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill

Lords amendments in lieu of amendments to which the Commons have disagreed; Lords reasons for insisting on certain of their amendments; and Lords amendments to Commons amendments.

9.30 pm

On resuming—

Clause 17

EXTENSION OF EXISTING DISCLOSURE POWERS

Lords amendment 5B, in lieu of Lords amendment 5: in page 7, line 23, at end insert—

"() No disclosure of information shall be made by virtue of this section unless the public authority by which the disclosure is made is satisfied that the making of the disclosure is proportionate to what is sought to be achieved by it."

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): A paper setting out the details of the Lords message is now available in the Vote Office. A second paper setting out the Government's proposals for a response to the Lords is also available.

The first Government motion relates to Lords amendment No. 5. I understand that it is the wish of the Government that all their other motions should be debated at the same time, and they are so grouped. At the end of the debate, I shall put the Question on each Government motion in succession.

Mr. Blunkett: First, I apologise for the fact that it has taken us so very long to receive the Lords message and that we have delayed Members of the House so late tonight. I want to explain the areas on which the Lords have deliberated in detail: part 5 on incitement to religious hatred, part 10 relating to police powers, part 11 on data retention and part 14, which, for want of better a phraseology, we might describe as sunset clauses.

Before we deliberate on the Lords message, it is very important to note that agreement has been reached on about 98 per cent. of the Bill. Given the speed, complexity and vigour of the debate over recent weeks here and in the Lords, that is a tremendous achievement. All people of good will should take pride in having been able to secure it. In that spirit, I shall address the four remaining clauses that we are dealing with tonight.

My political instinct is that people would never forgive us if we engaged in party political wrangles at this stage. I do not believe that anyone outside the House with any maturity expects us to behave in anything but a mature and responsible fashion in dealing with the remaining disagreements. That is why I want to try to secure agreement between the two Houses on the outstanding issues.

One issue and one alone has overridden everything we have debated—that is, providing greater security and reassurance to the people we serve. We have sought to do

[Mr. Blunkett]

so by providing proportionate and responsible powers and trying to reach agreement where there is disagreement over how far the legislation should go.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): In the spirit of what the Home Secretary says, we recognise that the disagreement has not been party political, because it brought people of all parties together when they felt that the legislation, in some respects, went beyond the requirements of dealing with terrorism and security. The agreements that have been reached have helped to redress that balance.

Mr. Blunkett: I certainly agree that Members of all parties have genuinely sought a way forward, but I hope that tonight we will show that we can achieve that in even greater degree. That is the point that I seek to make. Having established that we have already reached agreement on 98 per cent. of the Bill, I want to reach an agreement that allows the House of Lords to agree to the Bill tonight and to ensure that people are aware not only that we have been able to achieve that goal, but that Parliament has been able to handle a difficult and complex issue in such a fashion. As I said last night, the credibility of the process—not just of Parliament—is important to all of us, certainly those of us who care deeply about politics.

Let me work backwards. Part 14, relating to sunset clauses, has exercised Members in all parts of the House in regard to which elements of legislation should be returned to, not just in terms of deliberation—that applies to part 5, on an annual basis and or part 11, which already involves a sunset clause of two years—but in terms of broader issues. We agreed with the Home Affairs Committee on a sunset clause of five years on part 4, and we agreed that it would be appropriate to return that to primary legislation.

It has been suggested, particularly by the Liberal Democrats, that every part of the Bill should have to be revisited and rerun through Parliament. That, of course, would be at the expense of other measures proposed by, among others, the Liberal Democrats. We believe that, after sensitive deliberation on the matters that are of most concern and after agreement had been reached, it would be right to seek a return only if it was considered that remaining parts not given sunset clauses had prompted concern. We therefore proposed a review by a Privy Council committee, which would report to the two Houses within two years, and recommended that the terms of its report should be debated by the House of Commons.

There appears to have been doubt about whether the commitments given by the Government would result in full deliberation in relation to any concerns expressed by the committee. Our amendment, while declining to provide sunset clauses in regard to every part of the Bill and therefore to rerun those parts, does ensure that the review can highlight areas in which the committee believes there is cause for concern in terms of implementation, and therefore that we would guarantee a sunset clause of six months on any such items should the two Houses not have an opportunity to deliberate fully.

We consider this a sensible amendment, which should reassure everyone that the Government will have to provide a debate and will have to reach conclusions on the issues highlighted by the review committee.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Of course a review—particularly one conducted by those with authority—is welcome. The constitutional issue that divides us is this: it should be for Parliament, rather than seven or more people appointed by the Secretary of State—however important they may be—to decide whether legislation such as this should continue. This is a fundamental change in the principle that Parliament, and only Parliament, can apply the necessary wisdom and make the appropriate decision on whether emergency legislation that has not been considered properly should remain on the statute book indefinitely.

Mr. Blunkett: We will return those concerns to the House specifically, but we will also bring the report on the Bill to the House, thereby offering it an opportunity not simply to debate clauses relating to extension of the Terrorism Act 2000 and part 4—we have already made a commitment to consider that annually and to conclude it after five years, if it has not already been concluded by a vote in the House—but to debate the whole of the working of the Bill. That is a unique opportunity. It has never been offered before by Government, and I think it helps us in these circumstances.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I will in a moment.

I think that that helps us; given that people have been prepared to give and take, listen, respond and make sensible suggestions, we have now reached consensus on the vast majority of clauses. For unique reasons, we appear to have had consensus on bribery and corruption across the House. One measure was demonstrably put in at the last moment on the insistence of a Front-Bench spokesman for the Opposition party. On that alone appears to rest the full consent of the Liberal Democrats. It is a very strange world we live in, but there we are. Given that it is such a strange world, I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn).

Jeremy Corbyn: The Home Secretary said that the Privy Council committee will have a chance to examine all the workings of the proposed legislation and then issue a report. Will he confirm that in its examination of all the workings of the Bill, the committee will have access to the information under which anyone is imprisoned as a supposed international terrorist, and will be able to examine what it believes to be the justice of those cases before it issues its report on the general workings of the Bill?

Mr. Blunkett: The reason why it is a Privy Council-established committee is to give it access to the security and intelligence services. Of course it will not have access to the detailed cases of the individuals who have gone through the Special Immigration Appeals Commission and the evidence that has been heard in private. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] I am not even going to try that answer because we have spent hour after hour, including last night, deliberating on that matter. I do not intend to hold the House up unnecessarily.

On part 11, we had a suggestion from those who have been extremely busy on the Liberal Democrat Benches that we should separate out, because it is about not access but retention, those parts of data that someone could second-guess as being relevant to terrorists as opposed to organised criminals and others. They have considered it necessary to press that.

Should I resist the House of Lords on that matter, the Bill is in danger of falling. We have some quaint rules as between the two Houses. If something is resisted twice, the whole Bill falls—not the clause, but the whole Bill. It is a learning curve even for those of us who did politics as a degree. No doubt the Leader of the House will get around to looking at modernising the way in which we operate. *[Interruption.]* That was not a threat; it was a little quip. I am so keen to get the Bill through before Christmas that I would not dare threaten anyone, not even on my own Back Benches.

The amendment, in relation to part 11 therefore suggests that we should try to separate out those parts of data. As I tried to explain on a number of occasions, including last night, it is not possible to do that, but paradoxically, because it is not possible to do it, it is not reasonable to suggest that we should not do it. I am therefore prepared to accept the amendments that have been tabled. In order to be able to implement what they want, we will have to retain the data, so that it can be accessed to test out whether the intelligence services are right in believing that it is relevant in tackling terrorists. That is how stupid the Liberal Democrats are.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I hesitate to intervene on that introduction, but I congratulate the Home Secretary on accepting the amendment. It is important not in terms of the practical implications, which are as he spelled out, but in terms of the message it gives to one of the UK's important industrial sectors, from which he will require full co-operation if we are to implement anything in the Bill—or indeed in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

9.45 pm

Mr. Blunkett: We have been fortunate in that the industry has given its co-operation voluntarily for the past three and a half months. I remember in my statement on 15 October thanking the industry and congratulating it on doing so. We established the concept of a code of practice with a sunset clause in recognition of the fact that the best wanted to get on board the rest, as per the famous Winston Churchill phrase of 1909, to ensure that those who were prepared to co-operate were not undercut by those who were not. However, we have agreement, so let us move to part 10, on police powers.

We have another little paradox on part 10. It transpired that the Liberal Democrats had managed to contrive a situation in which their amendments reduced the powers already available to the police and the jurisdiction of the British Transport and MOD police. I pointed that out last night, and the Liberal Democrats went back to the House of Lords and persuaded their Lordships that they should accept an amendment that provides as follows:

> "Any powers conferred by this Part, except in so far as they confer powers replacing police powers which existed immediately before the coming into force of this Part, shall only be enforceable in relation to any suspicion, or investigation, or acts, of terrorism or any matters of national security."

In other words, having accepted that they had made a complete backside of it, the Liberal Democrats have decided to put the matter right. We are now back where we started. In the spirit of co-operation, I shall ask the House of Lords if it would be kind enough not to resist putting the original wording back in, so that we can move forward on the basis that we thought we were on in the first place.

The issue is serious because, should the House of Lords resist that request and send the issue back to the Commons, and if we were unprepared to put up with that nonsense, the Bill would fall. We have a clear message for the House of Lords: to ask it to accept that we have gone as far as we can in relation to those powers and to agree with this House.

I come to part 5. Coming from Sheffield, I am familiar with the old nursery rhyme about the grand old Duke of York. So I have marched myself up to the top of the hill and I am about to march myself down again. Before anyone can quip about giving way gracefully or otherwise, I shall ask the House to give way to the House of Lords, which has voted twice to remove the incitement to religious hatred from the Bill. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] There we have it.

There will be consequences. Every decision that we take—be it this House, the House of Lords or people in their individual lives—has consequences. Some people's attitude is, "We really agree with this proposal and we think that in the long term it would be a good thing to do, but this is not the time or the Bill and we did not agree with every word so we will reject it." *[Interruption.]* Those people will need to reflect in a year's time on where the new Bill is, not least those Liberal Democrats who are heckling me. After all, they have suggested that we should re-examine every aspect of this Bill, to the point where no time or space would be available to table a separate small Bill on incitement to religious hatred.

That is the consequence of the enthusiasm demonstrated by hon. Members—on the Opposition Benches and on my own side as well—at the fact that the provision has been removed from the Bill. We all understand that the House should concern itself with construction, constructive change, improvement and building on proposals. What I have never understood is the great joy and cheer at the destructiveness of removal. I want to explain what I mean—

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): You just messed it up.

Mr. Blunkett: I do not think that I have messed it up. I think that the votes in the House of Lords have messed up this provision.

Many hon. Members were not in the Chamber when there was sensible and rational disagreement on these clauses. Genuine concerns were expressed, which were heard and responded to. Discussions took place behind the scenes, and the Attorney-General did his best to ensure that we found a way forward.

[Mr. Blunkett]

I have no disagreement with that. People genuinely felt that there could be improvements and safeguards. That is fine. What I was referring to was the tremendous cheer that getting rid of the provision altogether aroused. There was no quiet pleasure at having won—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way to the former leader of the Scottish National party in a moment, but I merely want to make the point that the House should not shout and jeer at such moments. We had a rational debate on the matter, and the Government have conceded that we have lost on it. The House of Lords has voted against it twice, both times substantially. However, that is not a matter about which anyone should rejoice. It may be late, and people may be frustrated, but that is the single point that I want to make.

I give way to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond).

Mr. Salmond: The Home Secretary will not have to wait a few years to see such legislation in operation. My understanding is that the Scottish Parliament intends to proceed with similar legislation. However, in the Scottish Parliament, it will not be proceeded with as emergency, rushed legislation. Is not that the lesson that the Home Secretary should take on board?

Mr. Blunkett: I have learned a number of lessons over the past few weeks, which I hope that I will carry with me. However, one lesson that I have learned from interventions from Scottish National Party Members over the past week or two has been how different the two Parliaments are. I do not mean in terms of their processes, but in terms of the volume of legislation and the enormity of pressure that exists in them. Obviously, the modernisation process proposed by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will assist us, but in this Parliament we have the most enormous backlog and jam of legislation. Everyone, from every side, wants their preferred Bill to come forward.

I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Fitzsimons).

Mrs. Fitzsimons: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. Does he agree that we in this House are sometimes in danger of operating as though we are not seen by the outside world? Does he share, as I do, the disappointment felt by the 27 per cent. of my constituents of Muslim origin, who feel that, tonight, the House has not listened to their concerns or protected them? Does he agree that we bring ourselves into disrepute when we do so in a crowing manner?

Mr. Blunkett: When a number of faith groups, including the Muslim Council of Britain, asked me if I would consider bringing forward a clause on religious hatred, similar to the provisions regarding race hatred, we considered that it was a worthwhile proposition and attempted to do it in good faith. We did it to try and meet genuine concerns at a time when reassurance and increased security and surveillance were judged to be necessary. Our attempt to do this has undoubtedly sent a signal across the world. We did it in good faith.

I have made a point that has aggravated Opposition and some Labour Members, but I think that it is important that, when we deliberate on these matters, we take joy in success.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): I was one with whom the Home Secretary engaged constructively and graciously. Although we had a difference of opinion that was not resolved, we behaved as Members of this House ought to behave, so I am slightly disappointed at his tone. I ask him to think back to those discussions. The shadow Home Secretary and the Liberal Democrat spokesman both made an offer to the right hon. Gentleman to the effect that, were this measure to be dropped, they would co-operate with the Government on a new Bill that would address these serious issues in the round. Is the Home Secretary now telling us that that is not a prospect in the foreseeable future?

Mr. Blunkett: As for the right hon. Gentleman's sadness about my tone, I merely observe that if someone blows a raspberry in my ear, I am inclined to blow my mouth organ slightly louder. A raspberry was blown by Members when I announced that the clause was to be dropped.

On the substantive issue, I have heard that Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members indicated that they would like to co-operate on a measure that they have just defeated. I am very keen that they should indicate that through the usual channels, as well as how they wish to co-operate over such a Bill, how they believe that it should be designed; what substantive measure, if any, they think that it should be attached to; and which measure would have to give way in order for us to find a slot for it. It was because of the need to get through these measures in time to ensure that we did not leave people at risk or completely disrupt the rest of the legislative programme that we sought to achieve what we are doing tonight.

Simon Hughes: I hope that the Home Secretary will return to his introductory tone and accept that there are honourable views held on this issue on both sides of this House and the other place, just as there are outside in all communities, of faith and without faith. It just so happens that the House of Lords has twice, by the largest majority since it has been reformed, not shared the view of the Government.

I hope that the Home Secretary will not repeat the words of his colleague who suggested that the defeat on this issue—we think that it is the wrong place and the wrong time—should preclude collaboration on any Bill that deals with the blasphemy law, incitement and religious discrimination in the early future. The Government can make that time available if they want to.

Mr. Blunkett: There is every reason to continue encouraging those who are prepared to co-operate to do so. I repeat that my remarks were based not on concern about people's disagreement but on the triumphalism surrounding that disagreement. I intend to conclude, because I want people to have the chance—*[Interruption.]* It is no good the Conservatives or Liberal Democrats immediately offering their co-operation, if that is what they are doing, and then criticising me for being taken aback at their tone. That is all.

10 pm

If we want co-operation, let us seek it. I shall conclude on that point—*[Interruption.]* I am not bitter at all; we have achieved a lot. We have achieved consensus on a range of measures—including the aggravated offence in relation to religion associated with race hate. That will be extremely important in its own right in achieving security and safety, as well as sending a message to people. I do not want people of any faith to believe that tonight Parliament turned down their protection. That is important—whether or not we disagree.

Although it is late, I want to finish on a positive note. During recent days, we have received substantial co-operation from the Conservative home affairs team. I am grateful to them for that. A responsible attitude has been shown today by Conservative Front-Bench Members, and I am grateful to them. As I said yesterday evening at about 11.30, I hope that that will be emulated by the Liberal Democrats when these provisions return to the House of Lords—for it is not words that we seek, but genuine co-operation in establishing that Parliament can secure a safer and better future for the British people.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): This is an important moment for Parliament. The Home Secretary set out to achieve a Bill, with good intentions. Throughout, we have paid tribute to that. Throughout, we have recognised the necessity of the Bill and of having it quickly, because we face, as a nation, a real threat and, as I mentioned yesterday, all but seven of the 126 clauses properly address that threat.

I also pay tribute to the fact that the Home Secretary has made significant shifts in order to enable us to have what we set out to have in the first place—a Bill about terrorism. There was never a place in such a Bill for a clause on incitement to religious hatred. I will not rehearse the arguments. We are grateful that the Home Secretary has given way to the overwhelming objections from the Lords. I do not share the right hon. Gentleman's view of the performance of the Liberal Democrats, who have worked with us conscientiously and openly to achieve that important result.

I am also grateful that the Home Secretary has made way for a sunset clause that I believe will work. It is not perfect, but I suspect that we could never have hoped to achieve perfection in 10 days or so of parliamentary debate of a Bill of immense length. The provision will, I think, serve the purpose.

I am further grateful that the Home Secretary has allowed the Lords to do their work of noticing that there was something wrong in having about 81 Government agencies and quangos disclose almost everything to almost any law enforcement officer, who was trying to investigate almost any crime, anywhere in the world. That was not proper drafting, although I do not think that the Home Secretary intended that provision from the beginning. The proportionality rule that he has now explicitly applied will probably serve to remedy the problem. Again, it is not perfect. As the years go by, we shall have to see whether it works, but it is certainly much better than where we started.

Most of all, I am grateful to the Home Secretary for removing from the Bill an item that should never have been in any Bill: an attempt—if, indeed, it was intentional—to enable the Government of the day to push through, in a 90-minute debate in a Committee upstairs, any decision reached by EU Justice Ministers on any matter of criminal law. The Home Secretary has, in effect, removed that part of the Bill. He has so constrained the provision that it is innocuous, and for that not only we but the nation as a whole will be grateful, not just this year but for years to come.

What has been proved during the rather arduous progress of the Bill is the value of parliamentary scrutiny and parliamentary check. The Home Secretary has ended up with a better Bill—not only from our point of view but from his point of view. What has been shown is that when Parliament asserts itself constructively, effectively and in a dignified way against the Executive, Parliament can win and can make the actions of the Executive better than they would otherwise be. That is a triumph for our democracy and I am grateful to the Home Secretary for co-operating in achieving it.

Simon Hughes: I am grateful to the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and his colleagues for their collaboration. We have often been able to reach a common view in both Houses, and that view has prevailed in considerable parts of the Bill. I am sorry that the Home Secretary's frequent courtesy and friendliness when we have seen him and his ministerial colleagues to discuss the Bill and to put our point of view has not always been reflected in the tone that he has adopted publicly.

I hold no grudge about the fact that the Home Secretary may have a different view. I understand his national political responsibility, and he is perfectly right to introduce in Parliament a Bill to deal with terrorism. The Liberal Democrats have unequivocally said that we accepted that there should be such a Bill and that we would support it, and we accepted that it should be emergency legislation. We have never veered from that view, but we have had some disagreements about the Bill's content.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury (Ms Hilary Armstrong): Absolutely.

Simon Hughes: We have disagreed about the content because we have also kept to two other very straightforward positions. First, the provisions of a Bill that proceeds through an emergency process, without proper scrutiny and in double-quick time, should return for scrutiny at a later date—a perfectly normal constitutional principle. Secondly, we believe that a Bill that was intended to deal with terrorism and related activities should be limited to terrorism and related activities, and many of our amendments have been intended to deal with that issue specifically.

Of course, there have been, and still are, disagreements. I am grateful to all my parliamentary colleagues for the fact that we have reached a common view about how to

[Simon Hughes]

proceed and that they have unitedly supported the leader of my party, myself and our colleagues as we have sought to amend the Bill. However, the Home Secretary must not misrepresent the fact that when we have disagreed on extending the powers of data retention and transfer and those of the police beyond what is needed to deal with the current emergency, we have done so because we believe that it is not right to deal with those matters in this process and in this Bill and that, if the Government want to do that, they should do so elsewhere.

I want to make a point about the deliberations of the past day or so. Although the Government have no majority in the country, they clearly have a majority in the House. *[Interruption.]* No, they have no majority in the country. Indeed, no party has a majority in the country, and the Government achieved a considerably lower vote than most Governments since the war, so we should have no arrogance from the Government. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It would be as well for the progress of business if any Member who has the Floor is heard in reasonable silence.

Simon Hughes: The Government also have no numerical majority in the House of Lords, but this Government of all Governments cannot complain if they are defeated in the House of Lords because that is the House that Tony, Jack, David and Derry built. This is their House of Lords and their creation. If they wanted a different one, they could have created it.

Liberal Democrats regret the fact that the Government did not accept our argument about judicial review. We do not believe that it was necessary to derogate from the European convention on human rights and we were sad that there was a proposal to allow for European third-pillar issues to be debated on the basis of secondary legislation. However, we clearly acknowledge that the Government have made considerable concessions, and for each and every one of those we are grateful and are clear in our minds that they were wise moves that were taken on the basis of evidence and argument.

Three issues remain. The first relates to the incitement to religious hatred provision. The proposition that I put to the Government yesterday and before remains absolutely clear. Liberal Democrats believe, like the Scottish Parliament believes, that there should be legislation on religious discrimination. We believe that, if the Government want to legislate, they can find the time to do so. We shall, indeed, collaborate with other parties and faith groups to seek to persuade the Government to find the time to legislate properly.

Secondly, we believe that there should be a sunset clause for the Bill. What the Government have offered— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is still too much noise for such a serious occasion.

Simon Hughes: What the Government have offered is an improvement, but we have not changed our view that such a Bill should return for proper review.

Finally, we believe that we were right to press the argument that the powers of the police and the authorities that were so widely drafted in the original Government proposals were much wider than was necessary to deal with the current emergency.

We are consoled in our view by the fact that people from both the other major parties often supported us. We assure the Government that, like them, we are willing to co-operate and we assure the House and the country that we accept that this Bill, improved and amended, should pass into law tonight. However, we shall keep up our arguments when we believe that the law needs to be changed hereafter.

Disagreement must not be misrepresented. It is the place for Parliament to express disagreements and Liberal Democrats are proud of the position that we have taken. We shall continue to argue our case.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I have no religious beliefs, but it is shameful that people in our country are subject to abuse and assault because of their religious beliefs and are subject to discrimination in jobs, housing and education because of their religious beliefs. I have long believed that we should outlaw such discrimination. I strongly supported the Government's proposal to do that, even though it was included in a Bill that relates to terrorism.

I am sorry that the House of Lords voted that proposal down, but the problems remain. Tomorrow morning and tomorrow evening, as they take children to and from school, Muslim women will be abused and assaulted because they cover their heads because of their religious beliefs.

I have listened to the arguments against the inclusion of such a proposal in a clause in the Bill. I have noticed that many of the provision's opponents have said that they want such legislation, but not in this form or at this time. The problems that it was supposed to address remain. I hope that the Home Secretary and the rest of the Cabinet will recognise that and shortly introduce a Bill that includes proposals to outlaw incitement to religious hatred and religious discrimination, because we owe it to the people who are suffering those outrages at the moment.

10.15 pm

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): I rather disagree with the general tone of what my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said, but I congratulate the Home Secretary on agreeing with the Lords in amendment No. 23, on incitement to religious hatred.

We are all fanatically and fiercely opposed to hatred in all its forms. Indeed, if there were no such thing as hatred, we might not need a House of Commons at all. It is the resistance to expressions of hatred and violence that gives us our very role as Members of Parliament. Hatred is a hydra-headed monster: one can chop off one of its heads and two might grow in its place.

The issue facing us has been properly expressed in the House of Lords. The Lords said that part 5 has an unobvious but deep and devastating implication for freedom of speech. I do not believe that this House has had a proper chance to analyse that proposition, but if it is true, and we are the custodians of freedom of speech, it is right that we pay the appropriate amount of attention to that argument. We have not been able during our three sittings to give it that attention. The House of Lords, in its eight sittings, has had more opportunity so to do.

If it is true that the Bill has implications for freedom of speech, of course it may be that we still need to embrace curtailments because of terrorism, but the argument in this place has consisted of some people saying that anybody who says that there is anything at all wrong with the Bill is forgetting about 11 September. The beautiful 35-year-old daughter of my friend Padraig McHugh lost her life on 11 September, so if I say that the Bill is manky in parts, let no one tell me that I am forgetting about 11 September—no way.

Some people have said that those of us who are opposed to some parts of the Bill have set civil liberties too high and the threats too low. Every item in the Bill needs to be considered by reference to whether it lowers the probability of events such as those on 11 September. Unlike many of my colleagues who have opposed the Bill and said that they are also opposed to the military action taken by the Government, I have been strongly in support of the military action.

It is right, however, that this Bill—drafted too hastily, thought of too quickly and imposed without sufficient debate, particularly in this place—be simplified, and I am pleased that the Lords have done a job that should have been done here. I hope that in future, the timetable for any legislation of this sort will allow proper scrutiny to be conducted in this Chamber, instead of expecting it to go up the road where the Lords have the luxury of detailed debate, which we have been denied. I hope that we get legislation through to curtail hatred and make sure that we do so in a way that maximises the opportunity for freedom of speech.

Jeremy Corbyn: Like other Members, I shall be brief. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear.] I am grateful to my hon. Friends. The Home Secretary made the point that he will appoint a review committee to look at the workings of the Bill and told the House that it will not have access to evidence on the basis of which he will have the power as Home Secretary to name someone as an international terrorist, imprison them, deny them access both to the evidence against them and legal representation, then review their case every six months. Will the House reflect for a moment that no other country in Europe has introduced such legislation?

We are rushing through legislation that means that people will be imprisoned without any access to the evidence against them or to an open court. Because the security services are apparently not prepared to trust the civilian courts, the Home Secretary is not prepared to change the Bill. The House should reflect for a moment on the fact that, unaccountably, we are giving incredibly serious and draconian powers to the Home Secretary and future Home Secretaries. We should not be doing that. To defend itself, a democracy must be open and democratic and give people the right both to knowledge of the evidence against them and to be defended.

The Bill has been rushed through; it is extremely dangerous because it is a denial of civil liberties. If we parade ourselves as a democratic society, in times of difficulty it is important to show the rest of the world that we are prepared to stand up for the civil liberties and rights which we enjoy. If the Bill is used against supposed international terrorists and foreign passport holders, there is always the danger that it could be extended later to United Kingdom citizens. My hon. Friends and I are not prepared to support it because it is a dangerous departure from the norm of a Labour party and a labour movement that defends the right to civil liberties in our society.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I support the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and place on the record the fact that many of my constituents believe that there should be a criminal offence based on incitement to racial hatred [HON. MEMBERS: "Religious hatred"] Thank you. I should also like to place on the record my perception that that part of the Bill is not meant essentially or exclusively to protect people of the Muslim faith. There are many faiths that at present and, doubtless, in future, can be used as a target for hatred, as they have been in the past.

I wish to assure my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that he has no need to apologise for his response to what he rightly called the triumphalist response to his announcement. I can assure him that the majority of Members who bayed their triumphalism were not in the Chamber last night when the issue was debated. The whole reason for the House's existence is to examine forensically the Executive's legislation, so why do certain Members always hide behind the excuse that they would be able to do so if only they had more time? This piece of legislation was introduced because of an emergency. If the emergency services that work on our streets and in our hospitals throughout the year argued that they could not fulfil the requirements of their job because they had not had sufficient notice, what would the House and the people of this country say?

I take issue particularly with the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) who averred that he discounted the other place. He said that it was a Chamber that had been created by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and other members of the Government. When the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues signally fail to win an argument in this House, they invariably refuse to push their amendments to a vote because, as they say, the matter will be raised in the other place. A Chamber which the hon. Gentleman claimed this evening to discount is always his fail-safe.

The essential point, which the House should examine without delay, is that an unaccountable and unelected Chamber can overturn the decisions of this Chamber. Members of the official Opposition and the Liberal Democrats—I do not know what one calls the Liberal Democrats; one can hardly depute them to be the unofficial Opposition—argue that the Government are eroding the powers of this Chamber for various reasons, yet they are perfectly prepared to allow the noble Lords in the other place to overturn this Chamber's decisions. The sooner we ensure that the other place—

Hon. Members: Elect them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Glenda Jackson: Too impatient, and as always, illogical and illiterate. I intended to end by saying that the sooner the other place is elected and becomes accountable, the better.

Mr. Blunkett: I thank right hon. and hon. Members of all persuasions who have contributed to making it possible

[Mr. Blunkett]

to get the Bill through. I thank my hon. Friends for their contributions. I shall be spending more time north of King's Cross, given the support that I received this evening from my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson).

I thank my fellow Ministers, who have worked incredibly hard, and our Whip, who has worked particularly hard on the Bill. I thank officials and the lawyers, not just my own, who have worked extremely hard, but many others who have worked outside, briefing hon. Members and political parties and making sure that the Bill is a better one than when it entered the House.

I have got over my momentary pique—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] That's better. I feel a lot better for that. I genuinely think that the British people will say, "Well done. Parliament has shown itself in a good light and we are proud of what you have done."

Lords amendments Nos. 5, 8 and 23 agreed to.

Lords amendments No. 380 disagreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 40, 44 and 48 agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, pursuant to Order [5 December], That this House insists on its disagreement with the Lords in amendment No. 66:—

The House divided: Ayes 330, Noes 64.

Division No. 114] **[10.28 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Dodds, Nigel
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris

Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Paisley, Rev Ian
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
John Thurso and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke.

Question accordingly agreed to.

It being more than one hour after the commencement of proceedings, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the remaining Questions necessary to dispose of those proceedings, pursuant to Order [12 December].*

Government amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 66 agreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to amendment No. 38C: Paul Goggins, Mr. Dominic Grieve, Beverley Hughes, Simon Hughes and Mrs. Anne McGuire; Beverley Hughes to be the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to a Lords amendment reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

On resuming:—

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Act:

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001

Women (Afghanistan)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

12.31 am

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Even at this late hour, I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to raise the subject of women's involvement in a post-Taliban Government in Afghanistan. I want to talk about politics and reconstruction, but I recognise that for most women and children the first and absolute priority is food aid.

I also acknowledge that I have no claim to be an expert on Afghanistan, but as a Member of Parliament I have a responsibility for what is done in my name, both by the Government and by the United Nations. As a woman MP, I also share the universal experience of women in a man's world.

Prior to 11 September, Afghanistan was the poorest country in Asia. It was the second most heavily mined country in the world, and almost a quarter of the population were dependent on food aid. We are all aware and appreciative of the determined commitment to humanitarian aid of the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), and of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and for International Development.

I heard what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said yesterday about the increase in the overall tonnage of food getting into Afghanistan, but I understand that of the $662 million dollars identified as necessary for the UN inter-agency humanitarian plan, almost a half is outstanding. I should be grateful for the comments of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary on that shortfall.

Since 11 September, the plight of Afghan women has received almost universal coverage, but the cruel repression of the Taliban was well documented for years by the UN and was a focus of activity by women's organisations around the world—including our own Women's National Commission. While nothing could match the Taliban's brutal determination to render women invisible, restrictions on women's full participation in society predated that regime.

Furthermore, under the Taliban, the pattern of control varied across the country, where the enforcement of edicts circumscribing women's rights was dependent on local authorities that varied in attitude. Some were willing to co-operate with aid agencies. Indeed, if that had not been the case, it is difficult to see how many women would have survived.

Despite all the best efforts of the aid communities during the past decade, the plight of Afghan women remains dire. Estimates indicate that one Afghan woman dies in childbirth every 15 minutes; one in four children die before reaching five years of age; and female literacy is less than 5 per cent.

Against that background, the idea that women might participate in a future Government seemed unlikely to most people three months ago. When I raised the matter with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 17 October, there was a tremor of unease on the Government Benches and—I am sorry to say—hearty guffaws from the Opposition Benches. The next day, broadsheet sketch writers took me to task and joked about all-women shortlists in Kabul. There was an immediate assumption that I was a tiresome feminist trying to impose western values on an Islamic society. Few people realised that I was simply reflecting the views of Afghan women campaigners themselves.

Those women stood in sharp contrast to the images of burka-clad victims flitting nightly across our television screens; they were the women refugees in dozens of countries across the world, and the courageous women, organising secret schools, health clinics and beauty parlours under the noses of the Taliban. Those women came primarily from the educated elite in Afghanistan—older women who had lived through different times and their daughters and granddaughters.

The first primary schools for girls were opened in the 1920s, and women's associations were then encouraged. The 1964 constitution gave equal rights to men and women. In 1965, four women were elected to the Afghan Parliament, and seven again in 1988. According to the UN in 1977, 15 per cent. of legislators were women, and until the early 1990s, 70 per cent. of teachers, 50 per cent. of Government workers and 40 per cent. of medical doctors were women.

Following the Soviet occupation and the resulting civil wars, everything changed for women. In 1994, women were ordered to wear the hejab and chador and gender segregation began. In 1995, the Rabbani Government demanded that women be removed from the employment of UN agencies and non-governmental organisations. Violence against women became so extreme that initially the arrival of the Taliban in 1996 was welcomed. The relief was short-lived. The Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Suppression of Vice soon began its brutal denial of the most fundamental rights of women and girls.

The reaction to my first question on this issue in this House prompted me to set up a new organisation involving Afghan women resident in this country. The aims of the UK Women's Link with Afghan Women are to raise the profile of Afghan women and to campaign for women's involvement in the future Government of Afghanistan and the restoration of women's human rights. One of our first actions was to send a letter to the UN special representative for Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi, calling for women to be included in the Bonn talks. Some 153 women, including probably all my colleagues here tonight, from nine parties in the House of Commons and House of Lords, the European Parliament, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and Northern Ireland Assembly signed that letter.

Women's organisations, including Afghan women in many other countries, made similar pleas to the United States Congress and to the UN itself. Despite a notable lack of media coverage, the strategy worked. Three women delegates attended the Bonn talks, and there are two women in the interim Administration, but even before the talks started a new initiative was under way.

The European Women's Lobby organised an Afghan women's summit for democracy in Brussels on 4 and 5 December. It was an extraordinary occasion. Afghan women of different ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds, from inside Afghanistan and from exile, came together to discuss the future of their country. I was there as part of the non-Afghan support team, and we were joined by the three women delegates from the Bonn talks.

After two days of closed sessions, the Afghan women produced their blueprint. Their key demands are: the right for women to vote and to be entitled to equal pay and equal access to health care, education and employment; an emergency plan for reopening schools by March 2002 for girls and boys, including a new curriculum and teacher training; the inclusion of Afghan women lawyers in the development of a new constitution, which would include the principles of non-discrimination; the rebuilding of hospitals and provision of vital medicines, treatments and services, including psychological counselling and mother and child health care; the central inclusion of women in the Loya Jirga; and the protection of women from forced under-age marriages and sexual harassment.

I believe that the UK has an important role to play in helping to achieve the aspirations of those Afghan women. I accept that the demands were drawn up by a group of women who, despite their differences, shared a standard of education quite removed from that of the average Afghan women today, but so do the leading men in the interim Administration.

I know that my right hon. and hon. Friends have welcomed the increasing involvement of women, but I want them to do more. The Bonn agreement is a great triumph for the United Nations and the people of Afghanistan and it is welcomed by most, though not all, Afghan women's organisations.

The UK has played a major part in shaping the military action and the humanitarian relief. Will my hon. Friend pledge that the Government will do everything in their power to ensure the restoration of women's human rights in Afghanistan? Nowhere in the Bonn agreement is this explicitly stated, and I know that this is not because such a commitment was not sought. I can only conclude that there was some ambivalence among the delegates.

Will my hon. Friend state categorically that the UK Government will support the full restoration of Afghan women's rights in line with the UN charter? Legal authority exists. Afghanistan is a party to the major UN conventions on rights affecting women and a signatory, although it has not yet ratified it, to the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, which is known as CEDAW. The interim authority will take Afghanistan's seat at the UN. Does my hon. Friend agree that observance of UN conventions on human rights and ratification of CEDAW are essential to the restoration of Afghan women's human rights?

As my hon. Friend will know, the Bonn agreement provides for the interim authority to take power on 22 December. It is charged with setting up, within one month, the special independent commission for the convening of an emergency Loya Jirga, the traditional grand council. There is no mention of women's participation in the commission, but let me assure my hon. Friend that Afghan women lawyers stand ready to participate. Again, will he try to ensure that there are places for women on this most crucial body?

The Bonn agreement specifies that the special independent commission should ensure that

"due attention is paid to the representation in the Emergency Loya Jirga of a significant number of women".

This is extremely welcome, but some have sought again to label it as the imposition of western values. Afghan history does not support that argument. Women are first recorded—all 12 of them—as participating in a Loya Jirga in the 1920s.

The interim administration is also charged, together with the UN, with establishing an independent human rights commission and a judicial commission. The former's responsibilities will include human rights monitoring and investigation of violations of human rights; the latter with rebuilding the domestic judicial system. There is no stipulation that women should be involved in either body. Does my hon. Friend agree that women, who have been the prime victims of injustice, will have no confidence in these bodies unless women are members of them?

No one can be confident of progress in Afghanistan. None the less, the Bonn agreement is far reaching and ambitious. The emergency Loya Jirga will establish a transitional authority. This will convene a constitutional Loya Jirga within 18 months. It will also establish a constitutional commission to prepare a new constitution. Does my hon. Friend agree that women should play their part in drafting the constitution and will he ensure that, if UK officials are involved in any way, they will remain sensitive to the need to enshrine the rights of women in the constitution?

Let me turn now to reconstruction. Can my hon. Friend tell the House how he believes the meetings of the World Bank and the United Nations development programme in Islamabad and Berlin will impact on women in Afghanistan? Does he feel that lessons have been learned by the international community in relation to reconstruction in Sierra Leone and the Balkans that should be then applied in Afghanistan? UN gender audits and women who have worked in those areas report serious inequalities in reconstruction assistance.

I am aware of the excellent work of the Department for International Development as a leading funder of the UN development fund for women—UNIFEM. I am also aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development and non-governmental organisations such as Oxfam, Christian Aid, Save the Children, Afghan Aid and Afghan women themselves all believe that, wherever possible, local people rather than foreign nationals should be employed in reconstruction.

At the Brussels Afghan women's summit, women's international NGOs called for all reconstruction funds to be conditional first on, the participation of women in decision making on the granting of those funds; secondly, on the inclusion of women's NGOs among recipients of the funds; and thirdly, on the use of funds for implementation of the priorities of Afghan women themselves. Will my hon. Friend support such a proposition?

My hon. Friend will know that most of the top UN decision makers on the ground are men, and it is likely that macro projects for physical reconstruction will mainly provide work for men. Will he ensure that reconstruction funds provide immediate work for women, not least the estimated 700,000 widows, and that major funds are allocated for the education of girls and capacity building for women, to ensure that in the longer term women have equal access to jobs and to secondary, as well as primary, education?

[Joan Ruddock]

The Taliban prohibition on women working has created the impression that women never made a contribution to that economy, but in rural areas women were equally involved with men in agriculture. Even under the Taliban, NGOs such as Afghan Aid worked with rural women in seed planting and vegetable gardening. The World Food Programme also set up bakeries, largely run by widows, which provided food for half a million people. Other NGOs have been successful in employing Afghan women in a low-key way, but the majority of those women trained as teachers and health workers have had to remain at home.

There is, however, considerable room for optimism. The day after the fall of the Taliban in Kabul, six women previously employed by the UN turned up for work. They were asked to find other women to conduct a house-to-house survey to establish needs. Some 2,500 women were recruited by the UN, and already the survey is under way. Hundreds of local women doctors and nurses have also been identified, so the participation of women in the early stages of recovery is probably secure. The challenge lies in the future arrangements. Once again, the UK Government, as a member of the UN Security Council and a major donor, have a vital role to play.

The transitional authority will lead Afghanistan until such time as a Government can be elected, around the middle of 2004. If women are to stand for office, they will need not only support but work and financial assistance. In the rush for physical renewal—for food, education and health—the political process must not be ceded to men only. The many courageous women who have continued to work in teaching and health have already demonstrated their readiness to serve and to lead, but there are many others, traumatised by their experience, who will need further encouragement. Will my hon. Friend recognise that need, and ensure that the UK promotes funding for capacity building and leadership skills where it is sought by Afghan women?

Already, the Afghan women with whom I am working report renewed struggles by the women's organisation in Afghanistan. At the start of the Bonn talks, two peaceful marches for women's rights were banned by the Northern Alliance in Kabul. Attempts to regain use of a building that used to be a women's centre in the city were also rejected by local commanders. I appreciate that it is early days, and that there is not yet an overall authority in Kabul, but these are important touchstones in the rebuilding of civic society.

Afghan women welcome an international peacekeeping force. They remember only too well the terrible years of gender-based violence and, even now, fear the repeat of the rapes, beatings and abductions of the past. Will my hon. Friend accept that foreign troops deployed in Afghanistan must be particularly sensitive to the terrible trauma suffered by women and children? Will he convey to the Secretary of State for Defence the point that special training is needed for that assignment?

In conclusion, I thank my hon. Friend for his attendance tonight. All of us who have taken an interest in the events following 11 September have been on a steep learning curve. I am particularly grateful for briefings from UNIFEM, Oxfam, the UN information centre in London and the British Afghan Aid group. I also pay tribute to the remarkable Afghan women with whom I am working—Wahida, Sahar, Alia, Sabah, Nazifa, Assiya, Zarghona and others, who are my inspiration. The United Kingdom Government are, I know, committed to the future reconstruction of Afghanistan. While the future must be determined by the Afghan people themselves, the vast need for resources dictates the long-term involvement of the international community, including the UK.

As I said at the outset, women's organisations do not seek to impose. Our mission is to ensure that where the UN holds the ring, space is made for Afghan women. Only with the full participation of women are we likely to see the creation of a democratic, stable and peaceful Afghanistan, which, I know, we all desire.

12.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) for her work in bringing the plight of Afghan women to public attention. I pay particular tribute to her work with the UK Women's Link with Afghan Women. I congratulate her on an excellent speech; I am sure that all Members in the House—and it is nice so see so many here at this late hour—concur.

We all agree that one of the most appalling features of the Taliban regime has been its treatment of women, including restrictions on women's access to health care and education. The Taliban were a sinister, barbarous and fanatical regime who demonstrated mediaeval cruelty, especially towards women. Their collapse has given the people of Afghanistan hope for a brighter future. Under the Taliban, women's access to health care was severely restricted and they were denied access to education. As my hon. Friend pointed out, maternal mortality rates in Afghanistan are among the worst in the world. Life expectancy is just 44 years.

When the Taliban took Kabul in 1996, they closed 63 girls' schools and more than 100,000 girls were immediately thrown out of school. They ordered that women could not teach, so 150,000 boys were forced to leave school. The university was shut down and 10,000 students, 4,000 of whom were women, sent home. As well as denying women access to education, the Taliban enforced further repressive laws affecting women. By law, they could not go outside their homes unless accompanied by a close male relative. It was made almost impossible for them to work; even their dress was regulated by law. The penalties for breaking such laws were savage. Now that the Taliban do not govern their lives, those laws are thankfully at an end.

Last week, the first step was taken on the long road towards rebuilding Afghanistan and giving women a voice in its future Government. Exceeding all expectations, the representatives of the non-Taliban Afghan factions, including women and members of Afghanistan's four major ethnic groups, agreed that an interim authority under the leadership of Hamid Karzai would take office on 22 December. The British Government have long said that we would like a broad-based, representative Government in Afghanistan. We expect any Afghan Government to recognise international human rights norms, including women's rights. We believe that adherence to international human rights norms, including the UN charter and the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, which the previous Afghan Government signed but did not ratify, are the key to restoring the rights of women.

One of the most encouraging aspects of the Bonn talks was the participation of women delegates. There will be women in the new Administration, as my hon. Friend pointed out—a clear indication that the new Government in Afghanistan will be very different from the old one. Dr. Shima Samar has been appointed one of the five vice-chairs of the interim Administration and Minister for Women's Affairs. Although women often served as Ministers in Governments before the Taliban came to power, Dr. Samar will be the first woman to occupy such a senior post in an Afghan Government.

Dr. Samar is from the minority Hazara group and gained a medical degree from Kabul university, where she developed a passion for women's rights. She escaped from Afghanistan after the Russian invasion and currently runs an organisation based in the border town of Quetta in Pakistan, which provides health and education services for Afghan women and children. She also provides medical training for female students at several hospitals that she runs in Afghanistan.

Dr. Samar opened 10 Afghan clinics and four hospitals for women and children, as well as schools in rural Afghanistan for more than 17,000 students. Literacy programmes established by her organisation were accompanied by the distribution of food aid and information on hygiene and family planning.

The new Minister for Public Health, Dr. Suhaila Seddiqi, as well as being a doctor, is Afghanistan's only female military general. She has served as a surgeon in Kabul's military hospital for more than 20 years. Dr. Seddiqi, an independent Tajik, stayed in Afghanistan throughout the civil war and played a key role in keeping the hospital functioning throughout the 1990s. Dr. Seddiqi managed to keep working throughout the five years of Taliban rule. After initially ordering her to stay at home, they realised how crucial she was to the running of the hospital and reinstated her as head of surgery.

As well as supporting the overall political process, and the implementation of the Bonn agreement, it is extremely important that the international community should consult the women of Afghanistan about their priorities. The UNIFEM Afghan women's summit, which my hon. Friend attended in Brussels last week, was also attended by Dr. Seddiqi and Dr. Samar, and marked a positive start.

The summit was the largest global gathering of Afghan women leaders to focus on the role of women in the new post-Taliban Afghanistan. It addressed the crucial needs of all the people of Afghanistan, focusing on health care, education, refugees and human rights. The British Government hope that the international community will support the aims of the summit declaration—for our part, we certainly will—which calls for a greater role for women in the future decision-making process in Afghanistan.

We have long said that, while the form of the Government and constitution is for the Afghan people to determine, the future Government must be broadly based and representative of all Afghans. We hope very much that women will be involved.

Slowly, the people of Afghanistan are beginning to see real improvements in their lives brought about by the collapse of the Taliban regime. We welcome the reports that female students are beginning to re-enrol at Kabul university for the first time in five years. Access to television and to international media will allow women to become better informed about the situation in their country and in the wider world.

Improvements will take time. Better access to health care and education will afford women an improved standard of living. As they return to work, their financial situation will improve. That is especially important for all the female heads of household who were destitute when deprived of their livelihoods by the Taliban. Life for Afghan women has always been difficult. Afghanistan has more than a million war widows. Non-governmental organisations and UN-run projects to get women back to work will have a huge impact on the lives of many Afghan women and children.

The UK recognises the need for capacity building and leadership skills training and, where it is sought by Afghan women, the Government will endeavour to ensure that funds are available for that. The international community continually uses experience from past development projects to develop long-term strategies elsewhere. I am sure that the lessons learned from the Balkans and Sierra Leone will be applied in Afghanistan.

I am also sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will understand the need for any British troops in Afghanistan to be particularly sensitive to the traumatic experiences faced by Afghan women and children.

Pledges for the UN appeal for Afghanistan exceeded the $622 million identified as necessary for the UN inter-agency emergency humanitarian assistance plan. Currently, as my hon. Friend said, the UN has received 55 per cent. of the amount pledged. The British Government urge all those countries who pledged money but have not yet realised their commitments to do so as soon as possible. That is terribly important.

The meetings of the World Bank in Islamabad, and of the United Nations Development Programme in Berlin, were key to the restoration and reconstruction of Afghanistan. That reconstruction is an essential part of the effort to restore the rights of all the Afghan people and to underpin a commitment to the new Afghanistan made by the delegates at Bonn.

The international community and the UN have assisted the Afghan people to begin the process of rebuilding their nation. Their future is in their hands. We have an urgent responsibility to support the interim Administration, and we will continue to support them so as to build a brighter future for all the people of Afghanistan—a future which, I hope, the voice of women will have a major role in shaping.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to One o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 4 December 2001

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Teaching Profession

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Heppell.*]

9.30 am

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I called the debate for one simple reason. During the past few months I have spoken to teachers at all levels—from secondary heads to supply teachers—and without exception they have given me the same message: there is a mounting crisis in our schools. The Government seem not to realise that many teachers are at the end of their tether, and they need someone to speak up for them. I cannot make the Government change what they are doing—nor, it seems, can the teachers—but I can explain in straightforward terms what, according to teachers, is going wrong.

Before telling the Minister about the problems that the Government need to get to grips with, I pay tribute to those heads and teachers who are battling to keep their schools going, and who are delivering better results despite the problems that they face. They deserve the thanks of everyone in the House and in the country. It is to be regretted that, at times, my party has not enjoyed the best of relations with the teaching profession. Today, without qualification, I offer teachers thanks for keeping things going when so many of them are frustrated by the conditions in which they work.

At the heart of the problem is a Government who came to office promising to modernise Britain, but who, as far as I can see, have found a way to modernise only socialism. Today's Labour Ministers have lost none of their predecessors' instinct to run every aspect of our lives. If something is not working, their solution is to regulate and micromanage. Extra money has to be spent on special initiatives decided in, and controlled from, Whitehall. To ensure progress, every organisation is required to produce long and complex reports and plans that no one ever reads. In Labour Britain, no one is free to deploy resources according to local needs and realities; instead, they must follow the diktat of the departmental textbook. Nowhere is that more true than in our schools, and it has to stop.

Having served on the governing body of a small first school, I have seen at first hand the endless flow of paperwork from Whitehall. On giving up my governorship 18 months ago, I never imagined that matters would get worse, but only last week the chairman of the governors and the head of a primary school in my constituency told me that this autumn they have had to deal with six new Government initiatives, and that four or five more have to be responded to by January. Yesterday, I was told that 20 new documents requiring action by primary schools have been sent out since 1 April.

Because the governing body consists of volunteers, most of that work lands on the desk of the head teacher. She told me with some frustration that she now has little or no opportunity to do what she really wants to do: spend time in the school helping her staff to educate the children. Under this Government, our head teachers—by definition, our best teachers—are being turned into a generation of pen pushers.

It is not only head teachers who are frustrated by the weight of paperwork on their desks. Last year, one local head told me that he recently lost two good young members of staff because they

"wanted to get a life".

In a letter to the Minister written earlier this year, a local union official said that

"the majority of young colleagues who leave teaching cite the difficulty of having a life outside of the job—and the workload associated with it."

One of the most consistent messages from the teaching profession is that teachers do not feel free to do the job that they are qualified to do. Teachers say that Whitehall seems to want to tell them what to do step by step. There is no need to take my word for it. Last week, one head—not from my constituency—told me that the Government are over-interventionist, our children are over-measured, there is initiative overload, and the Government do not wait long enough to see what works. She described the Government's education policy in a manner that I believe constitutes unparliamentary language, and went on to say that

"the government has taken the joy and inspiration out of teaching."

The mood of intervention that seems to permeate the Department for Education and Skills has been most visible in the Government's approach to the pre-school sector. In the past few weeks, I have visited several pre-school groups in my constituency and been shown the increasingly complex bureaucratic framework within which they are being asked to work. It features complex curriculums, onerous qualification requirements for half the staff of a small playgroup, and huge amounts of paperwork that must be completed by people who are either volunteers or low-paid part-time workers. As a result, many groups will close and those that remain will struggle to attract people.

There is real concern in schools about the consequences of the Government's plans to bring in more classroom assistants and to develop their role. If the purpose of the exercise is indeed to strengthen the adult support offered to young children, that is desirable, but some people doubt that. In the letter to the Minister that I quoted a moment ago, my local union leader wrote:

"We welcome the greater consideration given to the training, development and career development of support colleagues; they do an impressive job, often for salary returns little better than the basic minimum wage. We are concerned, however, that their role is to go beyond their traditional and appropriate one, and they are to be encouraged to 'look after' pupils whilst teachers are freed to prepare work."

He continued:

"It is very sad that the government department responsible for education singularly fails to understand the basic process of teaching and learning—not only does the approach suggested misunderstand the nature of the educative process, it also runs counter to other directives on appropriate and adequate supervision."

Local teachers have expressed similar fears to me.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I raised a similar issue with a head in my constituency who felt that the role of teaching assistants as set out by the Secretary of State reflected a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of teachers in classrooms. He said that the right hon. Lady's vision of the role of teaching assistants\meant that teachers could give out work at the beginning of the class, then put their feet up or leave the room; yet the interactive nature of teaching these days means that classroom assistants must work together with teachers.

Chris Grayling: I agree. The anxieties expressed by members of the teaching profession about a potentially good initiative that might prove to be totally inappropriate leave the Government with considerable food for thought and the challenge of ensuring that they get it right.

The fears that my hon. Friend and I have described were echoed in the conclusion of the letter. It says:

> "There is disenchantment among young teachers that must be addressed. We ignore that disenchantment at our peril."

A recent piece of research undertaken at Liverpool university throws further light on the problem. It states:

> "The resignation rate from schools is rising sharply".

It says that on an annualised basis, the resignation rate from schools over the past summer was just under 16 per cent., up by 4 per cent. since 1999, and that the biggest factor behind those resignations was work load. Around half the teachers leaving the profession were doing so without any particular immediate plans. More worrying still, the research reveals that the age profile of the teaching profession is rising; it is not renewing itself. There are far more teachers in their 40s than in the early stages of their career. That risks storing up enormous problems for the future.

In my county, Surrey, and in many other parts of the country, disillusionment with teaching shows in what has become a recruitment crisis. There are simply not enough teachers coming on to the job market to meet the needs of our schools, and many who are currently in teaching jobs are leaving the profession. During last week's Education questions, the Secretary of State emphatically denied that there was an exodus from the profession, especially by young teachers. However, when I talk to head teachers I hear a very different story. In the past few days my colleagues and I have spoken to most of the head teachers in our county. They say that not only do local schools face severe recruitment difficulties, but that during the past year around half have lost staff from the profession, many of whom were younger, newly qualified teachers.

The Government continue to claim that talk of a recruitment and retention crisis in schools is scaremongering, and that most posts were filled during the summer. That may be numerically true, but the reality is rather different. Most heads say that the quality of new, British-trained teachers is good, but that there are too few of them. One head told me that the closest response to one advertisement that he had placed came from Romania and the next closest was from Papua New Guinea. Another said that he had filled places with teachers from Africa and that a huge amount of management time was needed to bring them up to the standard necessary to do the job properly for his pupils. Another said that although he had filled 18 vacancies, only nine of the teachers were up to the job, adding that he had had no choice. Other heads said that many applicants have little or no experience of the national curriculum and the learning frameworks that the Government have established in this country. More than half of Surrey schools say that they have staff teaching subjects for which they are not qualified, and I suspect that that pattern is repeated in many other parts of the country.

Where vacancies persist, cover is provided by supply teachers or by shuffling staff internally, but more than half the heads to whom we spoke said that they were concerned about the worsening quality of the supply teachers to whom they have access, because there are not enough good supply teachers to go around. Those who manage to cover vacancies internally say that that places huge pressures on other staff, taking precious time for lesson preparation which must then be done outside school hours.

The cost of recruitment is also enormous. One head told me during the summer that he had spent more than £35,000 on agency fees in his attempts to recruit staff. Others have had to pay for visits overseas to find teachers.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): A school in my constituency of which I am a governor had to advertise several times and incur the associated expense. The head teacher, accompanied by several other head teachers, went to Australia to carry out block recruiting and interviewing. Does my hon. Friend agree that appointments made in that way are unlikely to be long term and that people coming halfway across the world are likely to do so because they want only to visit Europe, so the problem is likely to recur in six months or two years? It is unlikely that heads will achieve adequate staffing with such recruitment methods.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an apposite point, which is reflected in the fact that many head teachers are happy to conduct telephone interviews with teachers from overseas and some do not even meet such staff before they arrive to work. Perhaps the greatest burden is on the time of head teachers. Many say that they have done little except tackle recruitment problems for the past few months and that the strain has been enormous.

Before the Minister adopts the classic Government defence position and says that it was all the fault of the Tories, I shall quote a letter that I received in the summer from the head of a community college in Sussex who was complaining about the lack of applicants for jobs. He said:

> "The situation is a clear contrast to the situation five years ago, when we were disappointed if we received less than twenty applications for any post, and averaged over fifty."

Today, most schools feel lucky if they receive more than one application for a post.

I expect that the Minister will laud the importance of the Government's recruitment and retention fund. While welcome, the extra cash has, however, been erratically divided and is too little to have a long-term impact. Surrey, for example, received £650,000, which is considerably less than many other problematic areas whose problems are often less severe. However, it allowed many heads to pay for advertising and other recruitment costs, which is welcome. More worrying is the fact that many have had to use the cash to pay extra to secure new recruits. They face being left with financial problems when the cash runs out, but they say that they have no choice.

Funding for Government initiatives is another area of concern for heads and one that is causing mounting frustration. Instead of simply providing more cash for schools, the Government have ensured that a significant part of the additional funding provided is ring-fenced and time limited. The Department decides how much is provided and what it is spent on. That is classic micromanagement of the sort that Ministers seem so determined to pursue. Heads in my constituency tell me that they spend an inordinate amount of time trying to match specific pots of money allocated to them under the standards fund to potential needs so that the money can all be used, but they say that the specific allocations rarely meet the needs of the school. Why is it not possible simply to give schools the extra cash and the freedom to spend it on the things that they know they need, rather than the things that the Department says they need? Schools have little discretionary money after teaching and other fixed costs are paid for, so it is madness for the Government to spend so much time trying to manage the small remaining amount of school expenditure.

Another problem is that funding is now provided on a time-limited basis. The best example is that of threshold pay. The Government initially allocated £400 million in their first grant to schools to meet the cost of threshold pay; now they say that next year's grant will be £250 million, and they have made no specific commitment for subsequent years. They say that funding will be increased to meet the scheme's requirements, but I am not altogether convinced, nor are many of the heads to whom I have spoken. They want reassurance that 100 per cent. of the cost of threshold pay will be put into school budgets in future. Otherwise, many will be faced with having to ration threshold pay by limiting it to fewer staff than are entitled to it. Many feel that they face that choice today, as few have the budgetary freedom to absorb the extra costs if the Government do not pay.

It is not just frustration with bureaucracy and overwork that is driving teachers to despair and, too often, out of the profession; there is real anger in many schools that teachers have no sanction against unruly and antisocial behaviour in the classroom. Every week, dozens of teachers are assaulted in the classroom. A couple of weeks ago, *The Guardian* reported the case of a music teacher in north London who was headbutted twice, kicked in the testicles, and smashed on the head with an iron bin by a pupil in his classroom. He had to be operated on and could not eat solid food for a fortnight. A recent survey by Warwick university reported that 80 per cent. of teachers believe that pupil behaviour has worsened during their time as teachers. The research undertaken by Liverpool university to which I have already referred found that pupil behaviour is the second most common reason given by teachers for leaving the profession. The attacker of that north London teacher had already been involved in several violent incidents but had not been excluded. Hundreds of other troublesome and disruptive pupils have also escaped action in recent years, while others have escaped on appeal after an exclusion decision: in answer to a written question in the summer, the Department told me that approximately one third of exclusion orders are overturned. I know of cases in which pupils excluded from school for dealing in drugs have been reinstated on appeal. What message of support does that send to teachers and heads in such schools?

To some extent, the Government have seen the error of their ways, but instead of totally reversing their recent policy, they have apparently only declared a moratorium on the exclusion process. Can the Minister clarify whether the Government will allow exclusions to return to the levels of five years ago? The current position, in which teachers are under the spotlight for their conduct, is absurd. They frequently end up in court charged with assault after losing their temper with pupils, whereas pupils can get away with almost anything. Is it any wonder that teachers feel betrayed and abandoned, and that so many leave in frustration because they feel powerless to prevent antisocial behaviour in their classrooms? One head said to me:

> "Too many parents seem to want to pursue minor incidents until they are in front of the courts."

Another, expressing his staff's frustration, said:

> "None of our parents ever seem to be willing to admit that their children could have done anything wrong."

The teacher assaulted in that school in north London said:

> "Middle-class theories about being nice and letting children work through their anger in these kinds of situations don't work. They need to have boundaries. This inclusion idea is potentially good, but is only half worked out. I want the issue of staff in inner-city schools addressed. We have to realise that we are breeding a whole generation of children that are growing up with no values."

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because discipline in schools and dealing with unruly pupils is an important subject. However, to rely solely on exclusion and getting those pupils out of schools is not sufficient, although I suspect that that is what happened under the last Conservative Government. It simply means that those kids are on the street, growing up without the values that he mentioned, and that they might end up causing far greater problems to society. If he wants to rely on exclusion, he must also ensure that his party puts the relevant money into other forms of education and providing somewhere else for those young people to go, so that they might be made into better citizens than his solution, putting them out on the streets, would make them.

Chris Grayling: There is no question of simply relying on exclusion, but not having exclusion as a weapon creates a vacuum in schools that exacerbates the problems for teachers. As the hon. Gentleman knows, in the last couple of years my party has advocated the creation of stronger units to deal with problem pupils. We need a very wide-ranging approach to policy on tackling the problem, but see no signs of that coming from the Government.

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. From September, for the first time we will be able

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[Mr. Stephen Timms]

to offer full-time education to anybody who is excluded from school. I am sure that he and the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) will welcome that helpful move. Under the Conservative Government, children who had been excluded were often given only a couple of hours teaching a week, which led to all sorts of problems elsewhere in the community.

Chris Grayling: I welcome any steps in that direction, but it is fair to say that in far too many cases troublesome pupils are kept within the schools, thus exacerbating the problems and undermining the authority of the heads and the teachers. Heads and teachers feel that they have absolutely no sanction against pupils in their classrooms who are disrupting the life of the school. That problem must be solved.

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): That is an interesting point, because in my part of Somerset, which is extremely rural, we cannot exclude disruptive pupils because there is nowhere for them to go. Our problem is that there is currently no funding to enable them to be taught within the class system. I shall be interested to hear whether the Minister agrees with me funding is essential if the system is to be made to work. My question is, where will the funding come from?

Chris Grayling: It is partly a matter of delivering funding to the right places. It is clearly wrong that in a county such as Somerset there is no alternative to inclusion. However, funding is not the whole of the issue. It is about the Government sending signals, providing a legislative framework, and giving teachers protection against false allegations by pupils. All those things will help to rebuild the confidence of the teaching profession.

Even in high-cost counties such as Surrey, the twin issues of classroom behaviour and overbearing bureaucracy dominate concern about the profession, despite the real problems caused by high housing costs and disparities between pay in London and areas just outside. Those issues must be tackled as part of the Government's solutions to the problems, but doing so will not on its own deal with the teaching crisis in our schools.

I end with some messages for Ministers. Start by taking a year out. Do not introduce any new initiatives for the next 12 months, and give what has already been done time to bed down. Look at what can be done to scrap the burden of regulation on schools. Let me offer some ideas. Why not rationalise all the reports that teachers have to produce for schools, the Government and local education authorities into a single annual report from the head and the governing bodies? Is not one fat document a year enough for any school? Limit the number of consultation documents sent to governors—they do not meet that often and they cannot cope. If anyone thinks that they can cope, they should attend a few governors meetings to find out.

Stop trying to micromanage school budgets; instead, give them new money and tell them that they are expected to do certain things with it, but leave it to the schools to deal with how and when those things are done. If a school has done those things successfully, let it use the money for the things it really needs. Give heads and governors back the full right to exclude pupils in the interests of their staff and other pupils, and give teachers more protection against false allegations. Above all, apply common sense. Mothers do not need to do courses lasting a year or more to be qualified to work a couple mornings a week in a local playgroup. If many young teachers are leaving the profession saying that they want to get a life, not everything can be right in the teaching profession. Do not believe only the statistics; when so many heads say that something is wrong, it just might be true.

My local unions concluded their letter to the Minister with these words:

> "We look to the Government to do something to restore teacher morale and make a start to address the underlying causes of our current staffing crisis".

I could not have put it better myself.

9.54 am

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on securing this debate and I join him in paying tribute to the hard work of teachers. Briefly, I want to focus on a number of specific issues facing teachers in my constituency. In particular, I would like to warn my hon. Friend on the Government Front Bench of an impending bid, from my constituency, for additional funding.

I pay tribute to two particularly hard-working and experienced teachers, Jane Bester and Wyn Churchill, who mentored me throughout my brief teaching career before I entered the House.

I am lucky in Harrow, West to have successful schools, which are products of a strong comprehensive school system and ethos. There is a strong partnership between those comprehensive schools and the local education authority. Harrow LEA has just had a positive Ofsted report, but it is not complacent; the report was not perfect, but extremely positive. Schools in Harrow, West have strong leadership, generally supportive parents and, above all, good teachers. All the high schools, in partnership with the LEA, have decided to apply for specialist school status. I flag up the bids by Nower Hill high school and by my old school, Hatch End, which has bid for arts specialist school status and is awaiting with interest the Department's decision on whether it will be given. It is keen to hammer home the message of successful delivery of arts provision and did so to the then Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, at the beginning of the May general election campaign.

I share the concern of the teaching profession on issues such as the retention of teachers. I do not dismiss the issue of the recruitment of teachers—much progress has been made on that and the effort must continue. However, retention requires proper financial stability in schools, and not an on-going fear of redundancy. When I was first elected to the House, the then Liberal-controlled Harrow council cut school budgets by 2 per cent. It took two to three years for the effect of those cuts to be felt in all schools; many teaching posts were axed and additional pressures were consequently put on teachers.

Additional money that the Government have advanced to schools has been welcome. All schools in my constituency have been able to appoint additional classroom assistants, and that has also been welcome. Additional resources have been put into either recruitment of additional teachers where necessary, or into the delivery of classroom material. One school has received its first lick of paint inside the building for more than 15 years. That is proof of the benefit of additional money from the Government and of the financial pressures that existed under the Conservative Administration.

I accept the concern about work load, which the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell also acknowledged. From my time teaching, I remember that work load understandably concerned teachers. I remember the frustration of the numerous reports that one had to produce and the considerable paperwork that had to be tackled to deal with children with special educational needs. Those factors still exist, but I welcome the fact that the Government have set up a working party with teaching representatives to consider those issues. I look forward to the Minister rolling out information about what that working party has produced.

The retention of teachers after they have been working for two or three years is important, and especially in London. Many head teachers tell me that house prices in London are a problem. After working for several years and establishing themselves in the community, teachers may want to move on to the house-price ladder. They will experience difficulties in securing a mortgage, and I would encourage my hon. Friend the Minister to remember that. As a London Member, he is aware of the pressures of house prices. I hope that his Department will review that closely.

I shall focus on teachers' working environments. In my constituency, the Rooks Heath high school and the Roxeth Manor first and middle schools are based in buildings that are more than 50 years old, which is inappropriate for any modern school and the community. The head teacher, teachers and governors have worked with the local authority to assess what a 21st-century school needs. Schools need an injection of capital investment way beyond that available via traditional capital routes, or the council's resources. The council—in partnership with Rooks Heath and Canons high school in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty)—is preparing a PFI bid for submission to the Minister's Department shortly before Christmas. The bid includes 14 schools in the Canons and Rooks Heath clusters. Those schools are targeted for support because they have the highest levels of deprivation in Harrow.

Politicians, teachers and head teachers in Harrow are frustrated that the borough is perceived as an affluent leafy metropolitan suburb with low levels of deprivation. In truth, Harrow has pockets of high deprivation, which are served by Canons high and Rooks Heath. Those schools have the highest number of pupils entitled to free school meals, pupils with special educational needs and pupils with English as an additional language, and rank highly on other indices of social deprivation.

The PFI funding for the Rooks Heath and Canons clusters will tie in with the Government's agenda as published in the schools White Paper. The funding will be focused on how schools can continue to raise attainment in the transition years from primary to high school. It will also develop the 14-19 curriculum by providing additional vocational and traditional academic study routes, which will be delivered in schools with the further education sector's and other partners' support. It will ensure that outdated music, arts and leisure facilities on both of the sites to which I have referred will be modernised, and that investment in classroom information technology and in teaching and learning facilities will be provided.

I urge the Minister to consider the Harrow bid sympathetically so that the borough may tackle the problems of teaching in old buildings that have lacked investment during the past 50 years. The bid would bring important community benefits. I look forward to hearing about further moves to assist the retention of teaching staff, particularly in London, to reduce the work load on teachers. As I stressed, I look forward above all to hearing, in future no doubt, that the Minister and his Department will support the PFI bid from Harrow to tackle some of the problems in my constituency.

10.5 am

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak this morning, and I thank hon. Members for the contributions that I have heard so far.

I come to the debate with no experience of teaching other than that of being a student many years ago. However, my experience as a newly arrived Member has taken me to the core of the teaching difficulties and strengths in my constituency, from Newark in the south to Retford in the north. The challenges that face teachers in my constituency are broadly the same, but I shall concentrate this morning on the difficulties in the Bassetlaw area, to the north of my constituency, where I live. I am sure that the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) is familiar with many of the problems and will reflect on them when he speaks in due course.

I remember that when I was at school there was always a leavening or sprinkling of mini-skirted female teachers, and young men out on the field who taught us rugby, cricket or whatever. They were perhaps much more able than the older generation of teachers to sympathise and empathise with the students. Clearly, the older teachers were there to provide maturity, gravitas and judgment, but the younger teachers were terribly important—particularly the female ones, I might add. Going round the various schools recently, I was struck more than anything by the fact that those young teachers are no longer to be found. From the top to the bottom of my constituency, I do not see them.

If we consider the Retford area, the reason becomes fairly clear. There are three secondary schools in Retford—King Edward VI school, the Elizabethan school and Ordsall Hall school—all of which provide excellent services to the best of their capabilities to the students. However, there is overcapacity: there are more places available than students to be taught, with the result that teachers face a difficulty with regard to where skills are concentrated.

Slightly further south is the excellent Tuxford comprehensive school, which offers a much better performance at sixth-form level than any of the three

[Patrick Mercer]

schools in Retford because of its concentration of teachers. I am not criticising the schools in Retford, but things are difficult for them. As a result, if a student from Retford wishes to study, say, a combination of geography, German and economics, they cannot be taught only in Retford; they have to move between one or two sites in Retford and down as far as Tuxford, which is about seven miles away. Bus services do not exist, and youngsters frequently have to use taxis to get to and from the sites.

The frustrations felt by teachers are considerable. Many of their school sites are in a poor state of repair and under-resourced in terms of facilities. In addition, there are difficulties in trying to find a student coming from or going to Retford who is persistently late and whose lessons are persistently curtailed, because of the travelling and the conditions involved. All that builds up to a great level of frustration for the teachers, who are trying to teach these young people.

This morning, I spoke to the head of the sixth form at Tuxford comprehensive school, who gave me a good understanding of the situation facing the teachers there. Among the staff, there is only one young teacher, a 23-year-old. That excellent young man has a very good background with his postgraduate certification of education and is making a first-class start at the school. However, he complains, exactly as my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) said, about the business of getting a life—we seem to come across that phrase all the time. As far as that young man is concerned, 5 o'clock is knocking-off time, when he should be able to get on and do other things, but he is faced with a work load of marking or bureaucracy that takes him away from what he believes are his core skills: teaching, inspiring and leading young people of north-east Nottinghamshire. He told me that last night he spent time filling in the same form for the Department for Education and Skills, the local education authority and the Teacher Training Agency, which all sought the same answers. If they had been on the same form, he would have lost two thirds of his work load last night.

That 23-year-old is being paid about £22,000 a year, which is similar in Newark to a junior manager's wage at the British Sugar plant or to a skilled ball-bearing maker's at NSK-RHP. Comparisons are invidious, but that young man has trained hard, is highly motivated and believes that his pay does not match his contemporaries' pay. There is no doubt that the pay is better after five or seven years, but as the teacher from Tuxford told me, about one third of young teachers in north-east Nottinghamshire leave at the end of their first year. Approximately half the remaining two thirds leave within five or seven years.

That teacher made a point that I have observed on the ground and that was raised this morning: there seems to be a gap between a smattering of people in their early 20s and mature teachers in their late 30s and early 40s. The recruiting difficulty faced by schools in Nottinghamshire can be contained at the moment, but in 10 years or less, difficulties will begin to bite. Tuxford school recently advertised for a humanities teacher, for which there were nine applications; five years ago, the same advertisement attracted 72 applications.

Conditions at Tuxford school have improved, and we are delivering a better service. Results are better, but young people still do not want to teach in the scattered rural community that I have the privilege to represent. Teachers have been damned left, right and centre, but standards continue to improve. At Tuxford school, GCSE results have improved by 9 per cent. since last year despite the fact that it is overcrowded, classes are much larger, facilities are poor, there is no gymnasium, and water pours in through the roofs. All that is being assessed, and I do not suggest for a moment that the state of education in my constituency is parlous. None the less, it is not an attractive proposition for a young teacher to endeavour to teach in such conditions.

Our teachers provide the future lifeblood of our nation. Our children are our most important investment. We must set teachers free so that they can teach, inspire and follow the vocation that most of them have sought.

10.13 am

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I congratulate the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on obtaining the debate on an important subject which I am delighted that we have the opportunity to discuss today. Much is still going wrong in schools. I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer), but many of his criticisms about the current situation could have been made about the last Conservative Government: during their tenure, bureaucracy in schools increased and there was a lack of funding for buildings, which he mentioned. Water came through the roofs, and there was a gradual deterioration in teacher morale, which I accept has not become any better under this Government. However, it is difficult to see how those criticisms would be overcome by the £20 billion cut in Government services that we were promised by the leader of the Conservative party during his leadership election. Although I accept the criticisms, the Conservative party is not offering any sincere answers.

If, as they say, the Government are serious about education being a top priority—it should be for economic reasons, but also for social and democratic reasons—the state of the teaching profession will inevitably be a key measure of the success or failure of their policy. Flowery rhetoric and warm words will count for little if there are no qualified and well-motivated teachers in classrooms who want to, and actually do, teach children. The Government's failure on that basic score tarnishes their education record. The much-delayed Education Bill, which will be discussed in the Chamber this afternoon, is 200 pages long and has 211 clauses but it contains nothing to solve the problem of teacher shortages.

The problem is severe; there is an alarming crisis in recruitment and retention. The chief inspector of schools in England said that the shortages are at their worst level for decades, and the figures for teacher vacancies make grim reading. It is a game of two halves: there is a problem in recruitment and in retention. According to a survey conducted by the National Union of Teachers, of every 100 final-year trainee teachers, 40 will not enter the classroom and a further 18 will leave the profession within three years. According to departmental statistics—the Government's own figures—primary vacancies have doubled and secondary vacancies have trebled under the Government. In each of the past three years, about 30 per cent. of newly qualified teachers were not in post by March of the next year.

I welcome the fact that the numbers of posts have increased, but that is the Government's constant reply to our complaints about the number of vacancies. What is the point of going for an increasing number of posts, claiming that they will reduce class sizes, if the Government do not manage to get teachers into the classrooms to fill those posts? Not enough teachers are being recruited, which means that there is a 51 per cent. increase in the number of supply teachers or instructors, with more children being taught by unqualified teachers.

As this is science year, we should remind ourselves of the acute crisis in the core subjects of science and maths. Official statistics for January 2001 show that vacancies for maths teachers have increased sevenfold over five years. Three years ago, according to the Open university centre for mathematics education, about one in 10 secondary maths teachers had no subject qualification beyond A-level. Now, 45 per cent. of staff teaching the subject to 11 to 14-year-olds have limited knowledge of maths and little or no training in teaching that subject.

The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee report "Science in Schools" found that the proportion of those beginning the postgraduate certificate in education with third-class degrees or lower was markedly higher in maths and science than in arts subjects: it is 37.7 per cent. in physics, 36.5 per cent. in maths, 33.8 per cent. in chemistry and 15.2 per cent. in biology. That compares with 7.4 per cent. in geography, 6.9 per cent. in English and 5.3 per cent. in history. Many of those who are going into teaching the vital subjects of maths and science have worse degrees than those going into arts subjects.

The second half of the game is retention: why are so many of our teachers leaving the profession? In April, the NUT produced a research study on the reasons why teachers are leaving the profession. As many as 82 per cent. of respondents said that the pressures of the work load were an important factor in their decision to leave teaching, and 49 per cent. mentioned the lack of time available for fulfilling their duties and professional development, and not being able to balance competing demands of work and home. About 56 per cent. felt undervalued and undermined by negative publicity and constant criticism. Stoked by Government and press criticism, teaching is nowadays perceived as a low-status profession.

About 22 per cent. of teachers mentioned the perceived unfairness of recent recruitment initiatives, which benefited new recruits but not the profession as a whole. What does that do for retention? Performance-related pay is also seen by many as divisive. Some 27 per cent. expressed frustration at the lack of resources, and particularly at the state of the school buildings and classrooms in which they had to work. Give people unpleasant places in which to work and they will not want to stay there. About 20 per cent. mentioned their feeling that the classroom has now become a place for targets, not children. We face a crisis in recruitment and retention in teaching, which is being underpinned by a perceived lack of status of the profession and a justified sense that we are failing to value our public servants.

What has been the Government's response? We have seen expensive and headline-catching initiatives, but a failure to tackle key issues. On fast track, £9.2 million was poured into private sector companies to recruit only 111 teachers. Targets for advanced skills teachers were hopelessly missed and, most staggeringly, the Government have reduced the number of training places for postgraduates from 19,169 in 1997-98 to 16,611 in 2000-01. It now appears that the undergraduate route is being allowed to wither on the vine, with a 25 per cent. drop in recruits since 1997. A recent report by the Institute for Public Policy Research said that

> "the current three year expenditure plan could generate up to an extra 70,000 jobs by 2004—in stark comparison with Labour's manifesto pledge of an extra 10,000 teachers."

What can we do to overcome the problems? We should never forget that the recruitment and retention of teachers is not in the main about financial incentives and reward. People do not go into teaching to make money—if we tried to tell a teacher that, they would laugh in our face—or to be very important people. They go into teaching because they want to teach. They want to pass on to the next generation their knowledge and understanding. The Government must take note of the widespread feeling in the profession that teachers are being undervalued and talked down by politicians. I must also say that Chris Woodhead has much to answer for.

As a young man, I was lucky enough to do a year's teaching. It taught me a lot. For one thing, I realised that I would never make a teacher. It is much too difficult a profession. It taught me also that teachers get far the most out of their pupils by being lavish with praise when they get things right, and stinting with criticism when they get things wrong. Pupils in our country are no different from the pupils whom I taught in Cameroon and Uganda years ago. They are most effective when they are encouraged to repeat the things that they do well and least effective when they face carping criticism for the things that they try to improve on.

In education as in social services and the national health service, the Government have tended to pursue a naming-and-shaming policy instead of what should be a value-and-encourage approach. We must restore the ideals and status of public service if we are to improve services significantly. The currency must be more than just funding, important as it is. It must include trust in our teachers to do a good job without the burden of restriction on everything that they do, and trust that they will strive for improved standards even without the burden of highly misleading league tables. If the Government constantly send a message to teachers that they do not trust them to do a good job, they will not, and the Government will get the teachers that they deserve.

10.25 am

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on securing the debate. Since my election to Parliament, I have enjoyed visiting schools in my constituency. Let me place on record the dedication and commitment of teachers and the leadership of head teachers who are doing a good job in difficult circumstances. The message that I am always left with

[Mr. Mark Hoban]

after a meeting with teachers or a visit to a school is the problem that they face with recruitment and retention of teachers.

Last week, a head teacher told me that a newly qualified teacher is usually at school for 10 hours a day, works at home until 9 or 10 o'clock in the evening and gives up a day at the weekend. If teachers are under such pressure, it is not surprising that they cite work load as a reason for leaving the profession. That head teacher spends two days a week trying to resolve recruitment issues and has been doing so for nearly a year; that time could be better spent elsewhere. He is seeking three teachers in key subjects. When I asked him what would happen if he did not find them, he said that he would have to rejig the timetable and existing teachers would have to pick up more classes. They would lose some of their non-contact time and would have to spend longer preparing for lessons and marking work. I cannot imagine that having a favourable effect on their morale, so the recruitment and retention crisis will deepen.

When the head teacher advertised for a physical education teacher, there were six applicants: four from Australia, one from New Zealand and one from Zimbabwe. Previously, he would have expected several applicants from the UK. Other head teachers in my constituency have commented that, whereas a few years ago they would have expected five or six teachers to apply for a job, they are now lucky if they get one or two. The head teacher whom I mentioned received £20,000 from the Government to help with recruitment and retention. He refers to it as "the Chancellor's gift." It was not much of a gift, though: with 50 teachers at the school, it amounted to £400 per teacher. In summary, teachers face the following problems: a heavy work load, fewer teachers, more work given to fewer staff, fewer applicants for jobs and paltry support from the Government.

The problem is reflected across Hampshire, where there were 57 vacancies in 1998, 93 in 1999, 142 in 2000, and 175 this year. The Minister could respond by saying that there are now more teaching positions, so let us consider the rate of vacancies: 0.7 per cent. in 1998, 1.2 per cent. in 1999, 1.8 per cent. in 2000, and 2.2 per cent. this year. The number of vacancies is increasing faster than the number of teaching posts, demonstrating that there is a problem of recruitment and retention in the teaching profession and that the Government are trying to ignore it.

In their White Paper "Schools: Achieving Success", the Government set out their objective for a fivefold increase in special schools. However, as the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) indicated, the number of teaching vacancies in those schools is also increasing, as are teaching vacancies in subjects that the Government want to encourage, such as maths, information and communications technology, physical education and modern languages. I do not believe that they will achieve their objective of a fivefold increase in the number of special schools by 2005.

The other dimension is that the problem of teacher recruitment is affecting pupils. This morning, Mike Tomlinson said that one reason why improvements in numeracy and literacy had stalled this year was the disruption caused by teacher shortages. When we discuss the problems of the teaching profession, we must not forget the needs of pupils whose education is being impaired because of the Government's failure to tackle the recruitment and retention crisis facing teachers.

10.30 am

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on securing this debate. I intend to talk about my constituency in rural Somerset. One of the big problems in recruiting and retaining teachers is the sheer scale and the size of the place. Some people who attend schools in Minehead have to leave home before 7 o'clock in the morning. They cannot get in if there is snow or ice, or flooding, as there was last year. Therefore, much of the work load of teachers involves trying to keep children up to date and up to speed with what they should be doing.

The worst and the best schools in Somerset are both in my constituency. When one looks at the reasons for that difference, and talks to the two head teachers, one discovers that the best school has no great problems recruiting teachers, but the worst school simply cannot get staff. The ethos is that a school that is achieving will get the staff it needs, but schools that are not achieving will never be able to catch up. At the moment, the worst school is short of seven teachers.

The other problem that we face in rural Somerset relates to class sizes. A school with two teachers that is on the borderline of being eligible for a third teacher will not get one, so it will have to double its classes. In other words, class sizes in rural Somerset are growing because many schools are getting bigger. For example, the middle school in Minehead was built for 500 pupils and because of the vagaries of the area it now has 750 pupils. Nothing can be done about that. The size of the classes means that the school cannot recruit the extra teachers that it needs.

There are also problems involving special needs. Many children in Somerset have special needs and although that is the case in most parts of this country, schools in rural Somerset cannot get special needs teachers to be at the school when they are required because they have to cover such a vast area. The best we can get is a couple of hours a week from the special needs teacher, and on some days one person may have to look after a class of 20 special needs children. That is obviously wrong. We cannot retain special needs teachers because when they have worked in Somerset for a short period they tend to go to Bristol or Exeter or one of the other larger towns where they do not face quite the same problems of movement and of scale.

Another problem was that the local college could not get sufficient resources from Government so we had to raise the £50,000 required for TEC status. An area with the smallest district council in the United Kingdom, with a total budget of just over £4 million, had to raise £50,000. We raised £65,000 from local businesses—and the biggest business is tiny—because people felt that education was not working for their children and other children in their community. That demonstrates the problem that we face.

We also have the problems of transport and travelling. As I said, some children have to travel two and a half hours to get to school and the problem is getting worse. It is all very well for the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) to go on about this, but his party is in charge of Somerset and much of what has been going on is due to the inability of his party to grasp what education really means to the children and the people of Somerset.

10.33 am

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on securing this morning's debate. Today, Parliament is rather dominated by education and that is a good thing. We cannot get enough of the subject. The more we discuss it and thrash out the problems and ideas that are before us, the better chance there is—I hope—that the Government will begin to get their policies somewhere near correct. Every child has only one chance of getting a good education and if that chance is lost, it is lost forever. That is why the subject is most important, and it is good that we are discussing it all day.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell made an excellent introductory speech, having researched many of the problems in his constituency and his county. Many of those problems also occur in other parts of the country, and it has been interesting to hear about the contrast between different areas.

Surprisingly, I agree with the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) who highlighted the difficulties caused by house prices and living costs for young teachers in Harrow and London. That problem is reflected in my constituency, which is just outside London. Teachers there do not get a London allowance, but house prices are just as high as in his constituency. The Government's plans to overcome that problem will not work, and it will be interesting to hear the Minister's reply.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) highlighted a variety of problems including that of overseas recruitment. It is good that people from other countries want to come to the UK to teach. It adds to the wealth of knowledge and experience that is being brought into our schools, but the cost of recruiting overseas teachers is enormous. Indeed, the cost of recruitment is often ignored—it can cost more than £10,000 to recruit a senior teacher to a school in south-east England. That money is lost if the teacher leaves the school after a year or two, and the recruitment cost must be borne again. It is a bad investment that does not work, as money that should be used elsewhere in teaching goes down the drain. In some areas, the problem of recruitment and retention is worse than what we have heard today.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) waxed lyrical about the NUT survey, and I am glad that he did because it means that I do not have to do so. He did not mention that 9 per cent. of those surveyed said that teaching is better in Scotland. I shall say no more, but as one who was educated in Scotland I am prejudiced. I admit that that experience was some time ago, but I am glad to know that some people still think that education is better in Scotland.

Mr. Rendel: Who is in charge there?

Mrs. Laing: I do not think that it is better because of who is in charge. That is another matter and one that is not for this morning's debate.

The other matters that are addressed in the NUT survey are quite enlightening, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Newbury for going through them in such detail. One important point on which I agree with him is that people do not go into the teaching profession in order to make money, but because they have more altruistic goals in mind. Most people become teachers because they want to teach. Simplifying the problem in terms of finance does not help to solve it. As he said, it is the morale of teachers that matters. However, I would not suggest that in order to improve morale no teacher should ever be criticised. As with any other profession, there are excellent teachers, good teachers and some not good teachers. In order to give children the education that they deserve, we must find the teachers who are not performing well and help them to improve.

I did not think that I would ever find myself saying four times in two minutes that I agreed with the hon. Member for Newbury, but I agree with him that it does not help the situation when the media use isolated incidents to vilify the teaching profession. The profession does not deserve that. Nor do the many thousands of excellent teachers who are out there working hard and doing a good job. We must make sure that, while we criticise those who are not doing well, we also praise those who are doing well.

In some schools in my constituency I have seen enormous differences made because of the personality, approach, energy and enthusiasm of the head or particular teachers. One person can make a huge difference to the lives of many young people. We have to give teachers the chance to make that difference.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) emphasised the increasing rate of teacher vacancies. It bothers me enormously to hear the Secretary of State and other Ministers give us endless statistics about the numbers being recruitment and the rate of recruitment in an attempt to pulling the wool over the eyes of those who study the statistics—[*Interruption.*]—I sense some dissension among Labour Members, but it is no good simply looking at the numbers and saying that more people are going into teacher training and more teachers are being employed in schools. If teachers are not being retained, if they are unable to develop their own professional ability, if they are not teaching the subjects for which they are qualified, at the level for which they are qualified, the numbers become meaningless. Merely putting a teacher in front of a class does not mean that the class is being taught properly. If the teacher is not sufficiently senior to be teaching at that particular level or is qualified in chemistry but teaching physics, that might solve the Government's problem with statistics, because it looks good in statistical terms, but the parents and children involved know that it is not nearly good enough.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) highlighted the disproportionate effect of teacher shortages on the worse performing schools. That is one of the biggest problems which has not been properly discussed. Perhaps the Minister intends to address it in the next few minutes.

[Mrs. Laing]

In my constituency, where I have made a study of the subject for some time, the better schools have minor problems in recruiting and retaining teachers. The worse schools have an enormous problem. The result is a downward spiral of educational achievement in some schools in some areas. The better schools are managing to keep their heads above water and provide a decent education, but the worst schools are being affected disproportionately. I sincerely hope that the Minister has taken the problem on board and he will find some way of addressing it.

I have a few straightforward questions for the Minister. First, does he recognise that there is a crisis in teacher recruitment and retention? I asked that question of the former Secretary of State for Education a few months ago in respect of my county, Essex, and he said that there was no problem and no crisis. I can tell the Minister that parents and teachers in my constituency were furious at that. They know that that there is an enormous problem that is becoming a crisis. If the Government do not even recognise that there is a crisis, there is no hope of solving it. If the Government do recognise it, we have some hope and perhaps we can work together to try and solve the problem.

Secondly, does the Minister appreciate the burden placed on teachers by bureaucracy and interference? It has been mentioned frequently this morning and it also emerges from the NUT survey. That is the direct responsibility of the Government and local education authority as they produce the bureaucracy and send out circulars telling teachers what to do. The Government could take direct action to improve matters.

Thirdly, does the Minister recognise that teachers are demoralised? The discipline problem is not just that pupils are not properly disciplined, but that teachers are being disciplined unreasonably for exerting a little discipline on pupils. If a teacher puts a hand on a pupil's shoulder, the parents can accuse that teacher of assault.

I shall not discuss the distressing details of a particular case, but I could tell the Minister in private. A very good, young teacher was lost to the profession for ever because of the unreasonable behaviour of a parent on behalf of a badly behaved child. The child gets away with it, but the teacher is disciplined and lost to the profession. I shall not extrapolate on the basis of a single incident, but others have mentioned similar concerns this morning.

Fourthly, does the Minister recognise that recruitment drives will never work unless we solve the problem of retention? I say "we", but only the Minister can solve it.

Fifthly, does the Minister acknowledge that many of these issues are within Government control and that he has the power to take action to overcome these problems? Will he undertake to do so?

10.46 am

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): I congratulate the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on initiating our debate on this important subject and I thank other hon. Members for their contributions. I agree with the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) that we need a debate on the teaching profession. It is also important to debate education in the wider community.

I also agree with the hon. Lady about the importance of celebrating the achievements of our teachers, particularly today, the day on which the results of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development programme for international student assessments have been announced. They show good levels of achievement by UK students in international comparisons with 32 countries. The UK performance was significantly above the OECD average in reading, maths and scientific literacy. The UK did well in comparison with other G8 countries. To develop a point mentioned by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), the UK came fourth out of 32 on the scientific literacy scale, and was significantly outperformed only by Korea. Even our lower-achieving pupils do relatively well by international comparative standards. The UK achieves high levels of performance without excessive disparities, and gender differences are also less than the OECD average. The OECD published that welcome information this morning. It reflects the achievements of the UK teaching profession, so I greatly welcome it.

The terms of the wider debate about the teaching profession were clearly laid out in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the Social Market Foundation on 12 November. The key question was how to encourage the best people to train as teachers. How can we ensure that as many as possible enter the classroom; and once they are there, how can we keep them fulfilled in their work and highly motivated to develop long-term careers in a fully modernised teaching profession? As we speak, children are being taught in 24,000 schools across the country. Hon. Members will recall that 20 years ago hundreds of children would have been sitting at home, and early in the summer it was predicted that that might be the case this term, but the children are sitting in their classes today. In view of some of the overstatements that have been made today, it is important to remind hon. Members that forecasts of disruption to schools this term have proved ill-founded.

My second observation, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) was right to draw attention, is that, thanks to extra investment in the fabric of our schools, classes offer better learning environments than they did a few years ago. In 1996-97, less than £700 million a year was being invested in school buildings; by next year, £3.5 billion—a fivefold increase—will be invested. I draw the attention of the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell to the fact that in Surrey capital investment has risen from £8 million in 1996-97 to nearly £22 million this year. Indeed, there has been a huge boost across the country, with far-reaching and welcome implications.

My third observation is that the overwhelming majority of staff are very skilled professionals with a strong commitment to delivering the best possible outcomes for the children. The continuing improvement in GCSE and A-level results across the country is proof of that, as is this morning's data from the OECD. The hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) was right to make the important point that schools' achievements have been good in that respect. Evidence of that improvement is provided by the annual report of the chief inspector of schools, Mike Tomlinson, on the progress of literacy and numeracy strategies, to which the hon. Gentleman also referred. This morning, Mike Tomlinson said that

"the overall quality of teaching continues to improve".

In our debate on the state of the teaching profession, it is important to pay tribute to that improvement. In last year's report, Mike Tomlinson pointed out that his inspectors deemed 95 per cent. of lessons in that year satisfactory or better, whereas in 1995 only 80 per cent. were deemed satisfactory. He said that

"the quality of teaching has improved. It is now good in more than six in ten lessons and unsatisfactory in only one in 20."

So there has been good progress on quality as well.

My fourth observation is that even during a time of economic prosperity, with an extremely well managed economy, many employment opportunities and unemployment at its lowest level for 30 years, teaching has become an increasingly attractive career option. In the past couple of years, the Teacher Training Agency has received an unprecedented number of inquiries about careers in teaching. After eight successive years of decline, we have witnessed two successive years of rising teacher training recruitment levels. The number of people following alternative routes to qualified teacher status—those who enter teaching later in their careers—has also increased sharply in the past couple of years.

The fifth observation is one that I make absolutely no bones about. Despite the above points, and to pick up on a comment from the hon. Member for Epping Forest, many teachers and head teachers feel overworked, undervalued and under pressure. As has been noted, many head teachers in various parts of the country had to work through the summer to recruit the staff necessary to ensure normal operation of schools this term. It is a great tribute to them that they succeeded in that task, but a vast amount of work was required. Far from denying that such problems exist, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West pointed out, we commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers to conduct an independent investigation into teachers' work load. That study is nearing completion and the steering group, which includes the teaching unions, will meet tomorrow to sign it off.

We know that the review will confirm the extent to which teacher work loads have risen. The interim report said that

"teachers and headteachers work more intensive weeks than other comparable managers and professionals".

It also confirms that we all expect our teachers to do too much clerical and administrative work for too much of their time. I quote:

"Teachers in many schools perceive a lack of control and ownership over their work, undertaking tasks—particularly documentation—which they do not believe are necessary to support learning, or which could be done by support staff rather than by teachers or more efficiently using Information and Communications Technology."

We acknowledge those concerns and we are determined to tackle them head-on. The consultants paint a picture of teachers who are pulled in too many directions and do not feel that they have the support that they need. By contrast, our vision for the future of the teaching profession is the one that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State described to the Social Market Foundation. The pamphlet that she published to coincide with that clearly sets out the demand pressures and supply constraints that have led to the current perception of the extent of teacher shortages: for example, we now need to recruit to initial teacher training some 10 per cent. of all new graduates—40 per cent. in the case of maths graduates, as the hon. Member for Newbury said. Those are very challenging proportions.

The difficulties do not lie only in teacher supply. Historically, the teaching profession has not been helped sufficiently to modernise the availability and use of support staff, nor the technology to support them.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: Given that the bid from my borough to which I referred will provide much-needed investment in ICT equipment, and given that hon. Friends have told me that the Minister has a growing reputation as a shrewd and considered judge of funding applications, would he consider offering or agreeing to meet a delegation from my authority when the bid has been submitted?

Mr. Timms: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's generous remarks, and note the sincerity with which they are offered. It would of course be for my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State to receive any such delegation, but I am sure that she would give careful consideration to doing so.

The school work force must be remodelled as part of the modernisation of the teaching profession. Measures to assist that will be my right hon. Friend's top priority in the current spending review, which concludes next July. The Education Bill, which we will debate in the House this afternoon, will make an important contribution. It will give teachers greater scope to exercise their informed professional judgment than has been the case in the past. It is no part of our project to supplant teachers with unqualified staff. On the contrary, teachers will have higher status, more responsibility to do what they are uniquely qualified to do, and the space to realise the ideals that brought them into teaching in the first place.

We will support teachers with better technology. We are already investing £1.8 billion in improving schools' IT between 1998 and 2004. Learning will be supported by a wider range of staff, including more teaching assistants to help teachers with classroom responsibilities—but certainly not to supplant them. Teaching assistants play an important part in our plans and they too will need support and development opportunities to allow them to maximise their contribution. We will support more bursars and recruit more administrative staff to free teachers and head teachers from more of the paperwork that is not central to the jobs that we want them to do. The first step on that path will be to refer the final report on teacher work load, by PricewaterhouseCoopers to the School Teachers' Pay Review Body for recommendations next spring.

[Mr. Timms]

A few weeks ago, I attended the national teaching awards at the Theatre Royal in Drury lane. It was a great evening, full of accounts of inspiring teachers. One of the pupils nominating her English teacher, who went on to be the winner of this year's outstanding new teacher award, said that the teacher

"doesn't only treat you like a student she is paid to teach, but as an individual. She realises each student's potential and pushes him or her towards it with enthusiasm. She has always made me feel supported and not scared to ask for help"—

for fear being humiliated—

"because she always listens to you. She has a way of communicating with students and parents like no other teacher I know."

I meet many teachers around the country and recognise in remarkably many the qualities praised in that testimonial. Joy and inspiration are there in abundance.

Foot and Mouth

11 am

John Mann (Bassetlaw): Unlike a majority of Members in the Chamber today, I was a mere candidate at the height of the foot and mouth crisis, and I lived on one of the largest beef farms in the country when the crisis broke out. I lived within 20 m of some of the finest livestock in the country on an estate that had a large number of both sheep and cattle. It is in a county that, to date and thankfully, has not been affected by a direct outbreak of the disease. The pressures on the farming community were near at hand and apparent, and I pay tribute to the prompt action taken by those in that community, not least in my immediate locality, who acted promptly and wisely to minimise the effects, on Government instructions and at the appropriate time.

In my constituency, it would be inaccurate to describe farming as the only sector affected by foot and mouth. Mine is a farming community that has declined steadily over the years under successive Governments. It would be honest and accurate to say that the community has been critical of all Governments during the past 10 to 20 years, and that applies particularly to tenant farmers, who form a very small section of the economy.

Half the land mass of my constituency is forested, which is unusual in England. Tourism is fundamental to the future growth of our economy and I want to speak about the impact on tourism, which is why I asked for this Adjournment debate. Next week, I shall give evidence to an inquiry at Finningley into an international airport and I shall try to persuade the inspector of the tourist potential of an area that has Sherwood forest in its midst. The area that suffered greatly because of foot and mouth.

In many rural communities, tourism forms the basis of the local economy and generates almost twice the revenue of livestock farming. In 1999, the total value of rural tourism was £12 billion. It supports an estimated 380,000 jobs and 25,000 small businesses. In spite of that, tourism is relatively weak because seasonal fluctuations in demand make the sector vulnerable to the impact of major issues such as foot and mouth.

When the first case of foot and mouth was confirmed, various measures were taken with the aim of ensuring that tourists did not contribute to the spread of the disease. Those measures included closure of footpaths, rights of way and heritage sites. Many land-owning organisations such as the Forestry Commission and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds announced that they would shut their land as a precautionary measure. In my constituency, Hodsock priory had to shut down at the height of the tourist season while Clumber park, which is a major tourist attraction in the north midlands, also had to close.

Several hon. Members in the Chamber take an interest in angling. The angling tradition in mining communities is deep, longstanding and current. Perhaps the greatest impact on daily life for the ordinary person was the fact that anglers had to go elsewhere for their sport because the canal was closed.

Many local education authorities advised schools not to organise visits to areas where outside spaces were closed either as a preventative measure, as in

Nottinghamshire, or because of infection. At Edwinstowe, which is two miles from my constituency, a major educational facility for children at local schools was closed for a long time.

There was bound to be an impact on tourism once public authorities communicated through the media their decision that the public interest was best served by considering the countryside to be closed for business. I want to concentrate on the impact on one section of the tourist industry, the Youth Hostels Association, which has a particular resonance in certain parts of the country and is especially important for my constituents.

In the three or four years when I worked towards becoming a Member of Parliament, I hoped that one of the first things that I could propose would be a new youth hostel in Clumber park to link with the youth hostel in Edwinstowe. That would create a proper tourist route, increase the number of beds available and put my area on the tourist map for overseas visitors. That has proved to be impossible, although such ideas are fundamental to regenerating the local economy. The potential for tourism in my area is as great as anywhere in the United Kingdom.

The decision to close the countryside resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of guests at youth hostels. The YHA was formed in 1930 as a charity, and it is now a worldwide organisation. Its aim when it was formed, to which it remains true today, was:

> "To help all, especially young people of limited means, to a greater knowledge, love and care of the countryside, particularly by providing hostels or other simple accommodation for them in their travels, and thus to promote their health, rest and education."

It operates 230 youth hostels in England and Wales, which are mainly situated in rural locations, and it has 300,000 members.

I shall declare an interest: I have been a member of the YHA for 25 years. I was introduced to it by my father, who was in turn introduced to it by a teacher when he lived in one of the most deprived parts of Edinburgh. He was encouraged to leave the tenement blocks and go cycling in the Scottish borders at the weekend using youth hostels. Opening the eyes of those who live in inner cities remains the key social import of the organisation beyond the business of being in tourism, although that is also important.

The organisation has been transformed. I recall, from first using youth hostels as a young boy, one at Thirlmere in the Lake district with a reputation for its austere warden, 1945-esque blankets and the duties that each person staying there had to carry out in the wooden hut and the freezing cold. It was known for Spartan conditions, creaking bunk beds and large dormitories. It was also known for its regime—in by 10.30 and lights out by 11 o'clock. I can tell people of that generation or older that the organisation has been transformed to meet today's expectations, standards and qualities. The youth of today regard it as on a par with their expectations, not as something left over from yesteryear. That point must be made, because many have a vague memory but would not recognise the organisation today.

During the eight months to the end of October, the Youth Hostels Association lost 19 per cent. of its business across the network, and 24 per cent. in its rural parts. In the worst affected areas—the Lake district, Yorkshire dales and north-east—business losses have totalled 40-50 per cent. Although there was significant business recovery in the south towards the end of the summer, there is currently no prospect of replacing those losses.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, because I do not wish his point about recovery in the south to remain unchallenged. Does he accept from me as a south-west Member of Parliament that although there was some recovery in coastal areas, inland tourism in the south-west—especially in my county, Devon, and in next-door Cornwall—was very adversely affected and has a very low cash flow?

John Mann: I would not dispute that for one second. The YHA's southern recovery is explained by its significant number of London youth hostels. They remain the cash cow of the organisation. In spite of that, and in spite of the fact that the London tourist industry was strong towards the end of the summer, there has been a loss this year of £5 million from an annual income of £30 million.

The organisation has no significant reserves with which to meet such setbacks, apart from its properties. In the short term, it has had to borrow from the banks to meet cash flow requirements. Crucially, in the medium term, it expects to have to close and sell a significant number of hostels to survive and undertake essential investment for the future.

Investment is essential for any enterprise, and as the YHA is well run, that means continuing to maintain and upgrade the quality of hostels—bedrooms, showers, windows, roofs and information technology—and broadening its appeal to a wider section of society. Of the YHA's current guests, 35 per cent. are school and youth groups, 30 per cent. are from overseas—often young backpackers—25 per cent. are individuals, couples or friends, and 10 per cent. are families.

I want to single out one group that uses youth hostels or, rather, would have used them this summer but could not; it has used them in the past, and wishes to do so in the future. It is the Acorn youth trust, based in Bassetlaw. It has financial backing through the single regeneration budget scheme for coalfields, and deals with at-risk young people in the ex-mining villages of Carlton in Lindrick and Langold. I say "at-risk" because those villages, especially the Wimpy estate in Carlton in Lindrick, are notorious across the north of England for involvement in heroin and for the amount of drug dealing going on in the streets.

The youth workers are working with those at-risk young people, aged 11 to 15—particularly younger teenagers—who could make decisions to get into the drug culture and become drug addicts. Many times in villages, I have sat with parents whose children have become heroin addicts and part of the consequent crime and disorder problems.

The primary focus of the trust is to take young people to youth hostels, such as those at Edwinstowe, Matlock and Llangollen. My great fear is that its ability to do that will be impaired by the financial crisis of the YHA. Last weekend, the trust took a group of people to the

[John Mann]

Edwinstowe youth hostel. Young people must raise the finances, however minimal, to attend such weekends; they are not charity, or a handout, but an award for the enterprise of young people.

Young people must take on responsibilities in the youth hostel, and the structure and nature of the hostel enforces that notion. The ideas of governance and how one lives are, for many, sadly lacking in their domestic lives. Cooking is another skill. Such young people, when given a pound, would normally eat burgers and chips. However, in the controlled and guided environment of the youth hostel, they have no choice but to learn cooking skills and learn about healthy living and eating. Such concepts are not directly available to them anywhere else, but have the most powerful impact. That opens young people's eyes to a world beyond the deprived village, street or house in which they live. Such educational work—through youth groups or schools—is crucial.

The YHA has a recovery plan and has not sat on its hands waiting to be bailed out. It has had to increase its borrowing and has already borrowed £3.3 million. It has also enhanced its short-term marketing initiatives, particularly those aimed at spring 2002 in conjunction with the Government's campaign for the countryside. It has started the hostel review, identifying asset sales, to raise the £5 million that it has lost. It has highlighted that issue in national and local media. I am pleased to say that it has also intensified applications for public funds to assist hostel investment and outreach work.

To date, funds made available by the Government have had some, though limited, benefit. Business Links initially declared the organisation ineligible for the £15,000 available to small businesses for the loss that it has suffered because of foot and mouth. Some 93 hostels have lost more than 60 per cent. of their business for two consecutive months, and many are being closed as a result of the crisis. I am pleased that the Government have changed that policy so that the organisation is now eligible, but I trust that the funds have not dried up. Can the Minister confirm whether the £500,000 that could be available to the YHA is, in fact, still available?

The hypothetical rates liability is £1.02 million, but as a charitable organisation, the organisation receives 80 per cent. mandatory rate relief and, in some cases, a further 20 per cent. discretionary relief. Its annual rates bill is £117,000 so it can expect only £75,000 through the hardship relief scheme. Significant money went to farming-based charities but the YHA was, unfortunately, declared ineligible. The rural taskforce has recommended that the scheme should be extended to environmental and recreational charities, such as the YHA.

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I want to make it clear that the match funding scheme for charities, to which he referred, was intended to help individuals, under particular stress in communities, who were involved in farming-related and non-farming-related activities. Initially, there was concern that it was only farmers and their families who were helped, but the scheme was widened by organisations such as the Addington Fund, which made a tremendous contribution to helping people who were under immense pressure during the main period of the foot and mouth outbreak.

John Mann: I thank my right hon. Friend.

Let me stress the assistance that the Youth Hostel Association needs. It will continue to make applications to the community fund and the heritage lottery fund. However, it is crucial that the re-launching of the visiting the countryside campaign, including encouraging people to stay at youth hostels, is a major factor in Government action over the next year.

Matched funds, through the foot and mouth appeal, which has raised £239,000, could make a significant contribution to relieving the plight of the YHA. I ask the Minister to respond specifically to the question of match funding, based on the appeal to its members. The Government could ask regional development agencies to give priority to reinvestment in organisations, such as the Youth Hostel Association, that are involved with environmental and social tourism.

There should be some form of economic regeneration for constituencies like mine—which on any indicator is one of the more deprived, and which, according to my fact-finding, is one of the areas less well funded from the available pots of money. Assistance from the European regional development fund would also be of great help. I know that in Nottinghamshire there is significant money in that fund, which lies intact without a penny having been spent from it over the past two years.

I would like to see special attention given to those youth hostels in rural areas that contribute to over 50 per cent. of the bed stock, or in places where there is one village shop. One of the critical social factors—well beyond young people from my constituency visiting—is the fact that, for village pubs and shops, an influx of perhaps 60 or 70 people a night is a major contribution to their sustainability. That is particularly so where the youth hostel is the key provider of local beds, which is often the case, or where there is one village shop struggling to survive, so the custom from the YHA's clientele is vital for its survival.

I would also like some ingenuity from the Government in the ways in which public funds can be used for to help young people at risk, such as those in my constituency. The Government should invest in the future by providing more funding so that such young people can utilise the youth hostels, both in the next year and on a planned basis in the future.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way while he is making such a powerful case about youth hostels, which I hope to add to later, if I catch your eye, Mr. Gale.

My hon. Friend will be aware that early-day motion 256 has already received over 80 sponsors, and I hope that he will urge every hon. Member to sign that EDM to show support for the youth hostel movement.

John Mann: I will, and I believe that more signatures are going in today to support that early-day motion.

My right hon. Friend the Minister and I have discussed this matter before on a number of occasions, and I think that we can picture the Black Sail youth hostel in the Lake district. I can tell those who have not been there that it is one of the best sites in this country. From the doorway, one can see on the right Red Pike and Pillar, which is part of the Wasdale horseshoe—unquestionably the greatest walking range in England, and one of the greatest walking ranges in Britain, and a ferocious sight from that aspect. To the left is Green gable and further to the left is Great gable—in Wainwright's words, the greatest of British mountains.

The Youth Hostel Association was formed to allow young people such as those in my constituency who have never seen such sights, who have been stuck in the cash-boot, burger-and-chips economy of deprivation, drugs and social risk, to experience the countryside and have their eyes opened to that greater world. For that reason, the YHA is a special case and urgently needs support and assistance from this Government, of all Governments, and from all parties, at its most crucial moment of need. I implore the Minister to help, because the organisation needs that assistance now. People at risk in communities throughout the country will be the losers if we do not tackle the problem in the very near future.

11.25 am

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Although the first outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in my constituency did not occur until April—the election had been called before the first outbreak occurred—a large part of North Yorkshire was already frozen because of outbreaks elsewhere, in Wensleydale, and in Cumbria. Businesses have lost in every season this year. North Yorkshire is still not a free county, but I hope that in a week or so, certainly before Christmas, it will have that status, access will be largely, but not entirely, opened up and businesses can begin to look forward to next year without the catastrophe that overwhelmed them this year.

The business crisis has been widespread. Foot and mouth disease is thought of first as an agricultural and livestock problem, but the ripples go extensively through businesses. The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) spoke eloquently about the youth hostel movement, which takes about £2 million a year. Just before the outbreak, I opened a refurbished youth hostel in my constituency, which promptly became non-functioning because of the lack of visitors. Tourism is often thought of as bed and breakfast, but many retired people who may have a spare room take visitors and do bed and breakfast; their life does not revolve around it. However, the people who run pubs and hotels are often wholly dependent upon free movement and on people being able to visit. There is no purpose in going to areas such as Grassington, for example, other than to gain access to the countryside of Wharfedale and Malhamdale. If people cannot gain access to the countryside, they do not go; businesses have had only 10, 12 or 15 per cent. of their visitors the previous year. It will be interesting to know whether the Christmas bookings are better, because people expect the countryside to be freer.

There are outdoor education and trekking centres in my constituency. Some people had just set up a business, and bought ponies and hired staff, and their business simply failed. I mentioned pubs and the hotels; the country shows at Pateley Bridge, Kilnsey and Malham were a complete wipeout, and the Masham sheep fair, perhaps most poignantly of all, this year had a competition for fake sheep. There were pens on Masham marketplace and people competed to make sheep out of wire, wool and so on—they were very imaginative—as they could not show the real thing. My neighbour had a high-quality entry, which she kept in her garage. I communed with it for some weeks when the wool was being stuck to the exhibit.

Many businesses have turned to making plaques for a living, which are awarded to for fell racing, or at country show events. Business is down catastrophically, even miles away from the infected areas; the National Trust and some public and semi-public bodies have suffered too. In towns such as Settle, where the epidemic started, there have been ramifications for almost every business that one can mention. Hotels and pubs in Horton in Ribblesdale—the epicentre of the epidemic—and in Malham and Grassington have all been affected. Businesses usually hope to make some fat over the summer and have a good autumn half-term holiday, which is the last real attempt to make money before the winter weather sets in. However, they have not been able to put by any stores, so the crisis will come this winter.

The crisis in businesses in my constituency, especially in tourism, is associated not only with the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. During the fuel crisis, travellers searched desperately to find a pump open in the Yorkshire dales. The serious problems caused by flooding also had an impact on tourism, and the persistently high level of the pound has made it much cheaper for many people to go abroad for their holidays than to spend them in the United Kingdom.

Those factors were present before the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. The Government's business rate relief and various funds provided some help. Regional development agencies have channelled funds, although there have been common complaints throughout the UK about the sheer bureaucracy of the processes that must be gone through before the money can be accessed. For many businesses whose desperate need was survival, the requirement to propose a business plan for future development was three or four steps beyond the crisis.

Mr. Burnett: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who accurately and compellingly describes the parlous conditions faced by many country businesses as winter approaches. Does he agree that it would be extremely unwise and unfair for the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise to demand payment of deferred corporation tax, income tax and value added tax?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman has uncannily anticipated the point that I was about to make. However, repetition is no sin in politics, so I will not hesitate to make that point in a moment.

Charitable giving has been important. Craven had a target to raise £1 million to help affected businesses. The Minister also referred to various other charitable funds. There is a hardy resilience among my constituents, but it is astonishing that Government agencies are calling in the debts just as the crisis begins to bite in winter.

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman's intervention gives me an opportunity to nail a lie. There is no change

[Alun Michael]

in the approach of Inland Revenue departments to those who are affected by foot and mouth disease. We have given an undertaking to continue to be sympathetic when we consider each request for help and support. The joint helpline is still open seven days a week to provide that assistance. There have been a couple of reports that debts would suddenly be called in. I am satisfied from my own inquiries that those are rural myths. Treasury colleagues assure me that they intend to be as helpful as possible to businesses that are going through the difficulties to which the right hon. Gentleman rightly referred.

Mr. Curry: We have dispatched urban myths that were invented by a previous Secretary of State, we have had the rural myths, and we can now concentrate on the difficult business realities. The Minister's remarks are useful, and I will invite businesses in my constituency to let me know immediately if they receive a demand from the Inland Revenue or other agencies. I am sure that the Minister would want me to contact him instantly with that evidence, so that he can tell whoever has issued a demand to stop. Lord Montgomery says in his autobiography that his mother would sometimes say to the nanny, "Go and find what Bernard is doing and tell him to stop it." That may not be a bad motto for the agencies.

Alun Michael: It would be unrealistic to suggest that the Inland Revenue should not talk to people about how, as business gets back to normal, they may deal with payments over time. I do not want to suggest that the Revenue should not talk to anyone, and Ministers have made it clear that, while the current situation remains, they will be sympathetic and pursue the line that I described.

Mr. Curry: The Minister will know that businesses do not expect gifts from Government. Businesses know that the money must be repaid, so the importance is in the tone and nature of approach and making it clear at the beginning that this is not a demand for payment, but an exploration of how the two sides can co-operate on a problem that everyone recognises. That is the key. There is a case for extending the business rate relief, simply because winter is such a difficult period, and the Minister will no doubt examine that as he collects his thoughts. We also need a full response to the Haskins report, which was generally sensible and solid. He is a bit the Lord High Everything Else of the Government, but on this occasion he has done a reasonable task. The Government made an immediate response, but more detail is required.

Above all, businesses need not money but some certainty. Hon. Members should imagine that they are a business. They have just suffered a catastrophic year and are being told by everyone that they should modernise, advertise their services and improve their facilities to attract new visitors. They must invest to do that; they cannot just sit and wait for it to happen. They also know that if there is one more outbreak of foot and mouth disease—we should not forget that the Government expect a tail to the epidemic—a whole chunk of countryside could be frozen again and such investment would be useless.

Businesses cannot choose not to make the investment, because they cannot just sit there and do nothing. Equally, if we do have an outbreak, there must be a response. It would be enormously helpful if the Government outlined the approach that they would take to isolate any outbreak and ensure that the repercussions would not plunge scores, or perhaps hundreds, of businesses into the same situation as earlier this year. That is particularly important, as the Government will shortly pass the Animal Health Bill, which will give them the legal means to compensate for animals slaughtered following vaccination as part of the programme for controlling foot and mouth. I do not prescribe a solution, but the Government must understand the great apprehension across the countryside that we are not yet done with foot and mouth and that it could come back and kill any recovery.

I will make one point to the Minister with which he will be painfully familiar. I mentioned country shows and the importance of attracting tourists. If the 21-day rule restricting movement persists, it will have an immediate and deleterious impact on the ability of traditional country shows to go ahead. Animals must be brought to and taken away from such shows and play an important part in them. If that 21-day rule is applied rigidly, it will be the death knell of many traditional country shows. They attract all sorts of people: those who make umbrellas, products from rocks and wheat, shoes and riding kit. Animals, although key, are not the only element, and an enormous number of businesses gain much of their lifeblood from attendance.

Mr. Burnett: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I do not want to tax his patience, but I must say that I agree wholeheartedly. I was speaking at the Okehampton livestock show dinner last Saturday evening, and that point was made to me. Does he agree that it would be wise for the Government to exempt livestock shows from the proposed cooling-off period?

Mr. Curry: It is inevitable that in the period in which we are relaxing from foot and mouth disease, a licensing arrangement for movement will continue to be in place. I do not expect the Government to lift all restrictions, but it would be sensible to examine the particular conditions of animals to decide whether they could be moved relatively short distances to local shows and back again without falling foul of the measure.

The hon. Gentleman will also know that we are hoping to get an announcement that auction marts will start again quite shortly. They also have an important role to play in the countryside, not least because they are the most important rural instrument for combating social exclusion among members of the agricultural community stuck on the top of a hill—one of the few occasions that they actually get down and meet fellow human beings is at the auction mart.

The epidemic has shown how interdependent agriculture and tourism are, but how exposed the countryside is to those two industries, and how inadequate the wider economic base in the countryside often is. We agree that we need better quality and more diverse facilities and Haskins has spelt that out pretty starkly. I applaud the efforts to bring regeneration into some of the market towns, which we all agree are important. I will assume that the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) agrees with Haskins before he intervenes again to tell me that he agrees. So many market towns have centres characterised by charity shops and financial services organisations because much of the traditional fabric of retailing has gone.

The regional development agencies are now talking about how to develop business. In the rural areas, it is important that food clusters—businesses dependent on agriculture, but spreading out to processing, going up market, trying to get higher quality food and dealing with the local supermarket, which is often regarded psychologically as a difficult thing to do—be given broad encouragement.

Let me make yet another plea about telecommunications equipment in the countryside. If somebody has a small business at the top of the dale it is prohibitively expensive to get in there the sort of wires and communications that would enable them to deal competitively with people who have access to higher technological products such as ISDN. Hundreds of thousands of pounds is needed to install such equipment. If we really want to wire up the countryside, to ensure that people can promote high value added businesses from the countryside, that question must addressed urgently.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bassetlaw for the opportunity to participate in this debate. I know that the Minister understands the problems because a short while ago I led a delegation from North Yorkshire spelling them out to him, but as I said before, repetition is always a virtue in politics provided it is not taken to extremes, and that is why I intend to stop now.

11.42 am

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on securing this debate. He described himself as a mere candidate for Parliament when foot and mouth first broke out. If he makes one or two more powerful speeches like that on behalf of the Youth Hostels Association and other affected country businesses, he will never be called a mere MP. So, more power to his vocal cords, if nothing else. This debate is timely, particularly as the Government have called for a full debate on the future of the rural economy. I shall be interested in the Minister's response.

It is worth us bearing in mind the devastating impact of foot and mouth on the country as a whole—and I speak as an urban MP who very much enjoys country sports, fishing, walking, rambling and the rest. I note the words on 18 April of the former Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend (Mr. Brown):

> "Foot and mouth disease has been an enormous blow to the farming community. Nationwide it has had a profound, disturbing and painful impact which is fully recognised at the heart of Government. It represents the biggest peacetime challenge of recent times requiring a major logistical and scientific response. There are no easy options, only stark choices."

Those were wise words in the light of what has occurred since.

The impact on the countryside, and particularly the agricultural community, was quite devastating. The first signs of the outbreak occurred in Essex in February. The origins were traced to a farm at Heddon-on-the-Wall, Northumberland, which is considered to be the most likely source. From there it spread to seven farms in Tyne and Wear. One sent a sheep to Hexham market, from where the disease spread to other parts of the country. The initial rapid spread was almost impossible to detect and for something like three weeks no one was really aware of the virulent disease. However, foot and mouth disease affected only a small proportion—less than 2.5 per cent—of the UK total of 55 million cattle, sheep and pigs that make up the national herd. More than 1,600 vets—with other professionals and 2,000 military personnel—were working at public expense to deal with the outbreak.

The Government strategy was clearly based on the best scientific advice. Many veterinary and other experts worked to contain the outbreak. The Government sought stringent disinfection and precautionary measures to contain the disease within affected areas. They sought to restrict movement countrywide by identifying areas with a heightened risk. They embarked on a policy to cull all animals on infected farms, within 24 hours of the disease being notified, to prevent the further release of the virus into the air. Unfortunately, they were not always successful in meeting that target. To remove the risk of developing and spreading the disease, they attempted to cull all animals in neighbouring farms within 48 hours of the first report.

For all the criticism of the Government's actions, the strategy worked. Britain is now free of foot and mouth disease, though there may be a sting in the tail. The farming community has been keen to berate Ministers and Parliament in general, but eradicating the disease should be a cause for celebration and, in respect of compensation paid to farmers, a cause for gratitude. I hope that we shall hear the farming community express some gratitude later.

The impacts of foot and mouth on agriculture have been overemphasised. Not only the farming community has been affected by this devastating disease. The Minister will be only too aware of correspondence with me about Mr. Harrison, a man in my constituency who ran Trail Breaks—a small organisation that staged cycle cross events in the countryside, but was unable to operate because of restrictions on access.

I recently met the Berkshire branch of the Country Landowners Association. The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) spoke about other industries that we might not readily associate with foot and mouth disease—industries that make plaques for the walls of tourist attractions, for example. The Country Landowners Association told me that some of its members—people who produce rambling books or guides—experienced a huge downturn in their orders. Bed and breakfasts in the countryside and country clothing stores are other examples.

My own sport of angling is also relevant. Fishing tackle shops are often located in urban centres. Because they were not in designated areas, they were ineligible to claim relief and support. Gun shops, country sport suppliers and youth hostels could also be mentioned. I was proud to add my signature to early-day motion 256 and I certainly associate myself with all the

[Mr. Martin Salter]

comments made by my hon. Friends about the work of the YHA and the need for the Government to consider it a special case. We must ensure that that worthwhile organisation continues.

Having given the Government a fair wind on how they sought to tackle the outbreak, I have to say that the tight drawing of boundaries within which businesses could apply for support was a mistake. The vast majority of people who go fishing in the countryside will visit tackle shops in places like Reading, Swindon and elsewhere. It is a shame that such shops were ineligible for support. However, I dissociate myself from today's announcements by the UK rural business campaign, which is seeking to take class action for compensation against the Government.

The Government cannot be seen as a financial comfort blanket for every business affected by foot and mouth or any other external force. The queue for Government compensation is long. It starts with Railtrack shareholders, for whom I have little sympathy. It includes passengers whose lives were ruined by Railtrack's incompetence, for whom I have immense sympathy. It also includes Equitable Life policyholders, and airline industry employees, who have suffered terribly from the downturn following the appalling events of 11 September. Many people have their hands out for Government support, but the UK rural business campaign will get precious little support in this House. One has to question—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. This is a Chamber, not a Committee Room. Hon. Members must not deal with post in here.

Mr. Salter: I thought that I had done something wrong.

One has to question the intelligence of employing a firm of lobbyists—Lehmann Communications—to organise a briefing for Members at 11 am on a Monday. I would not pay good money for that. The campaign's press release about the class action includes one comment from the Conservative shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who is seeking to make political points. The UK rural business campaign represents a class action all right—an upper class action. It should not unduly trouble the Minister.

It is worth considering expenditure on support systems. The DEFRA figures show that compensation—the Government are ambivalent about the word "compensation", but use it in their announcements— for farmers totals £1.2 billion. However, about £54 million is available via the business recovery fund. That represents an imbalance between support offered to farmers and to other businesses, whether in rural or urban environments, that have been equally badly hit.

Having successfully achieved foot-and-mouth-free status in the UK, the Government must urgently attend to businesses that are falling through the cracks in the system. No system devised in a hurry will be perfect, but rural businesses, the tourist trade, and the YHA should not go out of business because of our failure to address their concerns, which are as legitimate and important as those of farmers.

11.53 am

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on securing the debate. Fortunately, the foot and mouth outbreak did not reach as far as my constituency in Scotland. None the less, the outbreak had a devastating impact on access. Tourism is vital to my constituency and its economy because one of its attractions is the beautiful mountainous countryside. Hotels experienced a dramatic drop in business, which impacted on all sectors of the economy. There was no meaningful support for business in Scotland because a large proportion of the budget was allocated to survival workshops, which did not find favour with business men and women throughout my constituency. Farmers in Perthshire suffered because of the restrictions on exports and movements of livestock. Progress has finally been made on export movements, despite the fact that Scotland has been foot and mouth free for some time. However, farmers in areas such as the borders cannot get export licences because of administrative delays and bungling.

One may ask why a Scottish Member is speaking in a debate on agriculture, which has been devolved to the Scottish Parliament. For some reason, representation of Scottish agriculture has been ceded to Westminster. The president of the Scottish National Farmers Union, Jim Walker, gave evidence to the Rural Development Committee of the Scottish Parliament on 18 September. To summarise, he expressed extreme concern about the inability of the UK Government and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to lobby effectively on Scotland's behalf with respect to foot and mouth and agriculture in general. A concordat between the Scottish Executive and the UK Government gives jurisdiction over Scottish agriculture to the UK Secretary of State. Has the Minister's Department received any representations from Scottish Executive Ministers about amending the concordat to ensure effective representation for Scottish agriculture in Brussels?

11.55 am

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on securing this important debate. As I mentioned in an intervention, I am the author of early-day motion 256 in support of the YHA in its present straits. Like my hon. Friend, I am a lifelong member of the YHA and, as the Member of Parliament for High Peak, I have seven youth hostels in my constituency, which may be a record. I wish to describe my own experiences with the YHA, in order to stress the importance of the movement.

As a young boy, I went with my youth club to Malham and Linton—which I believe is in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry)—in the Yorkshire dales. Those were the first youth hostels that I visited. Later, I went to the Isle of Man, Wales and the Lake district. As a teenager, I found independence by taking my first solo holidays in the Cotswolds and on the Isle of Arran, courtesy of the YHA. I discovered a love of inter-tidal ecology at the YHA field centre at Borth. Years later, I went back to the facility as a teacher. For four years, as a student, I spent all my summers and Easter vacations working for the YHA on the Isle of Wight and in London as a warden. During that time, perhaps more than at any other stage of my life, I met people from different walks of life, countries and backgrounds who became friends for life. It was a wonderful kaleidoscope, not just of young people, as indicated by the YHA's name, but of people of every age group.

The YHA is a truly phenomenal organisation, which spreads around the world and has a great tradition. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw said, the YHA was formed 70 years ago at about the same time as the Ramblers Association, the Workers Educational Association and the co-operative movement. Many of the same people were involved in those campaigns and issues. The YHA is a major player in providing not only holidays but important learning experiences, covering social skills and development right through to biology and geography at degree level through its field courses. The organisation has moved with the times, contrary to the image that it might have. Some hostels now offer family rooms and wine with meals and do not insist on lights out by 11 o'clock. They are broadening their base and attractions and doing wonderful things for vulnerable people.

The past year has been a complete catastrophe for the youth hostels movement. The way in which the hostels were hit was disastrous in many cases. In my constituency, field centres were closed, staff were laid off, casual staff who would normally work for the summer were not employed, as the 22 million visitors a year to the Peak district reduced considerably, especially in the most rural areas and among those who might otherwise have used youth hostels.

The movement has a modernisation programme to bring its buildings up to scratch for the 21st century. That includes new facilities and making the hostels accessible to a wider range of people. All those investment programmes are in jeopardy. The only way that the YHA can obtain capital is by selling its capital assets—the youth hostels. In order to raise funds, the association would have to eat away at its own foundations.

As the YHA is a major player and the major not-for-profit player in the rural economy, and because it does not have the cash assets that, for example, a hotel chain may have stored away and deals with introducing young people to unique experiences that they would not otherwise have, I hope that the Minister will take away from this debate the message of early-day motion 256. I hope that he will do whatever can be done to help the Youth Hostels Association at its moment of need.

12.1 pm

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I thank the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) for securing this debate. He does so as the foot and mouth crisis has dropped from the media's attention following 11 September and other events. Nevertheless, long after the worse cases have disappeared, the disease will continue to affect tourism and related industries. Last Thursday, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs gave an interview to the *Financial Times* in which she warned against farmers believing that the devastating crisis was totally over. The rural communities face not only continuing economic fallout in the immediate aftermath of the disease but the possibility that a further outbreak may occur.

The debate has been primarily about economic aspects other than farming, so I shall leave farming to one side because time is short. The British Tourist Authority estimates that the combined effects of foot and mouth and the events of 11 September could result in the loss of £2.5 billion-worth of inbound tourism this year. Thousands of rural tea shops, pubs, museums and guest houses have seen their profits slashed as visitors have chosen to stay away from the countryside. I am glad to say that in my constituency, which is a seaside resort, we have benefited. Now that people have seen the joys of Weston-super-Mare, they will be returning in their droves in future.

Farming and tourism are not the only sectors that have been affected—so have many other businesses such as marquee hirers and camping equipment suppliers. The important point made by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) is that the effects are going to be felt through the winter, spring and even into the summer. Indeed, one of the main recommendations of the rural taskforce report, which was published on 18 October, was to

> "help ensure the survival of rural businesses through the coming winter months, when incomes and reserves are likely to be at their lowest ebb".

Yet any farmer or rural business owner hoping for the Chancellor to throw them a much-needed lifeline during last Tuesday's pre-Budget report would have been gravely disappointed. Was the announcement that foot and mouth disease had resulted in a £2.5 billion bill supposed to make struggling farms and businesses feel a bit better? Were they supposed to feel grateful for and satisfied with the little that they had been given?

The truth is that many support schemes introduced by the Government have not fully met businesses' needs. Many businesses have been unable to claim support under the hardship rate relief scheme, for example, as they do not fall within designated rural areas. That important issue has affected parts of my constituency and others, and includes businesses located in small rural market towns, which have seen their trade drop as a result of outbreaks nearby.

Alun Michael: It is worth making the point that businesses outside the designated areas where the Government have given additional support to the local authorities can apply for business rate relief. We have sought to mitigate the impact, particularly on rural local authorities, which bore an especially heavy burden as a result of trying to help businesses in their areas.

Brian Cotter: I thank the Minister for that intervention. Hopefully, it will help to highlight the fact that there is some support for businesses outside the 37 designated areas, although we might say not enough.

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman misses the point. The help is for the local authorities, which can provide help for businesses. We have sought to mitigate what would otherwise have been a very unfair burden on rural local authorities, because the heaviest demands fall on them.

Brian Cotter: My comment related to other factors. For example, Lord Haskins's report called for a £40 million support scheme, yet the Government came

[Brian Cotter]

up with £24 million. When we go into the scheme in depth—I am taking time away from what I was going to say—we find points that need to be raised.

The small loans guarantee scheme was held up as a major part of the recovery package and has been extended, but the scheme needs to be properly used. As at 18 October, a little while back, only 18 new loans had been taken up, which is of great concern. The business recovery fund, which was administered by regional development agencies and local business links to provide grants to suffering businesses, allowed an element of flexibility. Delivery at local level meant that local needs and circumstances could be taken into consideration, and small businesses had the opportunity to talk them through with advisers. However, that has caused its own problems, with discrepancies across the regions in the way in which the process has been delivered through the RDAs.

The criticism most frequently aimed at that form of relief is that the application process is far too cumbersome and takes far too long to process. As of 3 October, the south-west RDA had approved 775 applications, but 3,001 were still being processed. A further criticism is that the scheme does not cater for the short-term cashflow needs of small firms. EU state aid rules come into play.

The rural taskforce report reflects that view:

> "Whilst some have argued that assistance should be targeted primarily on helping businesses to change and adapt, many small businesses have made the straightforward plea that their priority is cash to survive through the winter. Tourism businesses are likely to recover provided visitors return in spring: the risk is that many may not survive until then."

Will the Minister, as a priority, respond formally to that report, to which there has not been such a response? Will he make changes to the business recovery fund to speed things up? Will he assure us that any funds given to RDAs can be retained? The hon. Member for Bassetlaw and others referred to the Youth Hostels Association. I am sure that, as a former chair of the YHA, the Minister will have great sympathy.

12.9 pm

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on obtaining the debate. How shrewd he was in applying for a debate on the financial impact of the foot and mouth crisis in the countryside and then sneaking in a speech largely about youth hostels. I do not mean that in any way as a criticism. He enhanced the prospects of his debate being secured, and I congratulate him on that. I first used a youth hostel many years ago, during the premiership of Harold Wilson, whom some Government supporters might not remember was a Labour Prime Minister—unless he has been airbrushed out of history.

Like a number of hon. Members, I want to broaden the discussion. In the past 10 months, some of us in this Chamber have attended numerous debates and statements on foot and mouth. I initiated such a debate in this Chamber on 27 March, and on 21 November my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) secured a debate on farming in the north-west. Several Members have talked about the need to strike a balance in today's debate between farming, rural businesses and the wider countryside, and it is true that this is not an either/or situation. In all the debates that I have attended, most hon. Members have recognised that the countryside must be viewed as a coherent whole. Certainly in my constituency, the countryside is entirely interdependent. Farming—we should refer to it as the food industry—small businesses, shops, garages, pubs, restaurants, country sports, and the holiday homes to which many hon. Members have referred all form part of the wider aspect of tourism. Moreover, there is the future of the environment—a subject on which we have not had time to touch.

Some hon. Members seem to believe that even farming is largely marginal. They turn to statistics that show that, according to every conceivable criterion, farming has declined in the past 20 or 30 years. However, on looking at the facts a little more closely, one comes up with some interesting propositions. For every person employed directly in farming in Norfolk in 1967, four were employed indirectly. Today, for every person directly employed, 14 are indirectly employed. The distinction between farming as it was narrowly defined and its broader aspects is therefore very strong. Any downturn in farming has a major impact on the countryside. Although this is perhaps not the time for such a debate, we should recall a point that was dramatically made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry): if we remove the farming community and the animals from the countryside, it will change dramatically in many areas.

It is worth flagging up the fact, as several hon. Members have, that farming is experiencing one of the worst recessions of the past 70 years. There are many reasons for that, in addition to the impact of foot and mouth. In 2000, farming income fell by 27 per cent. Such a fall had a knock-on effect for many of the small businesses in the wider farming community to which hon. Members have referred.

Last week, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the total cost of the foot and mouth epidemic has risen to £2.7 billion. The overwhelming majority of such costs relate to compensation paid directly to affected farmers, to cleaning up and to eradicating foot and mouth. A much smaller sum has been given over to rural businesses. By any means, £2.7 billion is a large amount of money, but I should point out one problem to the Minister. Although some have been compensated directly, many others in the farming community and in rural businesses who were indirectly affected, but who none the less suffered a major loss of income, have been unable to get any recompense. Indeed, many farmers and small rural businesses have said that it would have been better if their areas had been directly affected by foot and mouth, and if they had been closed down, because that way they would have received compensation. The indirect impact is enormous.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon made the wise point that, ironically, the crisis will occur during the winter. Many rural businesses that build up a cash reserve in the spring, summer and autumn are now in serious trouble, as the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Brian Cotter), who represents a seaside resort, knows. When the Minister considers ways in which he can help the countryside, I urge him to tell the Treasury that the crisis has not gone because foot and mouth appears to be under control.

I welcome the Minister's statement on the Inland Revenue's action on VAT, which should make certain that small businesses in the countryside are given as big a breather as possible in which to recover. We are not discussing a free holiday that will go on for ever, but given the crisis, an early attempt by the Treasury to collect money owed would result in many businesses going bankrupt before they had had a chance to recover in the spring.

A report by Dun and Bradstreet in June 2001 showed that the number of UK businesses being liquidated or going bankrupt between April and June rose by 15 per cent. on the previous quarter. According to the Countryside Agency, the tourist industry could lose between £1 billion and £2.3 billion in 2001. That sum of money almost equals the total amount that the Treasury has paid out on foot and mouth. We are discussing a massive hidden cost to both the countryside and the tourist industry.

Mr. Salter: I agree with the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's argument, but will he clarify whether, as Opposition spokesman on these matters, he supports the class action being waged by the UK rural business campaign and its demand for £5.1 billion in compensation from the Government?

Mr. Simpson: That organisation has every right to seek legal compensation. Along with many in the countryside community and consumers, I do not follow the supposedly clear-cut audit trail of how the Government dealt with the crisis. Many Members, including my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) and myself, who were in the crisis areas and saw MAFF's reaction to swine fever know that there was no stately process in which a crisis was dealt with by following established procedures. There was crisis management on the scale of the retreat from Dunkirk rather than a well-organised drill parade. Several organisations will seek compensation, and the law will decide the matter.

Does the Minister agree that to revitalise the countryside—we must look to the future—the Government must do three major things? First, they must restore the public's confidence that the food that they eat is healthy. Secondly, they must restore the public's confidence in both the viability of the farming community and in the assertion that our food industry will not be exported. Thirdly, the public's confidence in the Government must be restored. Even when one takes account of the problems of MAFF and DEFRA—I know that many officials and vets worked hard—there was chaos and confusion. We do not yet have any form of analysis on the outbreak of foot and mouth or what went wrong in dealing with it. As many hon. Members have said, internal, non-public inquiries are frankly insufficient.

Foot and mouth disease must be eradicated and policies and procedures must be put in place to deal with any further outbreaks. If we do not learn that lesson, we will back here having the same debate in two years' time.

Finally, we must ensure that bureaucratic barriers to rural businesses are removed. Many small businesses have to go through a paper chase—an obstacle course—to get help of one kind or another. If the Government can simplify that, they will go a long way to meeting the needs of the countryside as it recovers from foot and mouth.

12.20 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): If, as he suggests, the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) desires to increase confidence in the Government, he and his colleagues could help by supporting the steps that we are taking to deal with the enormous problems arising from foot and mouth disease, as well as the disease itself, and by being as positive as many of the organisations that represent farmers and the tourism industry, with which we are working closely.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on securing the debate. He is one of the increasing number of Labour Members of Parliament who represent rural constituencies. His speech was well informed and passionate, and it was matched by many excellent contributions. The debate may have been too short, given people's obvious interest in the topic.

In the brief time available to me, I want to concentrate on the issues that my hon. Friend raised, especially those relating to tourism and the YHA. In focusing on the financial impact of foot and mouth disease, we must emphasise that that discussion takes place against the background of its impact on individuals, families and communities. The pre-Budget report given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor shows that the national economic impact was much less than we had feared. Although that does not diminish the severe local impact in many areas—notably parts of Cumbria, Devon and North Yorkshire—the debate should be placed in that context.

To some extent, people are helping themselves. On Saturday, I was privileged to take part in a conference called by the Bishop of Hereford, in which many people, especially farmers, talked about—

Mr. Burnett: Will the Minister give way?

Alun Michael: I will not, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me. He has intervened several times, and many hon. Members made considered comments to which I want to respond.

The bishop's conference was positive, because it was about people saying what they were doing to rebuild their businesses and to succeed in the long-term future. I have also been handed a copy of a report from a conference called "Winning Ways" organised by the National Farmers Union and the Country Landowners Association in the west midlands, which makes a positive contribution to facing up to the challenges that lie ahead.

The crisis is one partly of farming and partly of tourism, and I do not want to play down either. Hon. Members have rightly stressed the balance between the two. However, in financial terms, net of compensation, tourism suffered even worse than farming. One of the few benefits of the crisis is that it has driven home the interdependence of rural economies and communities. Visitors come to see the landscape, much of which is

[Alun Michael]

maintained by farmers. If they stay away, the village shop and the village pub risk closure. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw said, youth hostellers contribute to the viability of both those institutions.

In recent months, the interdependence between tourism and agriculture has been reflected more than previously in the remarks of farmers, who say that they understand it much more now than they did before. The activities of the rural taskforce, which I have chaired since June, has been conducted in an atmosphere of working together in the long-term interests of rural communities. We will respond to the points made by the rural taskforce and in the Haskins report, including the issue of rate relief, which was raised during the debate.

Let us be clear about what the Government have done to help. We sought to control the disease as quickly and effectively as we could. It is too soon to claim complete success, but there have been no cases since 30 September, which is encouraging. Crucially, we have sought to get visitors back to the countryside. I think that the YHA itself has said that getting people back, and getting business back to normal, is needed more than anything else. Ever since I took up my role in June, that has been my top priority. I have been to places such as the Lake district with representatives of rural tourism, including from the YHA, to try to get that message across.

The clear views of Lord Haskins and the rural taskforce are that, although businesses need help through the winter, trade is likely to pick up, and businesses to recover, come the spring. If there is time, I will return to general issues of business support but I first want to spend a few minutes on the points about the YHA that formed such an important part of my hon. Friend's introduction.

I was pleased to hear him place such importance on the contribution that a youth hostel can make to the local economy, and to hear him balance that with the contribution made to those who stay there, especially those who are deprived in various ways or come from inner-urban communities. I do not have a pecuniary or personal interest to declare, but I have used hostels with my family and as a youth leader, and I endorse my hon. Friend's comments. I sought to bring a youth hostel to my Cardiff constituency as part of the exercise in joining up town and country. As a result, I was for some years an honorary vice-president of the YHA. I resigned in order to avoid a conflict of interest when I took up my present post.

Since September, I have received about 200 letters from hon. Members explaining their concern about the future of the Youth Hostels Association. I have no doubt that the problems are serious. It was the national organisation worst affected by footpath closures because so many of its hostels are in places where people mainly go to walk. Some hostels such as Black Sail, which a group of Members visited a few years ago, can only be reached on foot.

The YHA's estimated loss of £5 million on an annual turnover of £30 million is a measure of the impact on it. That is a serious blow, especially in view of its continuing need to invest in upgrading hostels to meet modern expectations. Like me, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has had close contact with the YHA since early in the outbreak. We have been able to offer it limited help and advised it on how to access existing funds.

We have visited hostels to publicise footpath opening. We have also changed the rules of the business recovery fund, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw said, so that individual hostels can apply to regional development authorities for help, a point that I drew to the attention of RDAs when we made the announcement. There have been discussions between RDAs and the YHA and a number of applications are in process. Some have already succeeded.

We are involving the YHA closely in our plans to encourage visitors back to the countryside as part of our effort to work with the tourism industry as a whole. This is not simply the Ministry making announcements, but an exercise in working together. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will reopen one of the YHA's flagship hostels after renovation: Hartington Hall, a beautiful 17th-century building in the White Peak. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and I plan to visit more hostels and will at least contribute through our bed night fees, if nothing else.

Set against a loss of £5 million, that is, of course, modest. The YHA is still at real risk of having to sell hostels to make ends meet. We are carefully examining the rural taskforce's recommendations that we should find further ways of helping. The matter is not straightforward, as earlier discussions about compensation made clear. Many industries would like compensation for loss of income. Compensation has been paid only for the loss of animals that were culled in the attempt to eradicate FMD. I cannot make promises, but I hope that the YHA will not take precipitate action. None of us wants the association to sell hostels and we shall keep talking to it about how to work together to avoid the need for such a consequence.

Several points were made during the debate about help for businesses. For example, the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) referred, during a thoughtful contribution, to the imagination with which many businesses and communities responded to—

Mr. Win Griffiths (in the Chair): Order. We now come to the debate on rhizomania in East Anglia.

Rhizomania (East Anglia)

12.30 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this matter. Rhizomania and its associated problems do not occupy the forefront of every Member's mind. The Minister must be wondering what he has done wrong to have to be in the Chamber for so long today to listen to debates on disease problems facing the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): Westminster Hall debates often provide an excellent opportunity to educate Ministers as well as other Members and it is a pleasure to respond to the right hon. Lady. I have had to become engaged with an issue that had not previously come to my attention, as she rightly suggested. However, the result is that I understand precisely why she raised the matter today.

Mrs. Shephard: I thank the Minister and I hope that he feels the same at the end of my contribution.

The position produced by DEFRA's consultation proposals is causing extreme concern among farmers and growers in East Anglia. The Minister, who will be an assiduous reader of *Farmers Weekly*, will know that that is causing concern across the board in the agricultural community. I hope that we shall have a positive response from the Minister today.

I shall give an explanation of rhizomania. It is a highly damaging disease of sugar beet, which reduces crop yields and persists in the soil for many years. Since the first discovered outbreak in the country in Suffolk in 1987, the United Kingdom has enforced a statutory containment policy authorised by a protected zone status for the whole country, supported by the European Commission and the plant health division of the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, now DEFRA. The policy of a combination of protected zone status and containment has worked well, thanks to a highly responsible attitude on the part of the industry. In sharp contrast with other parts of Europe where the disease is more or less endemic, less than 0.1 per cent. of UK arable beet land has become infected by rhizomania. In France, more than 50 per cent. is affected and in Holland the infection rate is well over 90 per cent.

Since 1987, there have been 211 outbreaks of the disease: 200 in Norfolk and Suffolk, and many of them in my constituency. After the first outbreak, we had a rash of outbreaks in South-West Norfolk, which made us feel like the rhizomania capital of the UK. Of those outbreaks, 68 have occurred this year. That may have caused anxiety among Ministers, but most of us realise that the high incidence of outbreaks this year is due to the exceptionally late crop planting because of bad weather in the spring. This year, by any standards, is atypical.

The low level of infection in the United Kingdom has not happened by accident. The first outbreaks in Norfolk and Suffolk, as I remember only too well, were accompanied by draconian containment measures. They caused hardship not only for all those involved in the sugar beet industry—farmers, growers, hauliers, processsors and so on—but because of the requirements for care over soil movements by potato and carrot growers, nurserymen and strawberry growers. At that time, MAFF Ministers kept in close touch with farmers and growers in the industries affected industries and, over time, adjusted and adapted containment policies to ease, where possible, conditions that made economic survival difficult for sugar beet people and others. Because of the hardship and the realisation of everyone concerned that the consequences of rhizomania were grave for the whole industry, since 1987, as the Minister knows much effort has been put into the development of disease-resistant beet varieties that are commercially attractive. It is universally recognised that that is the only proper and viable way forward.

For years, MAFF's plant health division—now under DEFRA—has worked with British Sugar and the National Farmers Union on plant development. So far, one variety, called "concept", has been produced that is economical viable and climate tolerant. Comparable varieties should be available to farmers in two to three years' time. As far as the industry was aware, Ministers supported that on-going work and its timetable, and they were amazed to hear, through the consultation document that DEFRA recently issued on the future of protected zones, that Ministers intended to ditch the policy of containment, apparently in response to demands from the European Commission. On 30 November, *Farmers Weekly* asked:

> "Why is DEFRA surrendering in the war against the sugar beet disease rhizomania? Instead of fighting on to defend the UK's rhizomania-free status it has decided to concede the title. The decision will prove a disaster, not just for sugar beet growers throughout the UK, but for many other producers. It is difficult to over-estimate the key contribution sugar beet has made to the profitability of many arable units."

Farmers and growers would heartily agree. The Minister and his Government are presiding over the worst crisis in agriculture since the first world war. In Norfolk, where 30 per cent. of the UK sugar beet crop is grown, 10,000 jobs depend on beet production and processing alone. In August, Larking Gowen, a Norwich-based firm of accountants, produced a report of Norfolk farm incomes in the year 2000. It makes gloomy reading and points out that farm incomes fell by 50 per cent. against the previous year. The average profits of the surveyed farms were substantially less than a farm employee's wages. Tenant farmers were found to be working to pay the rent, while living off capital. Farm incomes are at their lowest for 60 years; the strong pound, world commodity prices and the effects of swine fever, foot and mouth, BSE and bad weather conditions have taken their toll.

In that sea of problems, sugar beet has, in many cases, been the lifebelt keeping farmers afloat. The industry is still reeling from the implications of the Government's "everything but arms" initiative. Now, they have signalled their intention to deal the industry another body blow by abandoning the containment policy, which has been a success and is affording the necessary time to the industry to develop a proper long-term solution. The industry wants to know why that is happening, and I hope that we will get answers today.

According to the DEFRA consultation document, the UK's protected zone status for rhizomania comes to an end in March 2002. Decisions are therefore needed to

> "continue, modify or end this status."

[Mrs. Shephard]

If those are the choices, the Minister must explain why he does not propose to continue the status in the consultation document, but only to modify or end it. Why has he prejudged the issue? Why does he not put to the industry all the choices that his document lays out?

The document claims that there are doubts in Europe over whether the UK is meeting the legal requirements for protected zone status. That is not borne out by my most recent information from the Commission, which I will come to in a moment. His other claim, that there is

> "a reluctance in the industry to use the new varieties until they perform as well ... as susceptible varieties"

can be totally countered by the self-evident fact that he is not willing to allow the industry the two or three years needed to complete its work and perfect those varieties. The real reason, as is becoming usual with this Government, is that they are not willing to devote resources to agriculture. I hope that the Minister will come clean on that matter.

For information, I will briefly lay out the consultation proposals as they stand. They are: first, to maintain a protective zone in the UK outside Norfolk and Suffolk; secondly, to drop protective zone status for the whole country; and thirdly, to retain protective zone status for selective non-beet-growing areas, such as Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and certain parts of England, to provide

> "a benefit for growers and exporters of seed potatoes."

I hope that the Minister is aware that his decision to exclude the proposition that protective status should continue, has caused extreme disquiet in the industry. Meetings held by the NFU in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire over the past few days have produced very little support for the strategy. As the regional NFU director, Sandra Nichols is reported in the *Eastern Daily Press* as saying,

> "We feel the industry has been short-changed, because this option does not form part of the consultation process."

The premise for the Minister's stance—that there are doubts in Europe that the UK is meeting the legal requirements for protective zone status—was comprehensively countered at a meeting between Robert Sturdy MEP and the EU Agriculture Commissioner's chef de cabinet last week. Mr. Sturdy was told firmly that Europe

> "has no interest in pressing for a change to the country's disease status."

Alun Michael: Will the right hon. Lady tell us where and when that meeting took place?

Mrs. Shephard: I certainly will. Speaking to the *Eastern Daily Press* on 1 December, 2001—and I can give the Minister the full report—Mr. Sturdy said,

> "I understood that the industry is pushing at an open door. If Britain wants to continue with the existing arrangements, Europe is not very concerned. That is what I have been told."

I would be very happy to give the Minister the full cutting so that he can take up the matter.

Alun Michael: We have seen the cutting and made inquiries about it. We are reliably informed that the meeting did not take place as described in the cutting.

Mrs. Shephard: It is up to the Minister to convince us of that. Mr. Sturdy is a perfectly honourable man, he took the trouble to have the meeting and he has asked farmers and growers to write directly to the Commission. It will be interesting to see the nature of the replies that they receive, given the information that he has given to them.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): There is of course a reverse side to that and it would interesting if the Minister could categorically say that the Commission had asked the UK Government to come forward with these proposals.

Mrs. Shephard: No doubt the Minister will come to that in his remarks, but perhaps at the same time he should dispel any doubts that might have been caused by a letter from DEFRA to those invited to the rhizomania technical review meeting on 28 November. The letter quite clearly stated:

> "the decision not to continue with the whole protective zone is based on the legal position."

In other words, the decision has been taken, so why are we having the consultation anyway? I expect that the Minister will want to clarify that.

I turn now to the proposal that a protective zone should be maintained in the UK, outside Norfolk and Suffolk. I point out in passing that proposition No. 3—that there should be protected zone status for Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and parts of England that are important for growing and exporting seed potatoes—rings a bit hollow in East Anglia, which is also important for growing and exporting seed potatoes.

I wonder whether the Minister knows how the potato industry works in East Anglia. I wonder whether he knows about the importance of field vegetables, or of the investment made in recent years by farmers in irrigation schemes to grow potatoes and field vegetables. Does he realise that his proposal would result in enormous extra costs for those farmers and possibly in the failure of their businesses?

What advice does he have for such farmers about the arrangements that they should make if they grow potatoes and other vegetables in Norfolk and Suffolk that then have to be taken to Cambridgeshire for processing? That movement is far from uncommon. Three quarters of Norfolk's total potato production is moved across the county border for packing and processing. If we accept the proposition to exclude Norfolk and Suffolk from the protection zone, how will that arrangement be policed? Will teams, or swarms, of DEFRA inspectors examine the loads of vegetables that travel across the border? What will be the costs to producers? That has not been thought through.

What would happen to the valuable seed potato export business of, for example, Mr. Tony Bambridge, who farms in Marsham in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson)? Mr. Bambridge ships seed potatoes worth £150,000 to the Canaries and Europe. He said:

> "If we lost our protected zone status in these two counties we'll lose the export business to the Canaries."

He added that the Canaries, which take about 120 tonnes of locally grown seed would refuse further orders, because they will not accept seed from non-protected zones. What advice does the Minister have for Mr. Bambridge? Has he taken into account the proposals' effect on the rural economy, which has been devastated over the past five years?

We heard in the previous debate about the close relationship between farming and the rural economy. We heard an interesting illustration of the interrelationship in Norfolk, in which we were told that for every one job directly concerned with agriculture, there were 14 others in the broader rural community. Nowhere can that be more true than in sugar beet, and the production of potatoes and field vegetables. The processing, packing, haulage, labelling and marketing of those products account for a huge sector of the rural economy in East Anglia. There is fear that if we simply ditch the current protected zone status without carefully considering the implications, it will threaten that rural economy further.

I am sure that the Minister is aware of my next point, but I will rehearse it because it will be good to have it on the record. Many farmers have diversified into vegetable production, which is the kind of change that the Government claim to support. At least one of the propositions would pull the rug from under that diversification yet again. The Minister will say, correctly, that he is consulting on the proposals and that the consultation will last until 14 January. I hope that he will say also that DEFRA will be required to define its stance at a meeting well before 14 January—in other words, next week.

What stance will DEFRA take in advance of the consultation's completion? I do not know, but the Minister today has the chance to explain it and allay the industry's fears. As a member of a listening Government, will he undertake not only to listen but to hear what farmers and growers are saying? Will he place what he hears into the wider context of the despair and frustration felt by all in agriculture and in the broader rural community at the lack of understanding? Will he listen, hear and change his stance? We await his response.

12.49 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I congratulate the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) on initiating our debate on a difficult and intractable problem that seriously affects farmers in her constituency. She has left me little time to reply, but I shall do my best.

I acknowledge the experience, both from her ministerial and her constituency work, that the right hon. Lady brings to the debate. She has considerable knowledge of the sugar industry, but she is wrong to suggest that the industry should have been surprised by the terms of our consultation. This is a good example of the value of Westminster Hall debates. Rhizomania means little to most people, but it has the potential to do harm to an important section of the farming industry. It requires sensible and constructive debate.

The right hon. Lady will appreciate that the topic falls outside my portfolio, but I have discussed it in detail with my colleague, Lord Whitty, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who has personally engaged with the issue and wants to make progress. We appreciate that farmers in particular areas, such as the right hon. Lady's part of the country, are adversely affected, but we must face up to realities.

One view, expressed last week in *Farmers Weekly*, is that we should vigorously defend the country's rhizo-free status. That is everyone's sincere desire, but how can we realistically argue for such status when we are clearly not rhizo-free? The right hon. Lady referred to an article in the *Eastern Daily Press*, which suggested that Europe was not worried about this country's disease status. We were concerned about those remarks. Firstly, plant health falls under DG Sanco and is therefore the responsibility of Commissioner David Byrne. Officials here spoke to Commission staff, who confirmed that no such meeting occurred and that no such statement about the protection zone has been made.

I must make it clear that we are not ditching anything. The protection zone can be proposed only by the Commission, which is not prepared to do so because of the lack of support by other member states. I can provide the details. Our consultation was a response to that clear position.

The right hon. Lady made passing reference to the "everything but arms" initiative, but it was not our initiative. Only last week Lord Whitty was congratulated by farmers on the good result in Europe to protect the sugar beet sector.

Mrs. Shephard: Will the Minister give way?

Alun Michael: The right hon. Lady has left me little time to respond to a long debate.

Mrs. Shephard: I gave way twice.

Alun Michael: Very well, but it will diminish the reply even further.

Mrs. Shephard: Several points could be made. First, I doubt whether the Government would have done anything about "everything but arms", were it not for the intervention of the official Opposition. Secondly, does the Minister agree that the right way forward for the sugar beet industry is to develop disease-free varieties? Will his proposals afford the industry enough time to complete that necessary work?

Alun Michael: The right hon. Lady's signature on the early-day motion proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) demonstrates some support on the Opposition side for our approach. However, she diminishes her case by seeking to make it partisan, just as she diminishes the time available for my reply.

The problem is at its greatest in Norfolk and Suffolk, but we need to take into account the needs of growers in the rest of the country. That is evident in the options on

[Alun Michael]

which DEFRA is currently consulting the industry. DEFRA set out the position as realistically as possible in a consultation document published last month. We need to engage the industry on how best to move forward. I hope that that debate will help the industry to respond. Lord Whitty and our officials will work with the industry to develop the best possible strategy.

We would be more than happy to listen to alternatives to the three suggested options, but the right hon. Lady well knows that the debate on how to deal with rhizomania has gone on for years. No one has yet come forward with a magic wand. The Government's role, as it was when the right hon. Lady was a Minister, is to help an industry that rightly prides itself on its efficiency and competitiveness to deal with a serious problem that has dogged it for years.

The solution is neither simple nor a matter for the Government alone, and the industry must continue to be proactive in coping with the problem. There is no quick fix. The suggestion that the UK has a chance of defending its rhizo-free status does not move the debate forward, because it cannot seriously be suggested that that is a realistic option. All protected zones are subject to annual reports that suggest their continuation, and those reports are reviewed to see whether the status is justified. Our status is due to expire at the end of March 2002, so we are reviewing future options.

Areas in which the disease is established—where it is known to occur and where official eradication measures have proved ineffective for at least two successive years—cannot be recognised as protected zones. Rhizomania must be considered to be established in the UK, especially in Norfolk and Suffolk. We fought hard for the last two extensions of the whole zone, and several member states have made it clear that they will not accept any further extension. It is a non-starter to try to negotiate that, which will not come as news to the industry.

The European Commission and most member states have long challenged the validity of the UK's claim to meet the criteria for protected zone status. Nevertheless, officials successfully argued for several extensions between 1993 and now. The last extension was in 1999, and the industry was warned that no further extension would be considered acceptable. That uncomfortable position was made clear in meetings with the industry, which representatives of the National Farmers Union and British Sugar attended, and it was reinforced in subsequent correspondence.

If an outcome is desirable but not achievable, it does no one any favours to ignore reality. That is why Lord Whitty made it clear that standing still is not an option. The ideal way forward would be to develop an eradication programme to combat this degenerative disease. The argument is that if the disease can be isolated, which it can, it should be possible to eradicate it. However, neither the Government nor the industry have yet identified a way to do so without restrictions that would totally disrupt the industry. For some years, the industry and the Government have worked together to manage the disease, and they were doing so when the right hon. Lady was a Minister. She acknowledged that in a 1994 MAFF news release when she said that MAFF's policy was to contain the spread of rhizomania in Britain as far as was practical and reasonable.

That was an accurate and reasonable statement. Even then, the right hon. Lady was not talking confidently about eradication. There is no easy solution. The problem is that the disease is difficult to eradicate, and the immediate challenge is to limit its spread while making progress on other fronts, such as the development and introduction of disease-resistant strains. Given the long period—10 to 15 years—over which the disease develops before symptoms appear, any extension of the disease over the next two or three years will be the result of existing infections rather than any newly introduced infection.

That is why we have proposed three options, of which the right hon. Lady is aware, to maintain a protected zone for the UK outside Norfolk and Suffolk. The first option would end the regulated pest status for rhizomania in Norfolk and Suffolk, which would release some 3,000 growers from regulatory control. The second option would drop the protected zone status for the whole country, which would end official involvement in the disease. Statutory notices would be lifted from the 209 growers who have rhizomania outbreaks on their land. The third option would be to retain protected zone status for selected non-beet-growing areas. Certain areas would retain protected zone status to provide safeguards for exports. Some surveillance would continue to be required in those areas to ensure that rhizomania remained absent and that any growers with outbreaks of the disease on their land would remain subject to statutory notice.

There is no doubt that the industry and Government will have to co-operate and work hard, but neither officials nor the industry have yet found some magic that will change the whole situation. The industry's challenge is to respond as positively and constructively as possible to the consultation document. My ministerial colleagues and I have indicated our willingness to listen to any suggestions. Lord Whitty will certainly fight the UK case in Brussels, but he must show that the industry and the Government have a sensible, united approach that reflects the facts. Everyone must accept that the status quo is not an option. I urge the right hon. Lady to seek to persuade people in her constituency—I have no doubts about the importance of the topic and the effect that it will have on them—

Mr. Win Griffiths (in the Chair): Order. We now come to a debate on house improvement grants.

House Improvement Grants

1 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): It is with pleasure that I initiate the Adjournment debate on house improvement grants in North East Lincolnshire. It is a major issue that has repercussions in other areas but is a particular problem for us. I, my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), with whom I work closely, and councillors have all had representations from people living in unhealthy conditions in damp, substandard accommodation. They live on benefits and are therefore entitled to home improvement grants. People over 60 and vulnerable people—those who belong to excluded groups and whom the Government have a policy to help—who have applied for improvement grants have been told that nothing is available. Indeed, a constituent in despair about his treatment and place on the list told me that he would be dead by the time he got a house improvement grant, if he got one at all. That is not fair or reasonable.

There is a lot of older housing stock in North East Lincolnshire.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): Much of the older stock in my hon. Friend's constituency and in mine is leasehold property that the freeholders have done little to improve. Many leases are expiring, and the result is that the condition of properties in our towns is particularly poor.

Mr. Mitchell: I thank my hon. Friend for that apposite and true comment. That is another subject on which we have stuck together and argued as one. The original leaseholders, many of them members of aristocratic families, often sold leaseholds to companies that use them to extract profit. Those companies do not put anything back. They demand high prices for the sale of the leasehold but have done nothing about the state of the property. That adds to the problem.

The basic problem is that we have so much older housing. We have lots of terraced housing, which was built in the late 19th or early 20th century when Grimsby was a boom town and fishing was expanding rapidly. Some of it was renovated 30 years ago with the help of improvement grants. At that time, under Labour—and the Conservatives, to a lesser degree—the hills were alive with the sound of hammers, as housing was improved everywhere, particularly in Grimsby. However, that only gave it another 30 years of life—that was the intention—and that time is up. That housing stock now needs further improvement to maintain its condition, and many houses were not improved at that time. Deteriorating older housing is a huge problem.

We have a further local problem. North East Lincolnshire council is doing its best in spite of horrendous financial difficulties, which have been caused by the fact that the Government have not been as generous to and supportive of local government as they should be—particularly towards Labour local authorities, of course. I believe that local authorities, which are on the front line in dealings with the electorate and in the battle against exclusion, have been badly treated. Funding has been increased, but new duties have been piled on, including expensive obligations such as best value. As a result, North East Lincolnshire council has been plunged into a financial crisis of a scale that it never faced under the Tories. We have had to envisage and carry through cuts that were never imposed on us by a Conservative Government.

Leisure services have practically gone. The national fishing heritage centre, of which we are inordinately proud in Grimsby, has had to close for the winter. It is ludicrous for a prize-winning national museum to be closed because there is not enough money to keep it going.

We have had a mass shedding of both officers and employees. The council house renovation programme has been too slow and had too little money in the face of declining stock. It is a horrendous problem and it has affected what the council can do in respect of grants. It is not their fault. It is the Government's fault for not allocating sufficient money to local authorities. Councils carry the can while the Government, with a hypocrisy that has to be seen to be believed—I know that there will be no such hypocrisy from my hon. Friend the Minister today since she knows local government well—tell them, as Lord Falconer did, that they have to provide the service but there is no need for the Government to provide the money for it. Now that is hypocrisy and it is impossible. It is the kind of double-talk that damages relations between central and local government, and particularly damages relations with the electorate.

Another problem is the economic difficulties that the area faces. My area is one of economic disadvantage and has high unemployment. We have less public spending per head—£1,000 a year less than Scotland—yet our unemployment problem is worse.

Shona McIsaac: I do not know whether my hon. Friend noticed in the pre-Budget statement last week that the most disadvantaged wards in this country would be exempted from stamp duty and property transfer. Five of those wards are in our constituencies: two in mine and three in my hon. Friend's. Croft Baker park, north-east marsh and the south wards are the very places where housing stock exists, and the Government have therefore recognised the poverty and the disadvantage of our area in the pre-Budget statement. Yet we cannot seem to translate that into helping our residents with home improvement grants.

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that valid interjection. The Government are doing their best but the concession on stamp duty is not much use to wards like those in our constituencies where house values are so low. We have higher unemployment, dependency and deprivation, and we need help.

Renovating the housing stock is a key part of local renovation. It stimulates the local economy, provides jobs and work, stimulates materials supply and improves people's conditions, particularly single parent families and the old. It must also produce savings in health because a drier and efficiently heated house is a healthier house, so it must cut spending on health and social services. It needs to be a priority, and it is barmy not to give it a higher priority than we have done. I am ashamed that the Government have been less generous than the Conservatives were in that respect.

There is a real problem when it comes to house improvement grants. We have a priority list. To be on that list, people must be living in a house that is unfit and

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needs substantial renovation. They must also be on means-tested benefits, because grants are not handed out promiscuously as they were in the 1970s and 1980s. They are targeted to those on means-tested benefits.

There are 1,150 people on the waiting list; the total cost of renovating their premises at £8,000 a house would be £9.5 million and no funds have been allocated. There are 40 new inquiries a year; last year there were 106 new allocations on the waiting list. I understand from North East Lincolnshire that four people have been on that list since September 1992. No wonder they are beginning to feel that they will be dead before anything is done. It takes 3.6 years, not to get the improvements, but just to get on to the waiting list. What can I say to people who have been waiting since 1992? What prospect can I hold out to them that something will be done?

Demand is rising as stock deteriorates. Word is getting around that no money is available and people are not applying, but as the waiting list increases, less money is allocated. Capital spending guidance on house improvements is £1.6 million when the need is £9.5 million. The allocation for home improvements to those on the list was £160,000, but the demand is for £9.5 million. We need £4.15 million for those in unfit housing and on benefit. We need £2.8 million for those aged over 60 and in an unfit house—a fate that should not be inflicted on old people in North East Lincolnshire or anywhere else. For those aged over 60, on means-tested benefits and in an unfit house, £1.7million is needed to renovate the houses. Those figures do not include disabled facility grants or inquiries from the over-60s, which would cost another £4.6 million. Money is rightly allocated for disabled facility grants—it is ring-fenced—but the demand for those grants is £850,000 above the allocation.

North East Lincolnshire cannot afford to supplement the cases that it accepts because, like most authorities, it does not have the money. Some disabled people are living in conditions that need to be improved but that is not being done, and demand is growing rapidly as the population ages. Even the Member of Parliament is ageing, but the population is ageing even more. About 12 per cent. of our privately owned stock of houses are simply unfit and the total sum needed is £56 million. Too little is being done about that huge problem. The question is what the Government are going to do about it. More money is needed. It is hypocritical to say that North East Lincolnshire can squeeze more spending from its budget—it cannot. It is no use considering equity withdrawal plans, as they are not relevant in an area with low, static house prices and deteriorating stock. Discussion about new initiatives in low-cost loans are not relevant either, as people in the area are too poor to take up such loans, and house values are too low.

It is good to have energy-efficiency measures, but they should be part of home improvement. Energy-efficiency measures cannot be carried out without a home improvement grant and they add £1,100 per property, so another cost is incurred. The only hope of dealing with all those costs is a greater Government allocation to the area. Money should be allocated, tied to improvement grants and dedicated to regenerating the local economy.

The Government are doing very well on our two priorities of education and health; a lot more has been spent and there have been improvements, as most people perceive. However, there is no united policy on housing, which is also a problem sector. There are lots of bitty initiatives but no pulling together, and housing, especially the crucial matter of improving the existing housing stock, is not given priority. It affects not only health but education and the ability to study. The appalling conditions and damp in which some people live make it impossible to study or perhaps even to go to school, which may result in exclusions.

The next comprehensive spending review must give greater priority to housing. There should be four priority areas, not just two, and the last one should be transport. We need a big allocation, but most importantly we need action now. The Government have a major responsibility for the depressing situation in North East Lincolnshire and they must help us. They must stop the double-talk about how it is a local council responsibility and they have allocated enough money—they have not. The Government must help us to cut through all the complexities and give our constituents, who are central to us and to North East Lincolnshire, the good housing conditions in which they deserve to live.

1.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on securing the debate and on the way in which he has represented the interests of North East Lincolnshire. I know that many hon. Members are deeply concerned about the plight of everyone in poor-quality housing, especially the elderly and vulnerable. I certainly share that concern.

All hon. Members present have seen the appalling housing conditions that some people have to tolerate. We find it staggering that such conditions still exist at the beginning of the 21st century and that old people who have served their country live in conditions that they find unacceptable, with leaking roofs and damp. A number of them own their homes, whereas others are leaseholders. My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) has raised that issue separately, and we are all aware of particular problems in that part of the country.

I agree that quality of housing has a fundamental impact on quality of life and that it affects a range of other things that happen to a person. That is why the Government have made improving housing standards a priority. I shall briefly explain what we are doing, particularly about the private sector, because that is really what my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby talked about. I shall start with a few words about our policy in general and then deal with my hon. Friend's area.

Our overall objective is that everyone should have the opportunity to have a decent home. That covers all tenures. I am particularly concerned to ensure that we help the poorest private home owners, especially those who are elderly. Helping people to stay in their own homes is not only economically sensible but, usually, what they want.

It is not true that we have a worse funding record than the Conservatives. When we came to power, we inherited spending plans that would have given us only £1.5 billion for capital investment in housing across all tenures in 1997. We recognised that that was not acceptable, and since then a number of different measures have increased financing. For 2003-04, capital investment will be more than £4 billion. This year, local authorities will receive about £2.3 billion.

I fully recognise, however, that even those sums of money mean that we shall have to make choices. The Government decided in the first instance to focus our attention on the social stock. It is unacceptable that public sector landlords should offer poor-quality accommodation, so we set a target of bringing all social housing up to a decent standard by 2010.

We made two important changes to the financial framework for local authorities. First, we earmarked the sum that each authority needed to keep its housing stock in good repair. This year's sum amounts to about £1.6 billion, which leaves £700 million for other capital spending. Secondly, we gave local authorities discretion over how to use the remaining £700 million. For some, the priority will be investment in new social housing; for others, the top priority will be private sector housing.

Let me now deal with the problems of North East Lincolnshire council. As I looked through all the information about my hon. Friend's area, I thought that there were three particular problems. The first is the scale of unfit private sector stock, which is 12 per cent.—the second highest figure in the region. Secondly, economic restructuring, especially in the port hinterland area, has adversely affected the income of owner-occupiers who are unable to deal with those problems, which is what one would expect to happen. I accept that in many instances the people concerned are elderly. My hon. Friend has previously discussed the housing problems of Grimsby's grannies, and he has discussed them again today. Thirdly, low demand and alternative housing opportunities are undermining the stability and level of investment in some older housing. The council does not believe that the situation is likely to improve, because existing permissions for new build will attract homebuyers away from urban centres, including the port hinterland.

As I mentioned earlier, North East Lincolnshire council has benefited from the national increase in funding, and I shall discuss the problems associated with that later in my speech. When we came to power, the previous Government's expenditure plans provided the council with a housing allocation of £2.37 million for 1997-98, which included £228,000 for the disabled facilities grant. Since then, the allocation has increased to £6.43 million for this year, which includes £333,000 for the disabled facilities grant. The disabled facilities grant has increased, and money provided for housing has risen by 171 per cent. since 1997-98. The council's 2001-02 allocation was up 48 per cent. on that of the previous year, which is more than the national average increase.

We shall shortly announce the allocation for 2002-03. Without giving too much away, I expect there to be good news for North East Lincolnshire for next year. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby suggests that there still will not be enough money to meet the needs of North East Lincolnshire. I am sure that if other hon. Members were here, they would make the same point about their constituencies, especially if they were in the north of Britain.

Local authorities must ensure that they use their resources to best effect. We would all like to allocate more resources, but we have tough choices to make in allocating resources nationally. Local authorities make similar choices at local level, and next year they will have greater discretion in those choices when the single capital pot comes into effect. They will be able to decide how to spend their money, which should enable them to make choices that more accurately reflect local need. I cannot make commitments today in advance of the spending review, but I assure my hon. Friends the Members for Great Grimsby and for Cleethorpes that the need for investment in poor-condition housing is being closely examined as part of the spending review.

That does not mean that we are doing nothing to help now. We are taking several initiatives to deal with the problems identified by my hon. Friend. We are reforming the rules governing how local authorities give grants to home owners. We shall place before the House a proposal for a regulatory reform order to sweep away most of the detailed rules surrounding grants. That will give local authorities, as part of their housing strategies, greater flexibility to help home owners with repairs. For instance, it will allow greater opportunities to offer preferential or interest-free loans. We shall issue guidance on the reforms, which will include detailed help with offering financial advice, loans regulations and, more generally, how the new powers can be used by local authorities. We are also addressing the problems of leaseholders, and my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes is aware of that.

We are taking action to tackle fuel poverty through the home energy efficiency scheme. With a budget of more than £600 million, we expect to reach about 800,000 vulnerable households in England by 2004. Warm home grants of up to £2,000 for heating and insulation are available to the elderly and families with children on benefits.

In some areas, where houses are beyond the point at which they can be repeatedly repaired or renovated, clearance may be the only practical option. We recognise the need to improve the operation of the compulsory purchase and compensation system. Last week we published a new compulsory purchase procedure manual to enable authorities to use their powers more effectively. In the longer term, we have also committed ourselves to streamlining and improving legislation governing compulsory purchase.

Finally, we have increased funding for home improvement agencies. Such agencies are small teams attached to local authorities. They visit the elderly and vulnerable and help them to apply for grants, so that they can continue to live in their own homes. I am pleased to note that there is a home improvement agency in North East Lincolnshire that receives, I believe, £30,000 from the Government.

[Ms Sally Keeble]

However, there is also the question of the responsibilities of local authorities. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby said that he considered it inappropriate for central Government simply to pass the buck, as it were, but I do not see things that way. Central and local government are working together to meet the housing needs of his constituents. Given the needs and the increased resources that we have allocated, it is surprising that the current private sector programme in North East Lincolnshire is only about a quarter of that proposed by the council in its housing investment programme submission for the financial year 2001-02. It is also significantly less than what was achieved in the previous three financial years.

The plans that we have seen for North East Lincolnshire do not appear to account for all the housing resources that one might expect to be available. I have been unable to find out from the local authority why that is, but I shall certainly do so in the coming days. I shall write to my hon. Friend on the matter, so that he has all the information at the Department's disposal.

Mr. Mitchell: I accept that point, but there is a further problem. Housing associations, particularly those involved in the self-build scheme operated by Doorstep, are finding that house prices in North East Lincolnshire are too low to justify new social housing build. We are trapped in a vicious circle, but the fact remains that people often want to start out in, and go on living in, terraced housing. That is the point at issue in today's debate.

Ms Keeble: There is a clear need for a long-term private sector housing strategy, which, given the nature of the population as identified by my hon. Friend, must also include housing for older people. The strategy must also be linked to wider regeneration plans. The Government sent that message in its feedback to the council, which took up the issue in its best value performance plan. The plan mentioned the need to look at an alternative to renovation, given the scale of the problem.

I urge my hon. Friend to talk to the council about how the process can be taken forward. The housing department in his area was recently reorganised and is now on a footing to make such progress. In the longer term, that is the most sustainable and viable way to tackle some of the deep-seated problems that he has identified. Several other local authorities have taken that route, which is the only real alternative to repeatedly patching up houses that are often deteriorating faster than they can be repaired.

Shona McIsaac: Given all the initiatives that my hon. Friend the Minister has mentioned, and given that 12 per cent. of the housing stock in our area is unfit for habitation, when will the stock be improved, so that we can tell the residents who visit us week after week when they will see a solution to their very serious problems?

Ms Keeble: I shall deal briefly with two issues, one of which is the disabled facilities grant to which my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby referred. As he knows, there remains the opportunity to apply for additional funds. Of course, top-up is needed, but the rule applies across the country and it should deal with some of the associated problems.

The best way to offer constituents concrete solutions is for central and local government to work together on a strategy to resolve the problems. That will have to take on board constituents' views to ensure that there is an agreed way forward for their homes. I urge my hon. Friends to do that, and thank them for raising the issues today.

Road Links and Hospital Reorganisation

1.30 pm

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): I am pleased to initiate the debate and to see that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), is the Minister who will reply. I have much respect for her, which increased recently when I discovered that she is a member of the parliamentary tap dancing team. I feel that democracy is in safe hands when Ministers are prepared to make fools of themselves by tap dancing. I applaud that.

I want to analyse a problem with local and national dimensions: the taking forward of hospital reorganisation proposals without much thought being given to the road and transport infrastructure surrounding them. That problem, with its national and local aspect, goes to the heart of joined-up government.

I understand, as does the Minister, the motives for hospital reorganisation. It seems transparent that part of the motivation is financial, which is nothing to be ashamed of. We want to make the best use of resources, and because of economies of scale, hospitals must be reorganised at times. I also understand the strong imperatives concerning clinical demands. Much research has shown that if units and services are concentrated, their success rates are substantially improved. I do not disagree with that, and I see why hospital organisation sometimes has to happen. If it did not, we would be a country of cottage hospitals and only a few main city hospitals.

The Minister, and anyone who studies the issue, will accept, however, that there is a downside. The moment that hospital reorganisation is mentioned, local loyalties come into play. People do not want their services moved from the place where they are used to finding them to another area. There can be suspicion about the motives that might lie behind the reorganisation enterprise. We should be aware that the sole independent Member of Parliament got elected because of misgivings about hospital reorganisation. I express no view on whether those are justified, but simply point out that it is a contentious matter.

Hospital reorganisation, if it involves centralising facilities, often makes individuals more remote from the services that they require and seek. Their travelling times are appreciably lengthened, and their anxiety about what might befall them if they have to make such a journey, especially in an emergency, increases. There are strong arguments to reassure those people. I am told by ambulance services, and I believe them, that when a person is in an emergency situation, the most important thing is the, immediate help that they receive, which is often delivered by paramedics. Once they have got hold of a person, he or she is, in a sense, in safe hands, and travelling distance is not as critical to survival as that first service.

The record of cottage hospitals is not unblemished. They are quaint, pleasant and supported by the local community, but they have not had the clinical outcomes and success rates that some bigger, more anonymous institutions have had. I also accept that, as medicine develops, there is a need for expensive resources not to be distributed everywhere but to be concentrated in the hands of those who genuinely know how to use them. Expertise and equipment must be concentrated.

I recognise that there is a counter-argument to mine. However, any case of this order is substantially weakened if routes, especially those for emergency services, are poor. The maternity service is not actually classified as an emergency service, but I imagine that if I were imminently expecting I would want to get to hospital as quickly as possible and by the shortest and most satisfactory route. Extending routes for such services gives rise to serious concerns.

Another set of anxieties relates to the fact that we have an increasingly ageing population. Evidently, many people in hospital will be of the older generation, but many of the visitors who come to give them the support that is necessary for their recovery also have to make the journey to the hospital. Those facilities, whether by public transport or other routes, are often poor. That is a problem not only in terms of difficulty and inconvenience but in a clinical sense. Without regular visits the patient can often lack the psychological support that is necessary for a complete and satisfactory recovery.

The Minister will probably readily assent to what I have said, because it is a sensible way of looking at things and I know that the Department of Health is mindful of all the factors surrounding any kind of hospital reorganisation, highlights them where necessary and does not shy away from them. However, it probably plays an insufficient role in relation to transport considerations.

I want to draw attention to an example in my constituency, which has undergone a process of hospital reorganisation. At one stage, there was a Southport and Formby district general hospital—one building serving one community. The Southport and Formby NHS trust was merged with the Ormskirk trust because they were thought, as individual trusts, to be too small and incapable of providing the full range of services. Southport is the larger town; Ormskirk is substantial, but more rurally placed in central Lancashire. Of course, Southport and Formby are on the coast.

A contentious review of facilities was carried out by Professor Shields, who suggested that paediatric and maternity services should go to Ormskirk and cardiac services to Southport. That is fine unless one has a baby that needs delivering in Southport or a heart attack in Ormskirk—and not only Ormskirk, as Professor Shields pointed out. Beyond Ormskirk, around Skelmersdale, there is an area served by the Ormskirk trust consisting of a highly deprived group of people who do not have their own transport and lack any easy means of getting to Southport should they wish to visit a cardiac patient there.

Understandably, there was a lot of local opposition to the proposals. The previous MPs for Southport, Matthew Banks and Ronnie Fearn, were from different political parties but unanimous in their opposition. The reorganisation was also opposed in part or in total by the hon. Members for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas)—Formby is in her constituency—and for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), who is similarly affected, and by Sefton and West Lancashire councils.

There was a whole tranche of opposition across the board, but a key theme was transport. I accept that it was not the only issue. For example, a section of opinion took the view that it was fundamentally wrong for

[Dr. John Pugh]

anybody born in Southport not to have the right for their children to be born in Southport, and others were worried about whether services would be enhanced or simply rearranged for purely financial reasons. The hospital trusts were firmly behind the proposals but they, every political representative in the area and Professor Shields, who wrote the report, recognised that transport was a core element in the problem. He stated almost at the beginning of the report:

> "Although the hospitals are over 7 miles apart, public transport by bus is sparse, rail services between the hospitals is non-existent, and the connecting roads poor and frequently congested.

Transport is an issue. There is a road link and it would be silly if I did not own that there is, but it is a poor road designed for agriculture. Tractors often bar the way and in the summer it is flooded with holiday traffic of one sort or another. An ambulance going against the tide would have problems.

At the time of Shields, palliatives were suggested. Suggestions were made about a helicopter being used to take people over the congested road on bank holidays and so on. People talked blithely of a better bus system, but we have seen little evidence of that. The helicopter concept is a poor solution for overcoming transport difficulties because it is expensive and is not used in the winter or at night. Nor is it practicable for people with spinal injuries and injuries of that ilk.

The problem remains. One would like to think that an easy solution is on the horizon and I am soliciting the Minister's support for a move towards a solution. In the past, the routine might have been to go to the Department responsible for transport, point to the general need and stress what was required for it to be sorted out in Westminster. For sound democratic reasons, transport is not dealt with in that way today. Many roads have been de-trunked and that has led to road schemes having to be developed within local transport plans. In the case that we are considering, a local transport plan would be decided by Lancashire county council. I am not suggesting that the council does not want to build a road, but it is not its main priority at the moment. It is considering—I solicit the Minister's support for this—the possibility of an Ormskirk bypass, which would improve the problem for people travelling from Skelmersdale to Southport, but I emphasise that the problem is not such a priority for Lancashire as it is for the hospital system.

I shall not detain the Minister excessively, but I want to solicit support for her Department to make representations to various people, including the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and the Government office for the north-west region. I implore her to use whatever persuasive skills she has with Lancashire county council. However, the Department of Health cannot justifiably walk away from the problem.

The Shields report said at paragraph 8.9.3 that accessibility of the appropriate hospital service would always remain a problem given the paucity of public transport and the congested and poor roads. I do not blame the Department of Health for congested and poor roads, but there is some mileage in the Department's putting its weight behind any proposal to improve the road structure.

I shall add a few strings to that bow. There is a sound regeneration case for a better road and there is a sound operational need case for the hospital to have a better road because junior doctors could use it in times of crisis.

This is a fundamental request to the Minister on a matter that is important to my constituents. Local people have spotted a loophole in current Government arrangements. No doubt, had I been an important member of a Government party in the past and the Department of Health had reconfigured the hospitals in my area, I would sidle up to people or talk confidingly to transport Ministers and something would happen. However, that method is susceptible to serious abuse or miscalculation of priorities. If, after consultation, the Department decrees a national arrangement, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions should have input into what is done about transport. If the Minister responds positively to that request, she will go up further in my estimation.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I genuinely congratulate the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) on securing the debate. He has highlighted the need for a coherent approach to transport and health. The link is not made often enough, yet transport in its widest sense has a huge impact on people's health and well-being. Apart from transport between hospitals, it is also relevant because of pollution and congestion, which we all face every day.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks about my extra-curricular activities. I understand that he has a degree in logic. That may not be as foolish as tap dancing, but I am sure that it is equally enjoyable.

The local and transport planners interact with the national health service in the design of new hospitals and the reconfiguration of existing facilities. The Government set the overall framework in which service enhancements and developments take place, and provide the crucial resources that the NHS needs to facilitate those changes. As the hon. Gentleman accepts, the NHS can never stand still. As technology develops and public expectations increase, services are in a constant state of flux.

People who work in the NHS feel that they are experiencing constant change. That is not necessarily a bad thing because we want to improve the quality of local services. The need to combine quality with access is a challenge, and it is difficult to strike the right balance. In an increasingly complex health system, having every service on everybody's doorstep is no longer a practical proposition. Equally, we must guard against the creation of a huge monolithic organisation, which would be in danger of losing its connection with the local community. It is a difficult balance to strike, but we try to do so all the time.

Local health planners—whether at regional office, trust, or in future, primary care trust level—must strike the right balance between the convenience of local services and the requirement to concentrate services for reasons of excellence, safety and quality. Many needs can and should be met locally. The NHS tends to concentrate on the hospital, the secondary centre or the tertiary specialist centre. However, 90 per cent. of people's interaction with the NHS takes place at primary care level, and increasingly at intermediate care level, so that people can be cared for closer to home. The NHS should work in different ways and is doing so throughout the country as clinical networks provide services closer to people's homes. That may be a future direction for change.

We must take advantage of new technological developments and one of the most exciting is telemedicine. If hospitals are located in different sites and clinicians are treating people from different communities, it is more economical, gives higher quality and fulfils safety requirements for consultants to communicate directly with each other via telemedicine. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that telemedicine is being considered in his two local hospitals. A broadband microwave link has been established between the hospitals so that consultants on one site can assist with treatment at the other. I am told that there is a direct line of sight between the two units, which apparently makes this an ideal location for a pilot scheme to begin to get more people involved in that kind of telemedicine. This may well help. It will not reduce the need for people to travel, but perhaps not as many people will have to travel quite so often if they are able to use the new technology in this way. Clearly there are also worries about changes in configuring services where travelling does present difficulties.

Dr. Pugh: Clearly, in the case of surgical practice, telemedicine can be of some avail. However, in the maternity service, for example, even if a patient wants a medically assisted—not just midwife—delivery for their baby, telemedicine can play no part. They will essentially have to make the journey, and on a narrow and fairly unattractive road.

Ms Blears: I did not say for one moment that there are not certain specialties in which travelling is essential.

However, the requirements for people to travel all the time can be reduced as clinicians change the way in which they practice their specialties. I accept entirely that there are services where travel is a necessity and that people will worry about that. The right strategy is for the health service to work not just with local authorities that are responsible for developing unitary development plans, but with regional authorities that are responsible for transport links across the region. At national level, they can try to work with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to make sure that our national strategy takes health issues on board.

The Department of Health has a responsibility to work at all those levels to try to make sure that connections are made in a very practical way. We need to try to keep people out of hospital as much as we possibly can because that certainly obviates the need for them to travel. Much more emphasis on preventive work and on supporting people in their own homes is a top priority.

Equally, we need to get people out of hospital as quickly as we can. If people are subject to delayed discharge and remain in hospital in acute wards when they no longer need to, there are all the attendant problems that the hon. Gentleman has raised about visitors having to travel in order to support them and to help with their recovery. If we can get people discharged from acute hospitals into intermediate care settings closer to home and then back into their own homes with support, the need for travel will be reduced quite dramatically.

As the hon. Gentleman will know we have allocated £300 million nationally to tackle the problem of delayed discharge and we hope that many more people will be cared for at home rather than lingering in an inappropriate acute hospital setting.

The hon. Gentleman also acknowledged the need for staff to travel as well as patients. The NHS employs over 1 million people. Its infrastructure of buildings is probably the most diverse in western Europe. It operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and nurses doctors therapists and other health care professionals need to get to work and to leave work, often in the middle of the night when public transport may not be available. Road facilities are equally as important to staff.

Whenever we carry out major hospital reconfigurations or build new hospitals, we have to take into account travelling times by public transport and private transport and try to make sure that there is proper car parking, cycle parks and essential access to bus routes in local communities. Planning policy guidance 13 takes into account the need for good transport links in hospital development.

The difficulty is that we never start from a clean sheet and have to look at the situation we are faced with. The hon. Gentleman's constituency has two good local hospitals but pretty poor road links. I understand that the proposal to upgrade the A570 is in fact the number two priority on Lancashire county council's transport plan, and I hope that even if it is not the top priority, being second will mean some action fairly soon.

I am more than happy to say that transport is a key issue in hospital configuration. The Department of Health should be saying to all the parties involved that transport needs to be a priority if we are to make sure that the hospital services are safe and accessible for local people. I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that my Department has no intention of walking away from the situation. We will try to do everything that we can to get the road improved. It is a matter for Lancashire county council, and it is committed to putting it high up its agenda.

The two hospitals have struggled for safety reasons with the new requirements from the royal colleges for accreditation of junior doctors. Professor Shields's report has done us a great service in trying to ensure that the two hospitals are configured in a way that provides a wide range of services but maximises the safety and training requirements for the doctors involved. He recommended protocols on accident and emergency services at both Ormskirk and Southport to ensure that paediatric emergencies could be coped with safely and properly.

Ambulance services in the area have had some recent investment. Mersey ambulances received more than £1 million and Lancashire ambulances £330,000 to try to improve their response rate times. They both meet the national standards for responding to emergencies within eight minutes in 75 per cent. of cases, and are doing an

[Ms Blears]

excellent job. I am told that bus services have improved as well. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will know more than I do, but I am told that the service between Southport and Formby has been reinstated and that scheduled services between Skelmersdale, Ormskirk and Southport have improved. It was suggested that a shuttle bus should be provided, but that would cost about £100,000. The trusts decided that it was not economical but that they would try to improve the bus services between the two hospitals. I know the road myself, as I go to Southport regularly, and there can be a bottleneck in the centre of town. The road should be improved dramatically.

I understand that the ambulance trusts are taking advice on how to improve services by placing their ambulances at appropriate points across the community, rather than being always in ambulance bases. That, too, might limit travelling time. As the hon. Gentleman said, care in the ambulance can sometimes be the key to a good outcome for patients. We have invested in 12 lead ECG machines on ambulances, together with telemedicine links to the hospital, so that we can have immediate diagnoses of people, particularly with heart attacks, and improve survival rates.

The situation outlined by the hon. Gentleman is full of challenges. Professor Shields did his best in his report to reconcile a series of competing interests. What impressed me most about the report was that he went out to experience the transport problems and drove the road himself. Not every consultant or expert that we call in is prepared to test out the system personally. Professor Shields's recommendations were robust and based on real evidence of the situation in the community, and they appear to have the support of all the parties in the area, which is a difficult balance to achieve when people are worried about local hospital services.

Dr. Pugh: I should be wrong if I did not state my exact position. I was opposed to the reconfiguration in the form that it took for reasons other than those of transport, but I recognise that transport was the problem that everybody, including Professor Shields, singled out as a fundamental flaw in the scheme. Professor Shields appears to say that the road should be built, but it is not within his remit to recommend that roads be built. The fact that he drove it and recorded that in his report shows that he expects not the Department of Health but someone to address the problem.

Ms Blears: I dispute the argument that Professor Shields decided that the road was a fundamental flaw. He decided that it was a substantial issue and problem. Nevertheless, his recommendations for reconfiguration took into account wider clinical and service quality issues, not only those of access. The hon. Gentleman, and most Members of Parliament, frequently face the difficulty of trying to reconcile such competing issues within their communities.

We can take several practical measures, as I have outlined. We can try to prevent people from having to go to hospital and get them out as quickly as possible after they have received appropriate care. We can try to care for people and ensure that diagnostic facilities, including test, X-ray and pathology services, are provided as close to home as possible so that the patient does not constantly have to travel to the service. That is fundamental.

If we are serious about designing a system around the needs of patients, we must examine those considerations rather than simply the bricks and mortar. We should consider the services and what suits patients and, if we use a little more imagination and creativity, we can design our services so that people are not faced with the difficult transport problems outlined by the hon. Gentleman. I am glad that he has brought them to our attention and I will do what I can in the Department of Health to try to ensure that the transport issues are addressed.

Once again, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising those important matters on behalf of his constituents.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 5 December 2001

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Public Services

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Ainger.*]

9.30 am

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I call Helen Jones, I wish to explain to the Chamber that there is a problem with the annunciator system. The power is down. When it comes back, there is a danger that it will be at high volume until it can be adjusted. Please do not be scared.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): I open the debate as a member of two unions that recruit in the public sector: the Manufacturing Science and Finance Union and Unison. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak about public services, which are often taken for granted and sometimes criticised. They were neglected for 18 years under the Conservative Government. Nevertheless, they continue to deliver major improvements to people's lives. Despite the problems, those services provide excellent services for the majority of people every day. They represent some of the best aspects of our society, such as a sense of civic responsibility, a commitment to communal action and a belief that we all have a responsibility to one another. I am part of the generation that has always expected good public services. I am also old enough to remember the great changes that they made in people's lives.

It is a cliché to use one's family in a debate, but I shall do so because mine is representative of millions of other families. My grandparents brought up their children in the most appalling poverty. Although they worked hard all their lives, they lived in slum housing and there was no chance for their elder children to stay on at school past the age of 14, let alone to aspire to higher education. My older uncles and aunts still remember what it was like to struggle to pay a doctor's bill after a new baby was born or when a child had been seriously ill.

Yet my grandmother lived to see her grandchildren born under a national health service, grow up in decent local authority housing, and go to university. We did not go there because we were more clever—we were not—or because we were more prudent. I could not manage on the budget on which my grandmother had to manage. It certainly was not because we worked harder. It happened because public provision made it possible. Public services allowed families to move forward and improve their lives, which could never have been achieved by individual effort alone.

Over two generations, lives completely changed—so much so that my son now finds it difficult to believe the stories that his grandmother tells him. People live longer. We have wiped out many infectious diseases. Educational attainment is higher. People now have higher aspirations, and rightly so. That has come about through public provision. Meeting those higher aspirations is the next challenge that faces our public services.

We must remember the lessons taught by those people who set up public services. They were not afraid to have a vision. They thought on a grand scale. That was true not only of the founders of the welfare state, but of the great Victorians who set up the public water and sewerage systems in our major cities. It is true of the people who built cities with big public buildings and open spaces. They thought big and were able to do that because they had the support of the public. They kept that support by meeting those aspirations and by fostering a sense of confidence, which enabled people to make changes with the belief that they could achieve their aims.

This country had that in full measure. That was why, even in the midst of the second world war, it could plan for a health service and a welfare state, and have the determination to implement it afterwards, even in times of economic problems. People did that because they believed that they could, and people are coming round to that view again. They are ready to take the steps needed to improve our public services. Years of constant privatisation have told them that there are some things that they cannot buy for themselves. Years of under-investment in transport led to jammed roads and a collapsing railway system. The privatisation of hospital cleaning services resulted in dirtier wards and an increase in hospital-acquired infections, for which, at the end of the day, we all pay.

The scandalous neglect of public housing was one of the little noticed effects of the Conservative Government. The decline and social problems on many estates affected not only the people living there, but the whole community. That was the price we paid. With the collapse of Railtrack, people saw that the theme that private was always good and public always bad was no longer tenable. There have to be changes, but our public services are already demonstrating that they can rise to that challenge. Services such as NHS Direct and the university for industry demonstrate that flexible and responsive public sector services can be delivered when people need them.

There are many examples of innovation and service delivery of the highest standard in my constituency. Our libraries are now installing computers so that even those who cannot afford computers in their homes can have access to the internet. Health visitors in my area set up a project called "tackling men's health", where they worked with the local rugby league club to raise awareness of men's health issues. In Orford in the middle of my constituency, a personal medical services pilot demonstrates some of the best practice. By changing the way it works, it has met the health needs of the area. For example, under the direction of the practice nurse, it offers a good smoking cessation service. Its front-line staff have been retrained. Receptionists have become primary care assistants and can check blood pressure or test urine samples. They can then take NVQs, allowing them to do other tasks such as taking blood samples or nebulising asthma patients. In doing so, they free up the time of other practice staff. A patient who is worried about whether he should come to the surgery can have a telephone consultation with a general practitioner. That is the sort of public service innovation that we want to encourage.

Some believe that our public services are in decline but I do not buy that. Of course, there are problems and there is much more to be done. However, many of them

[Helen Jones]

still deliver excellence every day. We tend to appreciate such services only when they are not there: for example, refuse collection or the much talked about health service.

My wonderful secretary, Lynn, has given me permission to use her recent experience of the health service as an example. A year last July, she had a brain haemorrhage. She could have died, but was treated in the Walton neurosurgery unit and in Warrington hospital. She later developed eye problems and was treated at St. Paul's eye unit in the Royal Liverpool University hospital. Throughout that time, she received excellent nursing and medical care. The surgeons not only saved her life but restored her sight and got her back to work.

When Lynn later developed cataracts, as she was warned that she would, they were dealt with speedily and efficiently. She went to see the consultant on Tuesday 26 November about the last of her cataracts. She was in hospital the following Sunday, and the operation was performed on Monday. She could not have bought that kind of care in the private sector, however hard she tried. She could never have met the costs at the point of use.

Lynn compared her most recent hospital experience with the time that she went for a minor operation in 1994. She said that the wards are cleaner, the food has improved, and staff morale is much better. It is better because we believe in and support public services whereas the previous Government did not. They opposed the creation of many hospitals, neglected them for 18 years and then tried to privatise them.

I give an example, taken from my constituency, of the result of that neglect. The previous Government allowed the creation of a private wing in the grounds of Warrington hospital. The wing went bust because no one could afford to use it, so we bought it for the NHS. Its facilities are now available for all local people according to need, not ability to pay. It is officially called the Daresbury wing, although staff refer to it as the Dobson wing, after the person who bought it.

My message is that public services can deliver and, for most people, they can deliver well. Of course, we must make changes. We are investing in public services in order to make those changes and to put right 18 years of neglect. Spending, particularly on health and education, is now increasing faster than it is in most European countries. An extra £43 billion is to be spent on public services between this year and 2004, besides the extra £1 billion for the health service announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his pre-Budget report. We expect that reform will accompany that investment.

My examples have demonstrated that staff in the public sector are ready to make changes to the way in which they work. That is right, because most of our services were designed for the 1950s. Society has changed irrevocably since then. People expect more. They are no longer so grateful to have any service at all that they will put up with long waits and shabby premises. Our staff know that and are working to meet expectations.

We should not duck the need for change; it offers us great opportunities. We should lay down the principles that underlie public provision, even when we make changes. The first of those principles is that public services should support and help those who help themselves and allow them to move forward. However, public services must also recognise their duty to care for the weakest in our society, who cannot help themselves.

We can make public services more responsive to local needs and local demands by investing in and supporting front-line staff. In my experience, staff on the front line often know more about what is needed and what works in public services than anyone else. Staff are fizzing with ideas, which we must allow them to try out. We must be adult enough and honest enough to admit that, although most of those ideas will work, some may not. Change is always a risk.

We should recognise the expertise of staff who have spent many years in the public sector, often on low pay. We should be rewarding them and building on their commitment to ensure that we make the best use of their experience. The Government have taken steps in that direction by allowing health care assistants to train as nurses, for example, and classroom assistants to become teachers. However, a lot more needs to be done. The Government must examine the matter. People who make a commitment to public service should be rewarded with a proper career path.

We must create a proper public sector management ethos. We need to recruit the best and brightest managers, and to find ways to encourage them to be committed to a career in public service. We should explore the possibility of establishing a public sector management college that will attract the best and brightest, taking as our model the French Grands Écoles, a prestigious institution that enables people who enter public service to have a good career. Managers who deliver must be rewarded.

Our public services must develop a greater culture of openness and accountability. They should be willing to learn from their mistakes; they should be able to admit it when things go wrong and to put them right. We are making great strides in the national health service, for example, in that respect. However, a lot more needs to be done.

The culture of accountability must be taken further. Local authorities must be freed, so that they can invest in reform and make improvements. I am glad that the Government have made a commitment to allow them to borrow, because we need to give real choices to the people on the ground. People who work in housing, for example, need to be able to choose between trusts, arm's length companies and staying with the council. They can have that choice only if local councils can invest in repairs and improvements in the same way as housing trusts can.

We should not be afraid of that. We should recognise that, in different parts of the country, that will result in different conditions and in different ways of doing things. That is local democracy: if a local authority gets things wrong, it will pay the price at the ballot box, just as hon. Members do.

We need to have a grown-up debate with voters about public services—about what our priorities are and how we are going to pay for them. We must be honest politicians and admit that we cannot perform miracles. There is a price to be paid for everything, and it is impossible to have American levels of taxation and

European levels of public service. We need to say to people that if they are not prepared to fund public services, there is another price to pay, which we experienced under the last Conservative Government: not only poor services, but a fractured society.

The price that is paid for public services is a subscription for belonging to a decent society. Public services have delivered that consistently, for many years. They have delivered excellence and care, and have allowed many people to improve their lives in ways that were previously unimaginable. We should celebrate that, and look at ways to allow our public services to go forward, working with their staff to do an even better job in the future.

9.48 am

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): It is a pleasure to take part in the debate and, in particular, to follow the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones). I agree with everything that she has said. Her eloquence is matched only by that of the 13 empty chairs that are facing us this morning. That speaks volumes about the Opposition's attitude to the celebration of public services. It is great to celebrate public services, and we should do emphatically.

My background is as a social worker with children and families in local authorities. That profession is the epitome of public service. Social workers with children and families carry out the fundamental role that is given to local government: the role of "corporate parent"—an appalling and horrible phrase—to young people in care. It is a good parent to young people who must be looked after. Social work is a service that practises unconditional positive regard: people are worthy of respect, hard work and compassion whatever they have done, and they have dignity, something to offer and can be worked with.

Social work with children and families is a service that attends to the needs of the needy and vulnerable and those whose behaviour can be extremely challenging and difficult. The service reaches out to people who have been bereaved, abused, wronged and hurt. It represents the last line of defence for many people; sometimes it is the only line of defence that they ever have. The service reaches out to people in custody and prison, those who suffer from mental illness and those who have absolutely nothing. Hundreds of thousands of people do social work with children and families in many ways. We must acknowledge that cleaners, domestics or handymen, who may not think that they have skills in social work but who can build good relationships, can often do the best work with children in children's homes. Their practical activities may strike a chord with people whom others have been unable to touch.

Many people work in social services and some are the best people I know or will ever know. They work with children and families not as a job, but as a vocation. They always go the extra mile and never give up on people. They keep on keeping on, work antisocial hours and always and unequivocally put the needs of children and their families first.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is something very precious about the public services to which he has referred? The public service ethos cannot be bought. People have a real commitment to those for whom they care, which goes beyond mere payment. It is not only about remuneration. It would be bad to lose that ethos.

Mr. Dawson: I agree with my hon. Friend, who makes my point for me, but he leads me in another direction. The spirit of public service and the vocational emphasis have often been abused in the past, and people have not been properly paid or treated well at work.

We rarely hear about people who simply go about their ordinary lives and the business of social work, however high quality and heroic the work may be. I use the word "heroic" in its proper sense. Frankly, the world seems interested in many public services, certainly in social services, only when things go wrong. People are interested in failures and scandals, workers' incompetence, and villains. Every activity—social work, public service, every other activity in the world—has those features. It is right that incompetence, bad practice and downright criminal behaviour should be exposed but, for once, we have an opportunity to celebrate public service.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): An important point is being made about failure. Does my hon. Friend agree that, through the Office for Standards in Education, the Audit Commission and others, far too much focus is on identifying failure rather than looking for success, good practice and promoting, praising and celebrating that success and good practice?

Mr. Dawson: I could not agree more. That is an exceptionally important point. Far too often, we examine to detect failure and define problems when we could be looking at the details of day-to-day work, which is of high quality, and bringing it to the fore. It always amazes me to see the Oscar ceremonies and awards on television, when well paid and famous people queue up to slap each other on the back. I want to see loads of social workers getting awards for the good jobs that they do day in, day out.

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): I think that the hon. Gentleman has completely misunderstood the concept of the Audit Commission. Every Audit Commission report is based on looking at good practice, celebrating public service and saying, "If it can be done well in one part of the public sector, why can it not be matched in another part?" It is not about doing down the public services. It is about celebrating them when something is done well, and asking others to match that quality.

Mr. Dawson: To tell the truth, I do not recall mentioning the Audit Commission. I accept what the hon. Gentleman says about its role. However, the culture in which so much inspection takes place is about finding fault. There should be an emphasis on looking at good quality, extending it and supporting those who carry out such work, sometimes in the most difficult circumstances, where resources are poor and management structures are not as good as they should be.

[Mr. Dawson]

The best way to celebrate public services is to talk about the ways in which we can support public services better. In many cases, extremely valuable staff performing an important function are let down by a range of people. Often they are let down by local politicians—I speak as someone who has been a local politician—who do not value properly the services that they carry out, and sometimes do not understand the fundamental importance of their role. Sometimes, they need to be reminded forcefully, as they were only a couple of years ago by my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), about their fundamental role in relation to corporate parenting. It must be emphasised and re-emphasised over and again that local councillors have the most important role to play in relation to the parenting of children in care and many other services.

Staff at the front line and the sharp end are often let down enormously by the grievous bureaucracy that still prevails, unfortunately, in many parts of the public sector, and in other areas, by inflexibility, departmentalism, and—my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North made this point extremely well—management who fail to listen to, value, understand and empower those staff at the coal face who know the job inside out, are utterly committed to their work and have brilliant ideas about how to develop and improve the service.

We should trust and empower people more and give them proper support. Giving those who do some of the lowest-paid jobs in public services their head would bring about far greater improvements to public services than the Fancy Dan, top-down approaches of privatisation and external management techniques. If we trust those who are committed to working in public services and support them properly, we will make much greater progress.

We must provide support by offering precisely the career structure to which my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North referred, and by paying such people properly. Every Wednesday, the "Society" pages of *The Guardian* advertise social work posts. Today's advertisements are asking for experienced people to work in child protection, with offenders with mental disorders, with children who need preparation for long-term placements, and with children and adults whose terrible disabilities have undermined their lives. However, we are offering such people between £16,000 and £23,000 a year.

On Tuesdays, *The Guardian* carries many advertisements for jobs in the media, in marketing and cultural services. Important and good as those jobs undoubtedly are, they do not hold a candle to those advertised in *The Guardian* today, yet they are paid tremendously better than front-line social work posts. We should pay those who work in public services a decent rate, particularly given that the economy is so successful and that a wide range of employment opportunities exists. No wonder we are finding it difficult to recruit staff for important public services.

We must ensure that our public services are staffed not only by paragons—those for whom such work is a vocation, and who will work all day, every day because that is what they want to do—but by competent, highly intelligent, well-motivated, career-minded people who see in such work a good way to earn a living throughout their entire working life. I hope that this debate contributes to that process.

10.3 am

Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) on securing this debate, on making an excellent speech, and on giving us the opportunity to celebrate public services. I apologise for the fact that, unfortunately, I must leave before the end of the debate to attend a Select Committee meeting. I shall be brief so that others can contribute.

As has been said, we all tend to take for granted the invaluable contribution that those who work in public services make to our daily lives. We certainly need to give them greater reward and recognition. In particular, we need to tackle the continuing inequality in pay, which has been highlighted in today's news and which affects many women workers. I liked the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson): why should we not have a national Oscar awards-type ceremony every year for every sort and grade of public service worker ?

I should declare an interest: I am a member of Unison, the largest public service union. I came into politics through my activity as a shop steward; later I became a full-time official representing public service workers. I wanted to tackle the injustices that I saw in society in general, and particularly the injustices and inequalities that were affecting public service workers and the people to whom they gave such commitment.

I can offer one or two examples of public service workers from my own experience. I worked with and represented hospital domestics in Liverpool, Ayrshire, Renfrewshire and Fife. Prior to privatisation, they treated hospital wards as though they were their own homes. They were low-paid, part-time women workers but they knew the names of every single patient and would take the time to stop to say hello and have a chat. They would pay for from their own pockets and bring in a card or small present for an elderly patient whose birthday it was. They would provide comfort and support to patients and families, as well as the same high standard of cleanliness as they expected and provided in their homes.

They were not there for the money; they were on very low pay. They were there because of a genuine commitment. As my hon. Friends have said, when the last Conservative Government started to privatise cleaning, catering and other services, we lost those standards and that quality. Report after report has demonstrated that what we predicted at the time has happened: hygiene quality and standards have suffered. We must now show our commitment to restoring that quality and those standards and to giving women such as those hospital domestics a feeling that they are recognised and valued as equal members of our society.

Another example of such commitment comes from my contact with home helps and home carers throughout the country. Again, the vast majority were women working part time who balanced low-paid jobs with bringing up their families. They were often carers for adult, elderly or disabled relatives and, in areas such as Fife and Ayrshire, had to deal with the horrendous consequences of the miners' strike: a year without pay and the devastation that that brought to their families and communities. However, time and again, they went beyond their contractual hours. They would call in at weekends, on public holidays, at Christmas and new year to ensure that wee Jeanie or wee Jimmie were all right and had all that they needed.

As we all look forward to settling down in our warm comfortable homes at the Christmas and new year break, we should remember that every day of the week, 24 hours a day, public service workers are out there providing services that we take for granted. We all give an occasional thought to ambulance staff, the fire service and the police, but it is too easy to forget the many other public service workers: those in residential and nursing homes; those who provide all sorts of hospital care; those who provide emergency repairs to the roof when stormy winds have blown it off; those who come out to tackle problems with and restore gas, electricity and water supplies affected by stormy weather.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North has said, we must also remember those who collect our refuse. We are all desperate to have our bins emptied after Christmas because they are full of turkey bones and wrapping paper, and we expect the bin men to provide that service. The refuse collectors in my area take time to check that people who are on their own are all right. If their bin has not been put out, they will ensure that someone knocks on the door to check that they are well.

I represent a Scottish constituency which is known for bad weather during the winter months and I want to mention the road gritters and the services that they provide in more remote and rural communities. They go out in blizzard conditions when the rest of us are told to stay at home and not venture out. They put their lives at risk to accompany ambulances, fire engines and other vehicles that may be trying to reach people trapped in their cars, or to get people to hospital for emergency or urgent treatment.

I back the excellent speeches and suggestions of my hon. Friends the Members for Warrington, North and for Lancaster and Wyre. I am proud to be a citizen of a country in which hundreds of thousands of people show a daily commitment to others. I am proud to be a member of a union that seeks to give equal worth and value to those people. I am proud and accept the responsibility of having been given the opportunity to be a Member of Parliament. We must deliver greater reward and recognition for our public service workers and give them the opportunities that public services give to us.

10.11 am

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) on securing this debate and on her excellent speech, in which she spoke passionately about the magnificent public services in Britain and the workers who are employed in them. My hon. Friends the Members for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) and for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) also made admirable speeches. I endorse everything they said.

I shall focus on privatisation. I urge the Government and my hon. Friend the Minister to keep public services public and not to pursue privatisation. Some weeks ago in this Chamber, I described the private finance initiative as irrational nonsense. I do not retract from that at all and was pleased that it gained some currency in the broadsheet journals. Since then, more evidence has come to light, demonstrating that what I said was correct.

I want to quote some research from Unison, which estimates that

> "for every £1 bn of PFI contracts, the cost to the public purse is £50 million per year more than if the public sector could borrow directly. The costs of PFI have been met by cuts in services and in the employment conditions of public sector workers."

Thus we get 5 per cent. extra costs or, to put it another way, 5 per cent. less for our money by using PFI schemes.

Other aspects of privatisation have been touched on. Contracting-out of services inevitably means that profits are paid from costs, public service workers' pay is squeezed and staffing levels are cut. The quality of services gets worse. Reference has been made to hospital cleaning. At Luton and Dunstable hospital, we have come to the point of taking cleaning services back in-house. We have deprivatised them and the hospital is becoming cleaner. It has recently had a magnificent report; it is one of the hospitals that received three stars in the Government's assessment. I understand that it is the 11th best hospital in the country.

There is other research evidence on privatisation and private sector costs. Public and private health care costs in the United States of America have been compared. Administrative costs as a percentage of total hospital costs in the USA are 22.9 per cent. in the public sector and 34 per cent. in the private sector. We all know what a bloated, over-expensive health service the Americans have in the private sector.

Australian evidence shows that the estimated average cost per medical episode in Australia is 10 per cent. higher in private than in public hospitals. Where does the money go? It goes into profits and into vast payments for company executives. Statistics provided by the Labour research department show where the money goes and what remuneration executives receive. At Rentokil, one of the contracting companies, Sir Clive Thompson receives a salary of £1,076,000 per annum. In Jarvis plc, Paris Moayedi receives £509,000 per year; last year he received a 46.7 per cent. increase on the previous year, as well as dividends of £368,000.

Comparisons can be made between that remuneration and the average pay of workers in the contracting companies; for example, the chief executive of Compass, Francis McKay, receives £660,250 per year, while his average employee is paid £8,545. That is 77 times greater, which is grotesque. The great majority of workers in such companies are low-paid women.

When we increase public spending, we want the money to go into service provision and patient care, not into the bloated profits of a private contractor or fat-cat executive payments. The problem is decades of underfunding of our public services. One example is health. We can refer to the European Union average, to which much reference has been made recently. During the past 30 years, we have spent nearly £10 billion a year

[Mr. Kelvin Hopkins]

less on our health service than the European average; the precise figure is £9.2 billion. That is the equivalent of £14 million per constituency every year for 30 years. The situation is getting worse: the difference between France, which allegedly has the best health service in the world—not the most expensive, but the best—and us is the equivalent of £40 million per constituency every year. No wonder we have stresses and problems such as queues in the health service, and health service workers not being paid as they should be.

GPs and consultants have visited me to ask me to intervene to solve some of the problems that they face daily. I frequently write to Ministers at the Department of Health, who know that my letters are sometimes intemperate in language, which I regret. However, we must sometimes speak the truth.

Recently, a friend retired from being a teacher and needed a bypass operation, which he could not get. He had to wait while in danger of having a heart attack and perhaps dying. A friend of his had a house in France and said, "Come and stay with me for a few weeks. If after dinner one night you have a slight pain in the chest, the local hospital will give you a bypass overnight. After that, you can spend a while longer with me and then return home." He could have a bypass in France free of charge, but could not do so in his own country. That is a shame. The health service is not unwilling, but the resources are simply not there.

Luton and Dunstable hospital in my constituency is a fine one with dedicated people working for it. I am in regular contact with them and praise them to the skies for their work. None the less, they admit that their cardiac department is half the size that it should be. It is no wonder that there are problems and that a GP should contact me asking what to do when a patient needs an angioplasty and cannot get one because of lack of resources.

We must invest in the public sector and consider what has happened to it during the past 30 years. The figures provided by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which were recently published in a report, are incredible and show how public investment has fallen in Britain during that time. Since 1975, when it peaked, investment in the public sector has fallen from 9 per cent. of gross domestic product to 2 per cent. of GDP in 2000. No wonder we have difficulties. Spending must rise substantially, but it must go into public services and decent pay for public sector workers, not into private finance initiatives or private contracting.

I refer to a campaign recently started by Unison. I should declare an interest: I am associated both with the General Municipal Boilermakers union and Unison, two unions in the public sector, although I speak entirely for myself and my constituents. There is a campaign called "Remember 83". For Labour Members, remembering 1983 is a painful experience. I was a Labour candidate for Parliament that year, and I did well narrowly to beat the third-placed candidate in the same constituency where I now have a majority of some 10,000. That is how badly we did in 1983. The "Remember 83" campaign is about not 1983, but the 83 per cent. of the population who oppose introducing the private sector into public services. They do not want privatisation of the health service.

I urge the Minister to remember that we must not lose the public service ethos —the sense of commitment to public service and to our fellow human beings. When people work for other people, they feel better about themselves than they would if they worked simply for money. Money goes only so far. We all need it to live on, so it seems right that people should be properly remunerated. However, when people are working for other people, they feel that what they are doing is of immense value, particularly when those people are vulnerable, young, old, sick or disabled. That is when they are at their best and when human beings are at their most noble. It is Labour Members' job to remember that and to promote it for the future, not to go down the route of privatisation.

10.24 am

Mr. Harold Best (Leeds, North-West): I was delighted to discover that the time for this debate had been obtained through the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones). I thought that her speech this morning was first class.

I am standing here today because of the success of public services. Two factors allowing me to stand here are due to the national health service. First, cardiology was important to me just a few years ago; I might not be standing here otherwise. Secondly, this summer, I had my left hip replaced again. That operation involved some re-engineering of work done 15 years ago by the NHS. Therefore, I stand here as a representative of the success of the NHS, one of the finest public services that it is possible to imagine. However, public services are not always as well run as one might anticipate or hope for.

There is a tendency for us sometimes to forget experiences that we have had in the past. I would like to tell the Chamber about an experience I had in the 1970s—a long time ago. My wife and I were going to be godparents in a town in Yorkshire called Knaresborough, which is not far from Harrogate. We had to travel from Leeds. We checked the timetable for the train on Sunday, and found the train we wanted. We turned up at the station, only to discover there was no train at that time.

I went to complain to the people in the railway station, and the man said, "There normally is a train, but the trouble is that we're doing some maintenance work on the track and we forgot to amend the timetable. Just a moment." He disappeared and then returned to say, " I've just cleared this with my boss." He climbed over the counter and said, "Follow me." We got into his car and within half an hour we were in Knaresborough.

That sort of dedication from a public servant in providing customer satisfaction cannot be beaten. Imagine that same type of service being provided by Arriva—those who know the area know what I am talking about. Arriva cannot even get the drivers to run the trains. Every day, at Leeds station, there is an announcement saying, "We regret to inform people wishing to travel to Huddersfield that there is no train because there is no driver. However, there is a bus running from Leeds station to Huddersfield station." Those are the essential benefits that one can get from a public service, as opposed to some examples of private service.

I do not want to be seen as someone who knocks private services. I am talking about successful public services. We all experience successful private services at some stage in our normal working day: one enters a corner shop and the service is first class because there is direct contact with the public. Shopkeepers need to know that they are satisfying their customers in a personal, direct way. There are similar examples. It is a case not of one against the other, but of managing the most intelligent form of service that is required to meet particular needs. We must maintain that balanced view.

Public service means more than the health service and the railway system. Today, we are taking part in perhaps the most important public service: that which democracy renders to the people, whom it claims to represent and work for. Regrettably, there has been a serious decline in the ability of local democracy to deliver for the people it is elected to represent. We must redress that balance in favour of public servants in local government. If we can do that, we shall be committing a great act in defence of public services. The demoralisation of local government by spending controls has been terrible to witness, and we must give back the power to deliver to public services such as democracy.

If hon. Members' constituencies are like mine, there will be problems with street litter. My constituency has a serious problem in that regard. More than 50 per cent. of my constituency's residents are transients, most of whom are students; shortly, they will vacate the area in which I live for Christmas. There is a huge take-away industry in my constituency, although it is really a throw-away industry. Vast quantities of material are deposited in public places, and it is deeply offensive to the public eye. It is time that we took action to defend those public spaces, which are ours. We should be able to do that through local government, which is the greatest public service.

Because I feel passionate about local government's role in public services and the democratic values that flow from the public service that councillors give, I want to give other hon. Members an opportunity to speak. I shall sit down, but I want hon. Members to notice how smoothly I do so, which is due to the success of the NHS.

10.28 am

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): I am always keen to follow a smooth act, and, like my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best), I am keen to stress the importance of high-quality, world-class public services. We are on the road to achieving that.

Real investment is going into public services. Alongside that investment, we must reform the public services. Social workers, teachers and refuse cleaners are committed to that.

World-class public services are provided by involving the work force. The Government's position on public services seems to be linked to earlier reforms by previous Governments. That is dangerous. It is vital to consider how good public services are managed. There is a role for the private sector in the delivery of public services, but it is up to Ministers with responsibility for health, education and other matters to define what it is. Uncertainty about that definition is leading to a lack of morale in public services. There is still a feeling that public service delivery is bad and private sector delivery is good. It is important to ensure that services work for the communities that they serve.

Yesterday, I met a group of Unison stewards from Nottinghamshire. I must confess that I am a Unison member; I have been involved in the delivery of public services all my life. What struck me was their determination that services should meet the needs of families and communities.

In strengthening the resources of the Cabinet Office and the delivery unit, we should be aware that setting targets can create problems. Resources should be devolved to a local level to let local people deliver local solutions to local problems. We should celebrate the fact that people in Luton, Lancaster, Leeds, Nottingham, Newcastle or Nuneaton come up with different solutions and responses, but there is some anxiety about that. We hear a lot about the control freak tendency. I say on the record very quickly that I do not think that that exists. However, unless we empower local people we will lose the commitment of public sector workers.

Regulatory bodies such as Ofsted, the police inspectorate and the Audit Commission focus too much on the nuts and bolts of service delivery. They are good at looking for efficiency measures, but not so good at identifying and promoting success. I accept that the Audit Commission has changed its position, but the district auditor's approach to best value continues to focus on failure. If there is one body that has created a lack of morale in the education service it is Ofsted, with its consistent focus on failure. We need to identify success and to treat the work force who are producing it as beacons of excellence.

We should celebrate what is good in public services. There is a great deal of it about. We should be proud to use public servants to roll forward our public services to ensure that they meet local needs. Investment is taking place and the work force are committed to reform. The messages that we send out to them, both at national and local level, must aim to facilitate and encourage them in their work.

The central focus on targets is a danger. Let us loosen the lead a little, devolve resources, and let local people and work forces consider local problems and introduce local solutions. That really would be a celebration of success in our public services.

10.34 am

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): I am delighted to take part in this excellent debate. I congratulate warmly the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) on bringing us together to focus on success and to celebrate public services. All too often, Members of Parliament hear in their constituency surgeries about the bad side and the difficulties. All too often, the debate is about the problems. It is important to celebrate the good work that takes place.

The hon. Lady was right to say that we often take public services for granted. She was also right to highlight current innovation, use of the internet and development. Public services are moving on. I agree that we need a mature and sensible debate about their future.

The hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) was right to talk about the need to empower staff. Front-line staff know a lot about what is involved in their work day to day. We should trust and empower those individuals more, so that they have a greater say. He was right to touch on the issue of pay,

[Mr. Mark Oaten]

and to compare the salaries for jobs advertised in *The Guardian* on Monday with those for jobs advertised in that newspaper on Wednesday.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) highlighted the public sector ethos—on Christmas day, people nip in to see the folks for whom they care, and are prepared to put their hand into their pockets to pay for a Christmas card and a present. That is an important point.

I disagree with several points made by the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins). He did not have an open mind on private sector involvement. I agree that PFI is not a satisfactory model, but there are many other ways in which the public sector can become involved in public services apart from PFI. We are too hung up on thinking that PFI is the only way in which that can be achieved. I would describe the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) as the bionic man—I am delighted that the operations have been successful—and I was pleased that he had an open mind about private sector involvement.

It is a big disappointment that we did not have a chance to hear more from the hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping). If he had had more time to speak, we would have heard much more interesting information. I agree entirely with his remarks about Ofsted and his critical point about falling into the trap of assuming that everything that the private sector does is good, and everything that the public sector does is bad. There is good and bad on all sides. In a mature debate, we need to look at best practice.

I want to focus on a few key issues in relation to public services, and to allow time for the two winding-up speeches. Money is an issue. I quote one example that had a profound impact on me. A couple of years ago, I visited the pathology department in my local hospital. I was able to avoid passing out at seeing blood everywhere, but the other big impact was made by the comments of two individuals who worked in that department. The first person said that he was going to leave the department to work for a food manufacturer and to test chicken for bacteria. He was going to earn more money doing that. I looked at the second person and said that she looked absolutely exhausted, and that she must be working extremely hard. She said that she did work hard, but the reason why she was exhausted was that she finished her pub job at midnight the night before. She had to do that job to be able to work in the pathology department. What a ridiculous situation.

Another issue is to try to reward some of the people who work in public services. Currently, there is a Queen's police medal and a Queen's fire service medal. That leaves a big gap. Will the Minister [illegible]sider the idea of a Queen's ambulance service medal? The work carried out by the ambulance service is phenomenal. It is often the first service on the scene, and is involved in horrendously difficult situations such as air and rail accidents. The people who work in that service put themselves into difficult situations with great bravery. I tabled an early-day motion on that issue during the previous Parliament, which attracted about 100 names. Support also comes from the Red Cross, the fire service and the police, who want their colleagues in the emergency services to be rewarded.

I want to speak briefly about work loads. We can talk about pay, awards and rewarding staff, but the other big issue is the amount of legislation and initiatives coming from central Government, which impact on our public services. Since this Government came to power, 4,500 targets have been set in the key area of education. The first thing that happens to me when I visit a school is that the head takes me into an office and shows me a pile of legislation and initiatives. Heads would probably say that the individual ideas are good and worthy. However, the problem is the collective amount of stuff that comes through. I hope that the Government recognise that they could help those who work in the public service by pacing change more and acknowledging that the pile of red tape and legislation is too great.

It is important to involve and engage some of the professions. They would be prepared to move with change, and many public service workers would be prepared to examine a model using the private sector. It is critical to have an open mind, to involve those individuals in the debate and to listen to them more. We hear the criticism that the Government do not appear to want to listen to them.

Mr. Hopkins: The hon. Gentleman mentioned my speech in passing and talked generally about the success of the private sector in public services without giving specific examples. I have dozens of examples of the failure of the private sector in public services. Will he tell me about the successes?

Mr. Oaten: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the case of his friend who went to France and had a successful operation. However, the French model is not purely funded by public money because parts of the model work differently. That is a classic example from the hon. Gentleman's speech.

I make a plea on the difficulty of recruiting individuals to public services. In Winchester and the south-east, property prices are phenomenally high and we have major difficulties recruiting police, care workers and hospital workers. We have to recruit people from abroad to work in hospitals and desperately try to fill gaps and vacancies in the police service. The Government have introduced concepts about key workers' salaries, but they must try harder to tackle the issue. Although we wish to celebrate public services and reward individuals, if we cannot recruit people, we are in a real mess.

10.41 am

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I congratulate the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) on securing the debate and on her passionate and informed speech. I was struck by what she said about how public services have helped to improve peoples' lives over recent decades and the changing experiences in her grandmother's lifetime. I am sure that she would acknowledge that Conservatives have formed the Government for 49 of the past 71 years. Therefore, the improvement is not wholly the Labour party's achievement.

In these debates, we should move away from slightly sterile exchanges in which the party in government claims that everything is perfect when it is in office and everything was dreadful when the other lot were in, while the party in opposition claims the reverse—everything was wonderful until it left office and has been dreadful ever since. There is excellence in the public services under this Government, and there was excellence under the last Conservative Government. There were problems in the past and there are problems now. The question is how we can address those problems and build on the successes.

I have often heard the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), who is not quite a neighbour of mine, speak and he brings extraordinary knowledge, passion and care to all debates on social services. He has the greatest experience and expertise of any hon. Member on such matters and, yet again, he spoke with vim and vigour. He was correct to say that if we trusted public servants on the ground more, we would get more out of them and public services would run more smoothly.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) spoke from a background of considerable experience about injustices and inequalities that relate to public service workers.

Like the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), I was struck by the remarks of the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins). He started in a non-partisan fashion with his scathing criticism of the private finance initiative, because that attacks both my party and his own Government. However, he described the French system as probably the best health service in the world. We must learn from the experience of other European countries.

Although many excellent people work in our national heath service—I would say that because my sister is an NHS GP—there are problems with our service. Health care outcomes are not as good as those in most other European countries. We should learn lessons from what works on the continent, and apply those lessons in Britain. If we reach non-partisan consensus on that, we will have made some progress.

Mr. Hopkins: As we all know, the problem is underfinancing. Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that French compulsory insurance, which makes a larger contribution to public services than direct taxation, is little different from British national insurance contributions? Compulsory insurance is less progressive than income tax, but because of France's more equal income structure, that is less of a problem. The French taxation system is less regressive.

Mr. Collins: I do not particularly want to intrude on the grief that apparently exists between the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. In last week's Prime Minister's Question Time, the Prime Minister talked about social insurance in similar terms to those used by the hon. Gentleman, who may yet receive a call from 10 Downing street. The hon. Gentleman is back on the party line, as far as Downing street is concerned. In the pre-Budget report, the Chancellor was a little more scathing about funding health care by any method other than taxation. That debate is raging within Government, and we should discuss the issue, too.

I was delighted to see that the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) stood up and sat down smoothly. He mentioned that his first hip operation, which was performed successfully under the NHS, occurred 15 years ago. A Conservative Government were then in power, and that reflects the fact that there has been excellence and success under both Conservative and Labour Governments. It is not the case that public services were a terrible tragedy before 1997, or that there has been total excellence since then.

Mr. Best: I want the hon. Gentleman to acknowledge that a public service provided that service in both cases.

Mr. Collins: I do, and in the hon. Gentleman's case, it was a public service run by a Conservative Government, so we are all happy. What a delightful non-partisan note on which to proceed.

The hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) talked about the dangers of the Government's approach to health services. He was right to say that we must move away from the idea that the private sector is always good and the public sector is always bad. We should also move away from the opposite stance. The Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping was right to say that it does not matter whether a cat is black or white; what matters is whether it catches mice. We should pragmatically consider what works.

We should reflect on the fact that our public services are important and are the fabric that holds our society together, whether their business is to save lives, defend national security, prevent crime, care for the vulnerable or pass on knowledge from one generation to another. I agree with the point about the importance of local government, which provides a vital public service by representing local communities.

We must move forward with clear principles. Many hon. Members have set out some of those. I should like to add a few, some of which are similar to those that we have heard. We must respect the professionalism of public servants. We must allow them to exercise independent judgment and to give those who depend on their services the benefit of their training and experience. That has implications for the quantity of regulation and inspection applied to public servants.

We must provide proper resources for our public services but we must also give them financial discretion. For example, there has been much debate on the state of cleanliness of our hospitals. Many hospitals in my constituency and elsewhere are grateful to the Government for providing additional resources for cleaning their hospitals but resent being told that the money can be spent on cleaning only those parts of the hospital that are visible to the public. Staff point out that to reduce the risk of disease or infection, they must clean the whole hospital, not just the bits that are on public display.

We must provide management and structures that ease, not hinder, the tasks of public servants. We must increase the choice available to those who use the services. That does not go against the public service ethos; the best public servants are strongly in favour of increased choice. We should thank our public servants, in a non-partisan way, for all that they do for us, our constituents, and residents and citizens of this country. Public servants are appreciated. Although hon. Members differ on many issues, Parliament strongly endorses, welcomes and supports the work of our excellent public services, and it looks forward to building on the best throughout the country.

[Mr. Collins]

10.49 am

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): This has been an interesting and wide-ranging debate, and I am glad that hon. Members have had an opportunity to examine the principles that underpin public services. It is impossible for me to address adequately in the remaining 10 minutes the many issues that have been raised.

The Trades Union Congress rally which took place in Westminster yesterday rightly sought to celebrate the virtues of the public services, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) on securing today's debate. She spoke passionately about her experiences of the public services and those of her family. She also mentioned the high ambitions and ideals of the founding fathers—and mothers—of our public services.

Opportunities to examine in detail the fundamental philosophy that underpins the public services occur too infrequently. As elected representatives—and, in some cases, holders of public office who help to run the public services—hon. Members should grasp every one of them. We should address several key questions. Why do we choose to deliver public services? Who is best placed to deliver them? What services should we deliver collectively? How do we make decisions about those services?

The most famous touchstone remark is that of Baroness Thatcher that there is no such thing as society. That comment has frequently been cited, because it exemplifies the fundamental divide in British politics between those who see the nation as a random collection of individuals, and those of us who cherish the reality of communities, families and networks of interdependency, and who acknowledge that they make up the society in which we live and our collective consciousness.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) memorably commented on the tradition of community spirit that has been demonstrated by our historic decisions to form Parliament, Government and local authorities and to deliver public services, which is a more tangible expression of that community ethos.

Our public services are rightly cherished. The public have a great affection for them and hold them in the highest esteem. We should underline the value of the role that is performed by those individuals who provide basic services for the nation such as health, schooling, policing, protecting the environment and ensuring that Britain keeps going at all times. We should pay tribute to their hard work and commitment.

My hon. Friends the Members for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) and for Warrington, North referred to the quiet stories of excellence that occur every day in our public services. My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) talked about the vocation of social work, and about how, day in and day out, social workers put the needs of children and families first. He used the word "heroic". That is the right term, and I pay tribute to those people. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) spoke about her experience of working in the public sector, and reminded us that we must not take for granted day-to-day services such as road gritting and refuse collection, as they are also important. As has been mentioned, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West is a walking testament to the virtues of the national health service and other public services.

Why do we come together, through Government, to provide public services? At root, we do that because of our common recognition that, as a civilised society, we constantly advance if we create a climate that is conducive to fostering opportunities for all. Everyone should be able to realise their potential. Everyone should be able to learn and to develop their skills for work and for self-improvement. Everyone should enjoy good health and longer and more comfortable lives. Everyone should be able to travel more safely in a decent environment and to have security so that they can lead peaceful lives that are free from crime. The importance of fun, leisure and recreation should not be forgotten.

All those reasons and more justify our delivery of public services. They do not benefit only the less fortunate and the more needy in society; we all benefit collectively from public services. We do not have public services for altruistic reasons alone. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) pointed out that economies of scale can be gained from collective provision, which sometimes cannot be so easily gained through individual insurance-based provision. In addition, efficiencies and cost savings can be made. Those are all reasons for having mutually provided public services rather than services based purely on profit extraction.

Helen Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that the minute people begin to use widespread private insurance services, they become more reluctant to pay for public services for the people who cannot afford it? The key to good public services is that they are provided for everyone.

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend has touched on the points that we have debated, particularly in the past few days, about the national health service, comparative ways of funding and raising resources, and the efficiencies involved. Social insurance and other forms of private insurance need to be examined in more depth. I agree with the points that she has made.

These are testing times for public services; there is no doubt about that. Demands are high, pressures are constant and capacity is always being strained. In schools, there is a drive for ever higher standards of achievement. In the national health service, there are more operations and higher expectations because the population is living longer than ever before. In transport, there are more commuters and higher car ownership. There are great problems in meeting the ever-increasing expectations of our public services, and they need to be dealt with. In some quarters, there is a history of poor management and perhaps back-burner attention from previous Administrations. There has been chronic under-investment, asset stripping and a failed dogma of unjustified privatisation.

There are stark realities that we need to face. Cures will not come simply or overnight. We must find better ways of developing true partnerships between managers and front-line staff to foster the feeling of shared common endeavour. We need to look at restructuring management systems and building the management skills that my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North mentioned. Nothing is free in public services and ways must be found of paying for them. The pre-Budget report talked about how new resources should be matched with public services reform.

There are lots of solutions, many of which have been mentioned today. In the reform of public services, the existing system must be shored up with better recruitment and retention of key workers. Salaries must be improved. There should be performance incentives, but there must also be flexible working, child care assistance and so on. We must ensure that we make the capital investment necessary to improve the infrastructure that public servants work with day in, day out.

The Prime Minister set out four clear principles of public services reform. First, a framework of national standards, inspection and accountability, not simply to find fault, but to highlight good practice, needs to be devised. Secondly, we must devolve more freedom to front-line staff. Thirdly, the work of front-line staff should be more readily recognised and the value and professionalism of public sector workers acknowledged through pay awards and better conditions. The suggestion about an ambulance service medal made by the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) is certainly one that I will take back to my colleagues in the Department of Health. Fourthly, we must consider ways of widening choice for public services users, increasing variety and expanding those areas that are especially successful.

Private sector involvement it is not about dogmatic privatising. It is not a panacea or magical device. Nor is it about changing the ethos of public services. We must bring the best customer-oriented aspects of the private sector into the public sector. The public should be treated as individual consumers who deserve and expect respect and the highest quality of service, rather than as faceless recipients of product.

I understand some of the misgivings that have been voiced about public-private partnerships. However, we must look not only at the costs of borrowing, but at project management, servicing and the transfer of risk in those areas. There are too many issues for me to discuss all of them today. There are great things going on in public services. The notion of the public service ethos is extremely important. I believe that public services encapsulate mutual interdependence at local and national levels. That proves that public services are a good way of delivering what we need throughout our communities.

Government of Wales Act 1998

11 am

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I am pleased to have secured time for such an important debate. As we know, the creation of the National Assembly for Wales carried some high hopes. It was to be a new age for Welsh politics and the Assembly would make practical improvements to everyday life in Wales. Some positive things have happened. There is a more open and accountable system than was in place previously. We have got rid of testing for seven-year-olds. We have seen the end of the publishing of school league tables. I am delighted that we have a Children's Commissioner, a post for which I have worked hard over the years. We have free prescriptions and dental checks for under-25s.

Such achievements are laudable, but a recent headline in the *South Wales Echo* said "Scrap the Assembly". The paper published a survey that showed that 46 per cent. of people in Wales did not want the Assembly. Apparently, the majority view of people under 40 was that we should increase the Assembly's powers. The survey made it clear that people are not happy with the Assembly as it is at present.

What are the problems? Let us consider first the myth of inclusive politics. The Assembly is supposed to be a collective body, with each elected Member taking responsibility for its decisions. In practice, the power to make decisions has been transferred to the First Minister under section 62 of the Government of Wales Act 1998. Under section 63, the First Minister has deputised specific responsibilities to various Ministers who then deputise decision making to the civil service. The ethos of the civil service is to serve the Government, not the collective body. Instead of decisions being taken by a collective body, we have created a cabinet system that is similar to Westminster's.

It could be argued that the committee system provides inclusive politics, but under section 57, Ministers sit on subject Committees, because the cabinet structure was put in place after the legislation was made for Committees. As a consequence, Committees have no independence from the Minister. They influence the agenda. All briefing papers to the Committee are sourced from the ministerial Department and the Minister takes part in all the discussions. Will a briefing paper from the Department contain anything that conflicts with current policy? Ministers over-influence the Committees because the devolution legislation did not, as in Scotland, create a legislature and a Government. It created instead a corporate body that on Fantasy Island would have led to consensus politics but that has in fact led to tension, frustration and lack of delivery.

Recently, Rosemary Butler—then Secretary for Education and Children, with responsibility for the under-16s—revealed what the Government really think of the Committees. She said that she listens to the views of the Committees as she listens to the views of any other body or institute that she discusses matters with. Clearly, that is not a partnership, and although section 62 allows the Minister to delegate responsibilities to the Committee, that has not happened yet.

The National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill that is currently before the House of Commons contains the proposals of Jane Hutt—the Minister for Health and Social Services in the Assembly—about local health boards—before the Assembly has agreed to them. She has told the media that we will be moving immediately towards implementation, and that is before the Assembly has even discussed the plans, never mind agreed to them.

A further problem is that the Assembly is too weak. On 29 October 2001, giving evidence to the Welsh Affairs Committee, the Secretary of State for Wales said:

> "I believe that in the last two years we have seen and experienced quite a dramatic change in how legislation for Wales is made, as compared to what had happened before devolution."

How much secondary legislation for Wales is actually passed by the Assembly and how much is really different from what is passed in England? Even in the areas that are supposed to be devolved, there have been more Statutory Instruments passed for Wales in Westminster than in the Assembly. In 2000, the Assembly passed 70 SIs, 30 of them for education or health. Westminster passed 40 SIs relating education or health in Wales. In 2001, up to 31 July, the Assembly passed 28 SIs for education and health whereas Westminster passed 22. We are pulling ahead a little, but those figures do not include instruments passed for both Wales and England. Research on that has not yet been concluded.

The way in which the foot and mouth crisis was handled brings the matter into focus. The National Assembly for Wales took de facto control, but had to wait for permission from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in certain cases, which caused delay. As we all know, delay was the worst thing in the circumstances. The Assembly did not have sufficient powers to react adequately: for example, it could not decide to reopen livestock markets. Carwyn Jones, the Welsh Minister for Rural Affairs, said in the Assembly on 8 November:

> "The Assembly cannot take that decision"—

that is, to open livestock markets.

> "We are aware of the discussion, and the whole Assembly is it agreed that must have such powers for itself."—*[National Assembly for Wales Official Record*, 8 November 2001; p.23]

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): The hon. Gentleman argues that the Assembly has been given too few powers, but some would argue that the problem is that it has not been willing to use what powers it has. Some of us remember the great debate at the time of the referendum and the promise that we would make a bonfire of the quangos. The Assembly has the power to make that bonfire, but all we have had is a damp squib. It has not happened.

Mr. Llwyd: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I quote from *The Western Mail* today, in which a Labour insider said:

> "While we can't be sure how many Labour AMs favour increased powers, it seems that not a single one would take the Assembly in the reverse direction. No one backs the line taken for so long and so unsuccessfully by Llew Smith, MP for Blaenau Gwent."

That might put that matter in context.

The Assembly could not make the decision on foot and mouth, although it has been asking for the necessary powers. In another example, it is pressing for powers over animal health, but that is being ignored.

The Assembly still has to rely too often on Westminster for primary legislation. Whitehall appears to ignore the wishes of the Assembly on the Animal Health Bill, which will give the Government far-reaching powers, for example, to reduce compensation to farmers in special cases, and stronger powers to slaughter animals. The Secretary of State has admitted that there has been no consultation, and the Assembly is not mentioned. The Bill gives the Assembly none of the powers for which it has called. The Executive are calling for them and the subject Committee is calling for them. In a recent debate on the Queen's Speech, the whole Assembly voted for them. A perfect opportunity for devolving those powers has again been ignored.

In higher education, the Assembly is responsible for access grants and bursaries, but student fees and loans are still the responsibility of Westminster. How can the Assembly develop a proper policy on student and university funding when it has responsibility for only half the tools involved?

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Will the hon. Gentleman explain why, if he is so concerned about the way in which this House deals with primary legislation that has been requested by the Assembly, he as leader of his parliamentary party has not attended the debates on education and health relating to Wales that we have had in the past couple of weeks? Not a single member of his party said anything at all in the important debate on health that he has just mentioned.

Mr. Llwyd: It is quite simple. I cannot be everywhere at once. We are a team, and the matter was being covered. Such comments come well from a Labour Member. Let us look at Welsh Grand Committee attendance. Fewer than a third of Welsh Labour Members turned up. Where were they?

On 26 November, the Welsh Executive published their action plan on tax incentives. It is a helpful document, including proposals to the United Kingdom Government on how to improve incentives for business through the UK tax system. How many of those proposals were included in the pre-Budget statement? Only two or three. Calls for such things as broad-band incentives and national insurance credit were not mentioned in the pre-Budget statement.

Under the Transport Act 2000, Parliament and the Scottish Executive can nominate a member of the Strategic Rail Authority, yet the Assembly has the right only to be consulted, even though it asked for the same right to nominate. It is true that the public had high expectations of the Assembly.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Does my hon. Friend agree that the reason why there has been a 10-month delay in the establishment of a single rail franchise for Wales is precisely that we do not enjoy the representation in the railway infrastructure that, for example, the Scottish Executive enjoys?

Mr. Llwyd: I am sure that that is right. Once again, we are lagging behind. We are being let down and our public services are faltering through no fault of the Assembly itself but simply because of the way in which it was constructed.

There is some confusion about the way in which the devolution settlement was put together. For example, two years ago a calf processing scheme was established to help dairy farmers who could not export calves because of BSE. Although the United Kingdom Government discontinued the scheme, the Assembly's Agriculture and Rural Development Committee looked at whether Wales could proceed with it. After a great deal of confusion, it became clear that such a scheme had to operate everywhere in the UK—it could not operate in only part of a European Union member state. In other words, because it did not function elsewhere, it could not do so in Wales.

There is the further example of pay and conditions for teachers. For a while, the Assembly was unsure whether it was empowered to deal with such matters and in the end it was decided that it was not. However, the Assembly is responsible for appraisals and therefore for performance-related pay. Teachers find that very confusing and it is difficult for them to know who to complain to. Even in respect of matters that are supposedly devolved, many responsibilities remain with Westminster.

Another good example is building regulations. At one time, the Welsh Office dealt with such matters, but during the reign of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) the relevant expert retired—probably late on in life—and the powers were returned to Westminster.

Unfortunately, an anti-devolution attitude exists in Whitehall, and Westminster has clawed back powers that were devolved. There is the example of the Local Government Act 2000, section 6 of which enables the Secretary of State for Wales to amend or repeal statutory requirements on local authorities to produce particular plans, so that they can streamline their planning by reducing the number of separate plans required. In an Assembly debate of 4 July 2000, Peter Law, the then Local Government and Planning Secretary, called for those powers to be extended to the Assembly. The Westminster Government responded by giving it such powers in a few specific areas, but Peter Law argued that that was not a satisfactory response to the strong representations that were made. He said that

> "the Assembly would be unable to offer local authorities the same flexibility without the UK Government's consent, although these plans relate to powers that have been transferred or granted to the Assembly...We should keep control over plans that are already within the Assembly's responsibility."—[*National Assembly for Wales Official Record,* 4 July 2000; p.20.]

My hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) has mentioned railways, and it would make sense if powers relating to our railways were devolved to Wales. As a result, the Barnett formula grant would itself increase—although that is a debate for another day and I shall not get into it now. We have made no secret of the fact that we want stronger powers for the Assembly. In customary fashion, the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith) said that we cannot expect to have those powers, and that we must learn to walk before we can run. There are many obstacles in the Assembly's path, however, that make its operations difficult. Of course, we would argue that for the time being we need parity with Scotland—the power to pass primary legislation and to vary taxes.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Is the hon. Gentleman in favour of another referendum, or does he believe that such powers should be granted without consulting the people of Wales?

Mr. Llwyd: I am not entirely sure whether a referendum is called for, although we might have to consider that idea. At the moment, the Assembly is undoubtedly underperforming, but not through any fault of its own.

Let us compare the Government of Wales Act 1998 with the Scotland Act 1998. The Government of Wales Act lists exactly what is devolved and the minutiae of various statutes; the Scotland Act merely states which powers remain with Westminster and, unless something is mentioned in the Act, the Scottish Parliament is automatically responsible. That is much more clear-cut than the confusion in the Government of Wales Act. The Assembly cannot assume discretion, but the Scottish Parliament can. The Scotland Act keeps the door open for further devolution by including a section allowing devolution in other matters if and when needed; the Government of Wales Act does not say how future Acts of Parliament shall confer further powers on the Assembly, but there is an assumption that the Assembly will be able to debate Westminster's intentions and influence further legislation. However, we saw how that worked on the Animal Health Bill.

Future Westminster Governments could reduce the Assembly's powers without further legislation. There is no protection because of the complete lack of a logical basis for the current pattern of powers. Had subject areas been devolved, matters would be simpler. The coalition Government in the Assembly have appointed an independent commission to look into powers and electoral arrangements for the Assembly—we welcome that—because they can see a problem, but the commission is not due to report until 2004.

Edwina Hart, the Minister for Finance and Communities in the Assembly said in a BBC report on 29 September 2000:

> "I am sick and tired of Whitehall civil servants drawing up schemes which include Wales without consulting us.
>
> This shows contempt for the people of Wales and for the principle of devolution which was supposed to be a central plank of Government policy.
>
> Following the announcement by the UK Government"

Welsh cars

> "will not be allowed to have Welsh flags on their number plates."

Christine Gwyther, the late lamented Agriculture and the Rural Economy Secretary, claimed that Whitehall had kept her in the dark about a mix-up over genetically modified seeds being sold in the United Kingdom by mistake. She put that on the record on 19 May 2000.

I know that several hon. Members want to speak in this debate, but I want to raise two further matters. One is a quotation from an article entitled, "The New Model Wales" in the *Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 25, No. 4 of December 1998, which was, of course, before devolution. Richard Rawlings of the law department at the London School of Economics said:

> "There remains, however, the uncomfortable prospect of the Assembly as supplicant or lobbyist in the Westminster process. In the words of the White Paper, 'the Assembly will need to establish a close partnership with Members of Parliament representing Welsh constituencies'. This is very different from the situation of the Welsh Office as part of central Government."

He continued:

> "There is, none the less, too much about the scheme that disappoints. It is not simply that Wales has once again been treated as a second-class member of the Union. The product has been prejudiced by the nature of the decision-making process. Old governmental assumptions have held true, a rich constitutional discourse has not had the opportunity to develop. So let us, in conclusion, focus on the way in which the new model Wales has been produced."

He also refers to the

> "high dependency of the Welsh scheme of devolution on administrative and political goodwill. It is to this effect a flimsy construction, which presupposes consensus and co-operation for legitimacy and effective operations."

I shall conclude by referring to today's edition of *The Western Mail*. Mr. Alun Pugh, a Deputy Minister at the National Assembly for Wales, is a Labour Member who can hardly be called Plaid Cymru's friend, or perhaps anyone's friend. The paper says:

> "The present situation is a 'constitutional time-bomb' set to go off shortly after administrations of different political persuasions are returned in Cardiff and London.
>
> The warning and subsequent demand for full powers by 2010 from Alun Pugh, deputy minister for education, will be repeated next week in slightly different terms by the heavy-weight and highly regarded Constitution Unit of the University of London.
>
> Mr. Pugh ... makes his demand at the University of Glamorgan in Pontypridd",

where he discussed the completion of

> "Keir Hardie's unfinished business...Mr. Hardie was of course MP for Merthyr Tydfil, Labour's parliamentary leader until his death in 1915, and a fervent advocate of home rule.
>
> The Constitution Unit looks to the future in its *The State of the Nations 2001* ... the present secondary law-making powers held by Cardiff are inherently unstable".

The article further says:

> "The unit blames the crooked interface between powers held by London and those enjoyed by Cardiff"

and informs us that Mr. Pugh will tell students that

> "Having no law-making powers in Cardiff means that in the event of the Tories returning to power in Westminster"—

heaven forbid—

> "we in Wales could be steamrollered by laws whipped through by English Tories."

A senior Assembly Member said:

> "I suppose about one quarter of the 29 AMs have during plenary sessions or in public speeches said or hinted at the need for such a change."

Again, I shall refer to the closing words of the article:

> "No-one backs the line taken for so long and so unsuccessfully by Llew Smith, MP for Blaenau Gwent."

11.21 am

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Hon Members will not be surprised that the nationalists have called this debate. It is another opportunity to push the arguments for a Welsh parliament, with the ultimate goal being a separatist Welsh state. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) would deny that, and he uses moderate language to hide his agenda because he knows that the goals of separatism and independence are utterly unacceptable to the electorate.

The nationalists' misuse of language is obvious in their attempts to project a more moderate image, and it is wise to recall a few examples of that.

Ieuan Wyn Jones, who was then a Member of Parliament, was obviously having trouble with his crystal ball—it was probably not bilingual—when he predicted:

> "Labour are clearly unable to win a general election."

If Labour was unelectable there was no need to worry because Ieuan and his fellow nationalists had the answer, which was independence. However, that idea had to be couched in sweet and moderate language to make it acceptable to a hostile electorate. The buzzwords that Ieuan used to hide his aim of independence were:

> "self-government for Wales is the only answer."

Sadly for Ieuan, he forgot to tell his mate Cynog Dafis, again a former MP, who proceeded to announce that self-government, which used to be called independence, remained Plaid's aspiration.

Determined not to be beaten, and equally determined to make a fool of himself for a second time, Ieuan, recognising the flexibility of human nature and ideas, was pleased to announce:

> "I think self-government now needs to be redefined. I much prefer to use 'full national status'".

On that occasion he learned from history and told his party's members the reasoning behind the new line of full national status. Unfortunately, the members failed to keep those discussions secret and proceeded to tell the world, or least their recent party conference. When David Senior, a conference delegate, referred to independence, he said:

> "Apparently it means the same as full national status, but you see, I can't say it because it is not our policy . . . Hang on, if it means the same thing, it is our policy and therefore I can say it."

Mr. Llwyd: Once again, the hon. Gentleman has quoted a junior party member and portrayed his view as being somehow representative. Far from trying to keep the discussion secret, all the media, including HTV and BBC, had been invited in.

Llew Smith: I am unsure how Cynog Dafis will respond to the accusation that he is a junior member of the Welsh nationalist party. If we have time, and certainly after this debate, I am willing to refer the hon. Gentleman to quotation after quotation from both junior and senior members of the Welsh nationalist party, where they use such language to cover the aims of their party, which obviously involve separatism.

There are other nationalists who are equally confused about their aims or, more accurately, determined to hide the truth. That became even more obvious to me shortly after the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) was elected, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) said:

> "I watched the television when he made his victory speech. He said that he wanted to work himself out of a job and that although he was going to Westminster, he did not want to be there."

It is amazing the sacrifices the nationalists are willing to make to represent this great nation of ours. My right hon. Friend went on:

> "I can understand that. Even the post-modern Welsh nationalist party believes in some form of separatism and Welsh membership of the European Union. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) nods. I am not sure, but I believe that he also wants to work himself out of a job eventually. To paraphrase a famous saying, 'Make me chaste my lord, but not yet.'"

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy replied:

> "Yes, I am trying to work myself out of job."'—[*Official Report*, 2 March 2000; Vol. 345, c. 633.]

How can Plaid Cymru deny that it is the party of separatism and independence, when it concedes that its future plans do not involve having representation in the House of Commons? Are we expected to believe that the nationalists would have supported the Assembly if that was the end of the process? It would be the equivalent of signing their own death warrant if they were to support a halfway house, and not press for a parliament and ultimately independence. Anyone foolish enough to consider working politically with the nationalists should also remember that they helped to keep the Tories in power by voting with the Tory Government on the Maastricht treaty in exchange for a seat on the European Committee of the Regions. Indeed —

Mr. Llwyd: On a point of order, Mr. Amess. I have been listening for the past six minutes to this rant, and so far there has been nothing about the Government of Wales Act 1998. Others are waiting to speak about the Act. With great respect it really is out of order.

Mr. David Amess (in the Chair): I remind the Chamber that there are a number of hon. Members who are waiting to speak. It is my intention to get everyone in.

Llew Smith: I am sure that you do not need reminding, Mr. Amess, but the hon. Gentleman may have been listening to me for six minutes, but I had to listen to more than 20 minutes of his drivel, so time is certainly on my side. If we are going to discuss the Government of Wales Act 1998 and the role of the National Assembly for Wales, it is important that we examine the alternative, which is a Welsh parliament in a separate state. We should discuss why the Welsh nationalists want a separatist state and why they want independence.

We were consistently told that the failure to achieve independence was preventing additional European money, such as objective 1 funds, from being allocated to large parts of Wales. This was obviously another cheap attempt by the nationalists to con people into supporting independence, because the Labour Government delivered objective 1 for Wales and made a mockery of the nationalist claim. Those who are pressing for a Welsh parliament should recognise that once it has been achieved, the next demand will be for a separatist Welsh state divorced from the rest of the United Kingdom.

[Llew Smith]

The present demand by a few for a Welsh parliament is often justified with the argument that it was an insult to Wales to be given fewer powers than the Scottish Parliament. That is once again a nationalist argument. I am still not sympathetic to an Assembly, but I am of the opinion that the powers should be based on the most effective form of decision making. We want good government, not nationalism. Are we so unsure of ourselves in Wales that we have to copy the Scots, when we were informed that one of the reasons for devolution was that we were different from the rest of the United Kingdom?

In my opinion, the Government must now consider decreasing the powers of the National Assembly for Wales and devolving them to local authorities. Unlike the creation of the National Assembly for Wales, that would be an act of real devolution, not nationalism. It is also necessary for central Government to devolve a number of their powers to local authorities.

The Assembly has been unwilling to use all its powers to keep promises that it made to justify its existence. We all remember the promise to make a bonfire of the quangos, but that has not happened and we have seen only a damp squib. During the referendum, some of us said that we did not need an Assembly to make a bonfire of the quangos, just a one-line Bill from this Parliament. At that time, many nationalists extolled the virtues of an Assembly by informing us that it would be a miracle cure for all our economic, social and constitutional ills—you name it, the Assembly would cure it. No explanation was provided as to how that could happen—the mere existence of an Assembly would be sufficient. No matter what nationalists might dream up, we all recognise that their aims are separatism and independence.

It is important that we understand the reasons for the demands of the nationalists and why they are pushing for independence. Anti-English prejudices have run throughout their party since its birth. Saunders Lewis, a founding member and former leader, saw the Jews and the English as enemies, while admiring Hitler and Mussolini. *[Interruption.]* Of course, the nationalists do not want to hear this. Of Hitler, Saunders Lewis declared:

> "At once he fulfilled his promise—a promise which was greatly mocked by the London papers months before that—to completely abolish the financial strength of the Jews in the economic life of Germany."

The Welsh nationalist attitude to the English is also seen in their opposition to English children being evacuated to Wales to avoid the bombing of their homes during the second world war. They said that that would

> "completely submerge and destroy all of Welsh national tradition."

Saunders Lewis went on to say that the

> "movement on population is one of the most horrible threats to the continuation and to the life of the Welsh nation that has ever been suggested in history."

So, there we are. Hitler and Mussolini were friends of the nationalists, but English children escaping the ravages of war were the enemy. The anti-English prejudices of the Welsh nationalist party have changed little over the years and can be witnessed from the statements of some of its members. Gwilym ap Loan referred to the English in Wales as an

> "alien culture within our nation."

and Simon Glyn referred to retired people moving into Wales as a "drain on our resources."

So deep was the nationalist hatred of the English that they originally opposed the building of the Severn bridge and referred to it as a "suicidal policy". Then, as now, jobs are not important to the nationalists compared with the need to break the link with England and all things English. Nationalists in the Chamber may want to clarify their position today.

I do not want to give the impression that Welsh nationalists hate the English to the extent of taking a principled stand against any English involvement. Certainly not, because although they want independence, they also want English money to subsidise their aims. Hardly a day goes by without their taking the begging bowl to demand more money. One of my predecessors, Aneurin Bevan, rejected the anti-English sentiments of the nationalists and never failed to emphasise the common goals that unite us. Leo Abse, referring to Nye, reminded us:

> "he believed, as I believe, that a miner is a miner, whether he works in Durham or Glamorgan, that a steel worker is a steel worker, whether he works at Ebbw Vale, Llanwern, Scunthorpe or Sheffield".—*[Official Report,* 16 December 1976; Vol. 922, c. 1793.]

That is why, as a socialist, I reject nationalism and separatism: it would take us down the road to a Welsh parliament. The problem is not nationality but economics and the system and, as a socialist, I will always base my ideas and action on that fact.

11.34 am

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): It is a great pleasure to follow the socialist hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith)—he is one of the few socialists left in the Labour party. During his regurgitation, mixed with bile, of the future of Wales, we were given no idea what his constitutional settlement or his party's idea of a constitutional future would be.

I welcome the Secretary of State for Wales. I attend Westminster Hall fairly regularly and this is the first time that I have seen a Cabinet Minister here to respond to the debate. We are grateful for that acknowledgement that this is a serious debate—despite the contribution of the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent.

In reply to the hon. Member for Cardiff, Students (Mr. Jones)—

Mr. Llwyd: Cardiff, Cannabis.

Mr. Thomas: Yes, perhaps it should be Cardiff, Cannabis.

My hon. Friends the Members for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) and for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) were present at the debates on both the Education Bill and the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr spoke in the Education Bill debate, which is more than any Wales Office Minister did. Those debates had important Welsh aspects and merited some ministerial contribution.

I want to consider a narrow aspect of the operation of the Government of Wales Act 1998 to show how its failings have meant that we have not been able to achieve what we should like to achieve in Wales. Section 121 places a duty on the National Assembly to make a scheme promoting sustainable development. In response, it produced a paper entitled "Learning to Live Differently"—a positive document containing many ideas about how to use sustainable development as an opportunity to improve the quality of life instead of viewing it as a barrier or hurdle to economic development. We need to build on our burgeoning industries. There are few coal miners or steelworkers left, thanks to the Government's policies.

Llew Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Thomas: No. The hon. Gentleman did not want to debate with me and I do not want to debate with him.

Llew Smith: What about the miners' strike?

Mr. David Amess (in the Chair): Order.

Mr. Thomas: We must base a new economy on new industries such as renewable energy, which will benefit both the economy and the environment, and introduce the knowledge economy more fully. It is sad that Wales lags far behind in that respect.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I wish to make a serious point as the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central and Cannabis. The hon. Gentleman is about to argue that the constitutional process does not allow sustainable development to take place as was intended. However, does he not agree that there is no bar on the Welsh Assembly setting up renewable energy plans? Before devolution, the Welsh Office agreed several plans for wind power stations, but the Assembly has not proceeded with them—not because of any constitutional bar, but because it decided not to.

Mr. Thomas: The hon. Gentleman obviously thinks that he knows what I am going to say and is trying to take advantage of that. In fact he is wrong, and I intend to deal with the points that he raised. He is right to say that the Assembly has not seen fit to give the go-ahead to some important renewable energy projects, but that is nothing to do with the constitutional settlement—it is the result of a political decision by the Labour-Liberal coalition to thwart those developments. I suspect that he is as disappointed about that as I am.

However, the constitutional settlement also thwarts such developments. For example, on energy policy, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned, the Assembly is responsible for planning for electricity generating plants of less than 50 MW. Unfortunately, these days that is virtually nothing—any new renewable energy projects have to generate more than 50 MW if they are to pay their way—so although the Assembly may be consulted, the decision making remains here in London with the Department of Trade and Industry. That becomes even more worrying when one considers that nuclear power stations generate at least 1,000 MW, so the role of the Assembly in deciding whether there should be a new nuclear power station in Wales is negligible, if not nil. Can the Assembly deliver the coherent energy policy that it is supposedly putting together, which is compatible with sustainable development, when it is responsible only for small-scale energy generation?

On renewable energy, Wales already contributes 40 per cent. of the wind energy produced in the United Kingdom. However, there is an increasing likelihood that a new nuclear power station will be foisted on the people of Wales against our will. If that happens, it will be akin to the foisting of Tryweryn on us in the 1960s against our will. It is interesting that the interconnector that has been suggested for renewable energy, pitched as an interconnector to link renewable energy sites along the west coast of Britain, also links the sites of existing and potential nuclear power stations. There is no reason why an interconnector could not be used for nuclear energy as well as energy produced by renewables.

In my constituency, an application has been made for a large new wind farm at Cefn Croes, which would generate something like 59 MW—1 per cent. of Wales's electricity needs. The decision on that rests with the Department of Trade and Industry and not with the National Assembly. Hon. Members might say that at least the Assembly has a consultative role, but it has not seen fit to say yea or nay to the Cefn Croes application. That might be a political problem in the Assembly, but I suggest that it is also a constitutional problem. It feels that it does not have the right level of decision making over such processes, and because it is not responsible for the outcomes it shirks away from taking decisions.

Things would be bad enough if that remained the situation. However, if we pry further into the future of renewables in Wales, we find that the DTI has produced a consultation paper for offshore wind or water-driven electricity stations in Wales. Not content with relying on its ability to decide on projects of more than 50 MW, the DTI is suggesting that it should decide all applications for projects of more than 1 MW in London. That might happen in consultation with the Assembly, but it is removing from Wales to the DTI powers that currently reside with the National Assembly and local authorities in Wales.

The consultation process on that recently ended and, lo and behold, the Government have decided to go ahead. Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 will be expanded and the Government response simply states that

> "detailed handling procedures will be drawn up to show the roles of the different Government Departments and other bodies."

The role of the National Assembly as a statutory consultee in the process will be covered by detailed guidance, and any change in the National Assembly's overall position in the devolved arrangements will have to be separately considered by Ministers. Now, the Assembly is passing from being a decision-making body to being a consultee body.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The hon. Gentleman is discussing renewable energy. He will know that those who promote renewable energy argue, and have argued

[Mr. Jon Owen Jones]

for some time, that the primary problem in gaining permission for renewable energy sites is the difficulty with planning. Organisations calling for more renewable energy have asked the Government to remove the ability to restrict planning easily, by taking decision making to a higher level. I cannot see how it is consistent for him on the one hand to promote renewable energy but on the other to argue that planning permission decisions should not have been taken to a higher level.

Mr. David Amess (in the Chair): Order. There are 47 minutes left, and six people, including the Secretary of State, waiting to catch my eye. I would be grateful if we could have shorter interventions.

Mr. Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Amess. I will deal briefly with the intervention.

I know that the hon. Gentleman takes such matters seriously, but the outcome of what he just advocated would be the reverse of devolution and democracy. He is advocating that all decisions be taken at the highest level and not at the most appropriate level for the local people concerned. If the people in Wales say that they do not want renewable energy, I, though an advocate of renewable energy, have to accept that as the democratic view of the people of Wales. I do not think that the current constitutional arrangements allow them to express that will properly and fully.

The change in procedures for renewable energy was opposed by my county council. It has also caused concern to the Association of National Park Authorities, the Countryside Council for Wales, the National Trust and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority. They were all concerned to see that a level of democracy was being taken away from them and the Assembly and given to the Department of Trade and Industry. A parallel process is taking place, whereby the Government are consulting the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions about a change in planning law. They want to get rid of public inquiries—admittedly, they can prove lengthy, wasteful and expensive—and introduce a fast-track process for large-scale applications. That could benefit some renewable energy applications, but it could also benefit nuclear power stations.

I should also remind hon. Members that the application for the Kielder Forest renewable energy wind farm has been with the DTI since 1992, but the fact that it has taken the DTI nine years to reach a decision has nothing to do with the public inquiry—it is the DTI's decision alone. Raising the level at which decisions are taken does not necessarily lead to greater efficiency.

Many of us are criticised for wanting the famous process of devolution to be a bit like a Benny Hill sketch and move at a fast pace. Some say, "Whoa! That's too fast—let's see things happen at a normal pace." Perhaps there are a few hon. Members who want matters to progress in slow motion, but I doubt whether many—other than the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent—want the reels to run backwards.

Llew Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Thomas: No. I want to—

Llew Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. David Amess (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman is clearly not giving way.

Mr. Thomas: I want to make two final points, on the environment and on the failure of the present constitutional settlements. A decision was taken overnight by the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to allow the planting of genetically modified crops on three sites in Wales. There was no consultation with Members of the Assembly, the Welsh Executive, local Members of Parliament or Opposition spokespeople on the environment. In fact, there was no consultation at all.

Mrs. Jackie Lawrence (Preseli Pembrokeshire): The hon. Gentleman will know that two of the three sites were in my constituency, and he will also be familiar with the frustrations arising from the Assembly's lack of powers. However, if he has done his homework he will surely acknowledge that it was not a question of the DETR's retaining such powers, given that it, too, did not have them. They were given away in 1991 on implementation of environment legislation by the then Tory Government.

Mr. Thomas: I thank the hon. Lady for that contribution, but she is not entirely right in implying that her Government's hands are clean. It was a committee established by the then DETR that decided to plant GM crops in Pembrokeshire. Although I am pleased that planting on the two Pembrokeshire sites has not gone ahead, she will be aware that there remains a site in Wales on which such crops are being grown. That has thrown into complete disarray the Assembly's policy of a GM-free Wales, and its vision of Welsh agriculture based on a green, increasingly organic concept. If it is to have one hand tied behind its back and be thwarted at every opportunity by decisions taken in Whitehall, the Assembly will be unable to develop a sustainable future for Welsh agriculture.

The biggest issue in Wales this year has been access to rural housing. Unfortunately, the debate has been coloured by the use of extreme language on both sides of the argument. However, there is a solution. A number of reasonable proposals can be made in support of greater access to rural housing that enjoy the support of, say, people in Exmoor national park and in Cumbria. I included such proposals in a private Member's Bill that I wanted to present to Parliament. The Bill was thwarted by the arcane procedures of the House, to the extent that we did not even debate its merits. Nevertheless, during that process it became clear that simple matters such as planning the number of second homes in Wales could be decided not at Welsh level but only a Westminster level. Such problems underline the frustration felt by many in Wales. The Assembly could, and should, be doing a better job, and it should be given the necessary powers. That is why we need a review of the Government of Wales Act 1998.

11.49 am

Dr. Hywel Francis (Aberavon): I am a long-standing campaigner for democratic devolution. In 1979 I was the treasurer of the West Glamorgan campaign and in 1997 I was the national convener of the cross-party "Yes for Wales" campaign. I mention that not because I am keen to indulge in veteranism, but to remind hon. Members that the Labour party and the Labour Government come to the question from our vision as democrats and our respect for the democratic will of the people of Wales and the people of Britain. In that spirit, hon. Members should be reminded of the words of the current Secretary of State for Wales in October 1999 when he said that devolution is "a settled question." Many chose to misunderstand the meaning of that statement, which was borrowed from the late John Smith's memorable words,

"the settled will of the Scottish people".

For us in Wales, the settled question means that there is no going back. One of the new responsibilities of the Secretary of State is to safeguard the new constitutional settlement, as represented by the referendum result and the Government of Wales Act 1998. We should all, whether we were for or against devolution, now work with the Secretary of State and Assembly Members to make the present democratic settlement work.

The settled question in Wales also means that it is the democratic will of the Welsh people. The people voted, albeit narrowly, for democratic devolution and we must respect our democratic decision. It is disingenuous now, and it was disingenuous immediately after the referendum result, to call for additional powers. Our task in Westminster and the Assembly is to make the democratic devolution settlement work. It is inappropriate to call for additional powers without recognising the need for a further democratic mandate.

The task before us is simple. First, we must stop talking down the Assembly. The democratic partnership between the Assembly and Westminster is working, as evidenced, for example, by the creation of the Children's Commissioner for Wales and the additional funding achieved for objective 1 areas. Secondly, we must remind ourselves that our main task as Welsh Members of Parliament and Welsh Assembly Members is to improve the quality of life of the Welsh people. My distinguished predecessor, Lord Morris of Aberavon, said that we must achieve

"the repatriation of democracy to Wales".

That has now been achieved, and it is our task to make it work for the benefit of the people of Wales.

11.52 am

Mrs. Jackie Lawrence (Preseli Pembrokeshire): I am grateful for the chance to speak in this debate because, like my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis), I have always supported the principle of devolution. However, the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) missed the point—I may not have made myself clear—that if devolution had been in place in 1991, the Assembly would have had the powers, because it would have had to be consulted.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to nuclear power stations. There is great fear in my constituency in west Wales at the prospect of a nuclear power station, but I cannot help thinking that he is scaremongering. He will be aware that although the nuclear installations inspectorate is still the responsibility of Westminster, the Environment Agency and the planning aspects of any applications are devolved to the Assembly.

Mr. Simon Thomas: We are debating the Government of Wales Act and the hon. Lady should be aware that the Environment Agency is not devolved to Wales. It may have a Welsh branch or arm, but it is not devolved. She should also be aware that the Minister in the Welsh Grand Committee refused to rule out a new nuclear power station in Wales.

Mrs. Lawrence: My understanding is that the functions of the Environment Agency in Wales are devolved to the Assembly, perhaps the Secretary of State will expand on that.

On nuclear waste, if the hon. Gentleman looks at the consultation document on the management of nuclear waste, it is clear that the Assembly will have its say in the matter.

Given the opening statement by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), one is tempted to ask why he voted yes in the devolution referendum. He referred to the Welsh Grand Committee, but he does not seem to be aware that there was a three-day sitting of the Welsh Affairs Committee when the Welsh Grand Committee met last week. At the Welsh Grand Committee meeting of July 2000, only one Plaid Cymru Member was present. It was an important occasion on which we debated the comprehensive spending review, and he may wish to explain why he was not there.

I support devolution and I have always supported devolution. I tabled amendments to the Government of Wales Act 1998 on behalf of business in Wales. Those amendments were accepted in principle, and they were the only amendments that were accepted during the Act's passage through the House of Commons. I support devolution because actions such as the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) sending £100 million back from Wales could not happen under the Assembly. The decimation of NHS management under the former Welsh Office, which is a fundamental problem for the NHS, could not happen under devolution.

Llew Smith: Putting aside whether an Assembly is right or wrong, or whether we should have voted yes or no, does my hon. Friend agree that the reason why the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy voted yes was that he and his party saw it as a step down the road to a separatist, independent Wales?

Mrs. Lawrence: One is tempted to believe that.

Nursery vouchers, which were anathema to the Welsh people, could not have been imposed with the Assembly as it is now.

The issue of secondary powers, on which I did some research, was raised by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy in last week's Welsh Grand Committee. The Assembly is not using its existing

[Mrs. Lawrence]

powers on secondary legislation, and my information, which comes from the House of Commons Library and the Assembly, reveals that the Assembly passed 29 statutory instruments in 1999.

There are three systems for handling secondary legislation in the Assembly. I shall describe them as outlined by John Osmond, director of the Institute of Welsh Affairs. There is a full-length process, there is a foreshortened process and there is an emergency process. In 1999, there were 29 statutory instruments of which 15 were subject to the emergency system; in 2000, there were 119 statutory instruments of which 40 were subject to the emergency system; in 2001, there were 221 statutory instruments—that is a different figure from the one cited by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy—of which 48 related to foot and mouth disease and 93 were subject to the emergency system. In two years, there were 369 pieces of secondary legislation, of which only eight were dealt with by the full system, while 148, approximately half, were dealt with by the emergency system.

We must examine what those three systems do. The full procedure means that secondary legislation goes in front of the business unit, the subject Committee and the Legislation Committee before being debated in plenary. Eight of those 369 statutory instruments were dealt with through the full process. The emergency procedure involves a decision made by the Welsh Executive subject to scrutiny by the Legislation Committee after the instrument is made.

On that subject, John Osmond states:

> "So far much of the secondary legislation considered by the National Assembly has been dealt with by the third, emergency, route. This may be because the Assembly's committees had too much on their plates in the early months to get round to such detailed matters. On the other hand, if the precedent is followed in the future, it will mean that one of the purposes of devolution, to make the legislative process more transparent, accountable and open to amendment, will be lost."

The number of statutory instruments dealt with by the Assembly during the first months was low compared with former Welsh Office's activity.

Mr. Llwyd: I am listening intently to what the hon. Lady is saying, and it is constructive. Can she tell us how many such instruments were passed in that time by the House of Commons?

Mrs. Lawrence: I understand that the hon. Gentleman alleged that 60 had been passed by the House of Commons, but I am talking about legislation dealt with by the Assembly. It seems that there has been a lack of time to examine secondary legislation with the degree of scrutiny that those who support devolution, and supported it during the passage of the Government of Wales Act, expected. Here, we have one and a half hours for statutory instruments in Committee, but there, because of the lack of time, such decisions have not been given sufficient scrutiny. We must ask the hon. Gentleman and his party why that is so.

I looked at the debates in the Welsh Assembly during that period; the majority had been secured by Plaid Cymru. We should consider the Assembly's responsibilities. Labour Members want the Assembly and devolution to work and when the Government of Wales Bill was proceeding through the House, the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues said that that was also their position—if we can believe what they say. Now, the leader of Plaid Cymru is saying that devolution is doomed to failure. The only reason why it is doomed is that instead of handling secondary legislation openly and transparently in the Assembly, which it has a responsibility to do, the party introduces debates on UK Government fiscal and public expenditure, royal commission and Lords reform, new deal, relief of world debt and the up-to-date situation in Afghanistan. Any council or local authority could discuss those subjects if it wanted to, but if the ordinary population of this country felt that their local authority was discussing such matters and avoiding the problems of rubbish collection, transport, street lighting and so forth, there would be an outcry.

Labour Members want the Assembly to work and to have the opportunity to do the job that we voted for it to do, and that was the purpose of the Government of Wales Act 1998: to have devolved, transparent decision making, which is as near as possible to the people it serves. That is the purpose of devolution. If the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy and his party co-operated in the manner in which they said that they would when we were enacting the legislation, rather than calling for debates for which the Assembly has no responsibility, it would work effectively and could progress in its job.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): I am going to call the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), but I ask him to speak for no more than three minutes, or I may not use such discretion in future.

12.2 pm

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Thank you, Mr. Winterton.

I want to concentrate on how the constitutional settlement is working. In the past fortnight, two major Bills that will effect health and education provision in Wales have been discussed. Plaid Cymru showed poor attendance in debates on both.

The system is not working as well as it could. Both Bills had Welsh clauses that are considerably different from major English clauses. Yesterday's debate on the Education Bill revealed many differences. The best way to give scrutiny to a Bill, whose major provisions affect Welsh constituencies in a different way from English ones is not to be obliged to vote on the whole package on Second Reading, when it includes entirely contradictory things for different parts of the country.

The reason why the Welsh provisions are appended to bigger Bills is to do with the constraints on time in the House. I understand why that is a practical necessity if we deal with legislation as we do. Unfortunately, for one reason or another, Wales Office Ministers were unable to respond to the issues raised in the debates on both Bills. That may not have been the best way to deal with them.

I ask the Secretary of State to consider again whether mechanisms could be introduced whereby we could deal with Welsh legislation in a separate way that did not take time away from the rest of the Government's programme. They want to implement the programme and will be understandably reluctant to introduce Welsh Bills that will take up precious time. We have discussed before whether we could introduce some fast-track mechanism or use the Welsh Grand Committee.

We must consider how to make the settlement work. I am sure that that is a great priority for the Secretary of State and he will have thought about it deeply for some time. Although the existing mechanism is better than nothing, it is not working as it well as it could in respect of those two Bills, and we need to make progress on improving it. It would be useful if other parties offered help and suggestions, rather than simply saying, "Scrap the whole thing."

12.6 pm

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Let me first say how pleased I am that Plaid Cymru Members have secured a debate—in a way, it has enabled us to celebrate the success of the Liberal Democrat-Labour coalition in Cardiff—and how appropriate it is that representatives of the two parties of government in Wales should make the last two speeches.

Devolution was a Liberal idea, a long time ago. Many believe that it was a consequence of Liberals dragging their feet that Plaid Cymru came into existence, partly as a pressure group to drive Wales towards devolution. I am concerned about Plaid Cymru's entirely negative attitude to the early years of the devolution project in Wales. I have listened with interest and some confusion to what its members have said about its position. For a long time, I mistakenly believed that its policy was to support independence. That was clarified when a former Member of Parliament, Dafydd Wigley, said that the party had never supported independence, much to the surprise of many of its members and the rest of us.

The confusion remains. Plaid Cymru has a very close working relationship with the Scottish National party, which is committed to independence for Scotland. Hon. Members and the public can be forgiven for being somewhat confused about why two parties with such different objectives in principle choose to align themselves in the House of Commons.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Perhaps it would help the hon. Gentleman's confusion if he could explain why last night his party voted against the Education Bill, including Welsh clauses that his party had put in and supported in Wales. Does that not show that his party is not only two different parties, but a different party in any given constituency?

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Gentleman has failed to clarify the question of independence.

Mr. Thomas: He has failed to clarify his voting record.

Lembit Öpik: I assure him that independence involves making difficult decisions and trying to find a balance between the best interests of the UK and those of Wales. *[Interruption.]* We try to draw a responsible line, part of which involves not shouting down Members who are trying to make a sensible and constructive contributions.

Llew Smith: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in reality there is no confusion in the nationalist party about its position on independence? Indeed, Dafydd Wigley, to whom he referred, is on record as saying that an independent Wales would leave NATO.

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. Although we can all be entertained by the contradictions, it is a serious matter, because it is hard to gauge exactly how one should view Plaid Cymru's position on devolution. The hon. Gentleman has been a long-time opponent of devolution. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry: of the settlement in Wales. That is a respectable position, although I do not necessarily agree with it.

It was symptomatic of Plaid Cymru's approach that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) intervened after six minutes to imply that the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith) had no right to make his points. That summarises what many feel is the attitude of Plaid Cymru Members. They try to shout down any opposition, including me when I was speaking a few minutes ago, rather than respecting the right to a different opinion.

We should all remember what was said at the time of the devolution debate: new politics requires new attitudes and a willingness to operate in a different way. That willingness is not apparent among Welsh nationalists. For example, Plaid Cymru Members tabled three amendments on the child care debate in the Assembly. The amendments were on matters that were about to be addressed anyway. They tabled four amendments on the ministerial code; that subject too, was already in hand. Tomorrow, Plaid Cymru Members will lead a debate on economic development. All those issues are already on the agenda.

It seems to Liberal Democrat Members that although Plaid Cymru Members take a negative attitude towards the devolution settlement, they want to steal the clothes of the coalition for the many positive things that are being achieved. The two parties in the coalition have embraced a new kind of politics by operating together and trying to provide political stability in the devolution settlement in Wales.

The hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) made an insightful point. Eight out of the past 10 minority party debates awarded to Plaid Cymru were wasted on matters that Plaid Cymru Members know that the Assembly could not influence significantly. The nationalists are entitled to spend that debating time as they wish, but it seems to the Liberal Democrats that Plaid Cymru Members are more interested in posturing and playing at party politics than in spending debate time constructively and making a helpful contribution to the government of Wales.

Mr. Llwyd: Mike German.

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Gentleman says the name as though it were a mantra that evokes the devil himself. That is an example of Plaid Cymru seeking opportunistic advantage, even though Mike German has not been found guilty of any wrongdoing throughout what has been, in my view, an overly long and drawn-out inquiry. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. I do not want to hear sedentary conversations. I am trying to listen to the hon. Gentleman's speech.

Lembit Öpik: I am sure that the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) is supporting me from his sedentary position. He is so angry about the injustice meted out to Mike German by Plaid Cymru that he felt the need to shout out. He can be forgiven for that.

Plaid Cymru Members have attempted to score a party political point against Mike German and the Liberal Democrats, even though in this country a person is innocent until proven guilty. The fact that the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy is willing to drag that up is symptomatic of the attitude that bedevils the nationalist contribution to the government of Wales.

In response to an intervention from the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, almost out of frustration with the Government of Wales Act 1998, said that Plaid Cymru cannot be everywhere at once. That is true. Plaid Cymru's long list of criticisms, complaints and frustrations cannot be resolved by the four Plaid Cymru Members of Parliament, although it is not the party's fault that it has only four seats. The Liberal Democrats have 52 Members of Parliament, all of whom are committed to devolution. All Liberal Democrat Members take a federalist attitude toward the United Kingdom, and are willing to engage in devolution—not just for Wales, but for England and Scotland, too.

I suggest to Plaid Cymru that it seek allies carefully, rather than making enemies of potential allies. It should be willing to engage with those who are committed to devolution and its expansion, as are many—not all—of the hon. Members present.

I remind the Chamber of the long list of triumphs achieved by the Liberal Democrat-Labour coalition. They include the Reece report on student funding, which pushes for a more generous settlement for students. Farming Connect was a significant achievement of my colleague, Mick Bates. We provided free school milk, which many feel was a great step forward in health provision for young people. On economic development, the Assembly's efforts made a significant contribution to save many jobs in Llanidloes—to be parochial for a moment. I am sure that there are many other examples.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy rightly praised the Liberal Democrat-Labour coalition for its proposals on free prescriptions and dental charges for a proportion of the population. That is another Liberal Democrat policy, as was the introduction of the Children's Commissioner. Even when condemning and criticising the Assembly for its performance, hon. Members cite some of its successes.

I recognise that Plaid Cymru has a legitimate right to try to maximise its power and the number of votes that it can secure in Wales. However, I suggest to Plaid Cymru and all parties that we have a higher responsibility: to make devolution work. To do that, we must think positively about the opportunities that it brings, rather than simply run it down. I invite Plaid Cymru and the Conservatives to enter into the coalition of ideas that can put the public first, rather than engage in a cynical and incessant attempt to drag down an institution that so many of us worked side by side to try to convince the Welsh people was worth while.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Before I call the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), I shall say that I want to give the Minister 10 minutes to wind up this important debate. If the hon. Gentleman can use self-discipline—I know that he can—the Chamber will be very happy.

12.16 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I will make a brief contribution, Mr. Winterton.

This is an important debate, but part of the problem is the high expectations of devolution that existed when the process was introduced. We all remember the debates. We were all told how wonderful everything was going to be—we would have a cure for the common cold, and the Welsh rugby team would never lose again if only we had a Welsh Assembly. Look at what happened. I shall not talk about Welsh rugby, because I have only four minutes. The fact is that the expectations could not possibly have been met.

We now know—we expected to hear this from Plaid Cymru—that devolution was a journey and not a destination in itself. Now Plaid Cymru thinks that the reason for the Welsh Assembly's not working properly is that it has not gone far enough—it should have primary legislative powers, and if only it had them, we would have a cure for the common cold and the Welsh rugby team would never lose another match. We have been there before. Yes, we should make devolution work—it is a reality, because the Assembly has powers—and we should use the powers that we have, and stop whingeing. The Assembly has sufficient powers to make a difference in many fields, but they are being used as a vehicle to try to push devolution even further.

I was in Corwen this week, and I saw the North Wales group having a meeting on the Welsh language with Dafydd Iwan. It seemed successful, and a lot of people were there. That is one area where devolution has worked. The Children's Commissioner has already been mentioned, and the Assembly gave the Westminster Parliament a lot of evidence which enabled it to introduce the post through primary legislative powers.

My goodness, though, what a load of piffle the Assembly concentrates on. It has a hole in the ground that cost £8 million to £10 million, when we were told that the whole thing would cost only £17 million. Why does the Assembly not scrap it and spend the money on the people instead? Assembly Secretaries have renamed themselves Ministers, and Rhodri has renamed the whole organisation WAG—the Welsh Assembly Government. Instead of navel gazing, why does the Assembly not focus on the requirements of the people, not the politicians or institutions, and start delivering?

In the national health service, which is a clear example of the way in which the Assembly could have made a difference, waiting lists of six months or more have increased by 900 per cent. The situation is far worse that it was before devolution. It is pointless for the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) to look smug, because he is part of the coalition that brought that about. He should have taken some of the responsibility and blame in that regard.

Part of Rhodri Morgan's problem is that he has too many jobs. Mike German has been mentioned before—he was put to one side, and Rhodri Morgan took on the responsibility. Manufacturing is in meltdown, agriculture is in crisis and tourism has been hit because of foot and mouth. We need somebody at the top who takes a clearly focused interest in the economy of Wales rather than one person trying to juggle too many jobs at one time. Frankly, it is Rhodri in Wonderland, and he must ensure that he gives a proper opportunity for other people to delegate the responsibility. I understand why he does not want to delegate responsibility when he looks at those who sit around him, but they are his Members and it is time that he did.

The National Assembly for Wales must not be given taxation powers because the referendum did not grant that, and it must not be given primary legislative powers without the people of Wales having their say. They did not vote for that last time, and there is no desire for it now. The Assembly should use and concentrate on the powers that it has. The National Assembly for Wales will be judged on what it does.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his brevity.

12.20 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Paul Murphy): We have had an interesting and informative debate. This is the first time that I have spoken in Westminster Hall, and if it is always as cold as this, I will not return in a hurry.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) made reference to my presence as Secretary of State—the debate is important. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, Wales Office is not here because he is Cardiff discussing the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill that is currently going through the House with a National Assembly for Wales Committee. The purpose of his journey to Cardiff is to ensure the progression of the partnership in shared government that the devolution settlement is all about. When I heard the speech of the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), I wondered whether his party wants that partnership and sharing of government. On the basis that Plaid Cymru's aim is independence or full national status, does he want the sharing of government between Members of Parliament who represent Wales and Assembly Members?

Mr. Llwyd: With respect, partnership must be equal. The example that the Secretary of State cites is not good. The Under-Secretary is at the National Assembly for Wales today discussing a Bill that has received its Second Reading, and surely it is now too late to change it. The Assembly expressed a view against the Bill before Second Reading.

Mr. Murphy: Although the Assembly had some differences of opinion about structure, there are opportunities for both Assembly Members and Members of Parliament to deal with many aspects of that Bill and the draft NHS Bill that will come before us soon.

The hon. Gentleman said that the Assembly was weakened because powers were transferred to the First Minister. The Assembly itself voted in plenary to delegate power to the First Minister. He also said that the Government of Wales Act 1998 does not provide further powers to the Assembly, unlike the Scottish equivalent. However, section 22 provides for the transfer of functions, and other functions may go to the National Assembly for Wales.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned statutory instruments and, specifically, those that are made in Westminster but affect Wales. In 2000, 225 SIs were made in the National Assembly for Wales and seven were made in Westminster. In 2001, 308 SIs have been made in the Assembly and nine in Westminster. All the statutory instruments that are made in the House of Commons either transfer powers to the Assembly, or concern the law—the hon. Gentleman's profession—language or education. Such statutory instruments give extra powers and responsibilities to the National Assembly for Wales, which he would presumably endorse.

Plaid Cymru Members questioned whether the settlement is working. Of course it is. It works better each year. They and others have called me a dinosaur, but I am told that dinosaurs lasted for millions of years. The people of Wales voted for the Assembly only four years ago and it has operated for just over two years. I read in the *South Wales Argus* about Professor Hazell from the university of London who said that the settlement is not working. I have never met him, and I do not know who he is. All I know is that the Prime Minister has charged me with the responsibility of ensuring that the devolution settlement works. It does, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) has said. I agree with him that there are ways in which we can improve it, and we will look carefully at them in the years ahead. However, a comparison between 2001 and 2000 shows that the Assembly has been given more enabling clauses, so that it can decide how to deal with matters such as education.

Education provides a good example. There are 31 clauses that refer specifically to Wales in the Education Bill that yesterday had its Second Reading in Parliament. That Bill also proposes to enable the Assembly, if it so wishes, to have various powers. The Children's Commissioner for Wales Act 2001 has been derided by some people, who said that it was tagged on to another piece of legislation at Westminster. That was not the case. An opportunity was provided to introduce a Children's Commissioner for Wales Bill quickly, and that was supported by every party. Matters such as legislation on the national health service and on post-16 education could also serve to illustrate my point that not a single piece of primary legislation of importance to Wales has been refused in the past two years.

More importantly, the working relationships between the House and the Assembly are continuing to improve. What the people of Wales are concerned about above all else is the delivery of the services that affect their lives—as the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) said. However, they voted in the referendum of 1997 for a particular form of settlement:

[Mr. Murphy]

a partnership in government between the House and the Assembly. They voted for primary legislative powers to remain at Westminster, on the basis that there is a reason for that, which is the partnership. That is what they voted for.

I have read the proceedings on the Government of Wales Bill—and I advise hon. Members to do the same. Those proceedings, on the Floor of the House and in the other place, are peppered with references to the fact that the people of Wales voted for the settlement, and to the fact that that is why—as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis) mentioned—the settlement is settled. It is not settled in concrete for many years to come—nobody has ever suggested that—but it is settled in the sense that only very recently people decided to vote for a particular type of devolution settlement.

Of course we have had teething problems, and there will be more to come. There will be occasions when the Government and the Parliament disagree on certain matters with the National Assembly for Wales. That will always happen, so long as Wales remains within the United Kingdom, and so long as the devolution settlement that the people of Wales voted for is in place.

Parliament is sovereign; it agreed to ensure that the legislation was passed, but did so on the basis that a majority of the Welsh people said that that is what they wanted. I say to Opposition Members that, although there have been difficulties, it is important that the Ministers and Members of the Assembly should be able to ensure that we get better services in health, schools, local government, transport and the environment, by sharing the responsibility for them with hon. Members at Westminster. The people of Wales want that settlement. It is working well and it will improve in the coming years.

The big test will come in 18 months. It is essential that we do not allow ourselves to get into a position where we use the constitutional questions to obfuscate the importance of the services themselves and the delivery of them. We must not carry on talking so much about constitutional issues—frankly, they turn off most of our constituents, important though we think they are.

Our constituents want [illegible] genuine improvement in the quality of their lives. We want to achieve that in a special way, by means of a devolution settlement—a constitutional arrangement—that has been operating for only a short while. That sharing of power and responsibilities between hon. Members and the Assembly is crucial to the success of the working of the Assembly—and, above all, to the success of the improvement of the quality of life of women, men and children. All hon. Members, along with Members of the Assembly are jointly responsible for that.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): As we have finished early, we can now move on to the next debate. It is a good day for the Welsh. I call Mr. Gareth Thomas.

Gas Network

12.29 pm

Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): I am pleased to have the opportunity to present a debate on a subject that is of interest not only to Wales, but to many people throughout the United Kingdom. I am also pleased to see the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), in the Chamber. I hope that she can respond positively to some of the issues that I raise.

There are approximately 25 million households in the United Kingdom, 5 million of which—that is, 20 per cent—are not currently connected to the gas network. It is a large network that has been developed over a long time to a high engineering standard, but it needs to be expanded. Many of the households to which I have referred are fuel poor according to the definition adopted by the Government in their strategy for tackling fuel poverty. In other words, those households spend more than 10 per cent. of their income on energy to maintain an adequate standard of warmth. Many of those households are in rural communities. Moreover, many of them are close to a gas main. That is a cause of frustration.

In fact, Transco has estimated that no fewer than 1,300 communities with more than 150 households have no gas, but are within 2 km of the gas network. To use the jargon, they are infill communities. Gas is being supplied by gas transporters to new developments where there is competition. However, there is a problem with getting gas transporters to pipe gas into the communities that the network has not so far reached. Many of the communities to which I have referred are in my constituency, which is quite rural. I refer to Llysfaen, Betws yn Rhos and Gellifor in the community of Llangynhafal.

Mr. John Lloyd Roberts, the clerk to the Llangynhafal community council, recently wrote to me, and I shall quote briefly from his letter because it crystallises the frustration felt by many of my constituents. It states:

> "The Community Council, on behalf of over 100 local residents, has been in discussion with Transco Wales Ltd over the past 6 months regarding the provision of mains gas to the village of Gellifor. I would like to emphasise that the main gas supply line passes very close to the village and a number of properties on the edge of the village have already been connected.
>
> A quotation was recently received from Transco requesting a charge of £2001.00 per property—dependent upon receiving 30 quotations."

Mr. Roberts makes the point that prior to the deregulation of the gas industry,

> "villages much further away from the pipeline were connected at a cost of less than £200 per property.

He goes on:

> "The Community Council and local residents are extremely disappointed that the estimated cost has turned out so high and arrangements have been made to obtain alternative quotations from other public gas transporters. However, the alternative quotations are all similar to the price quoted by Transco. We have also investigated the possibility of obtaining assistance under the Objective 1 Scheme but have been told by the County Council that a Scheme of this nature would not qualify for Objective 1 funding . . . We find it difficult to believe that it was the Governments intention that the introduction of competition in the gas industry

should result in connection charges for rural communities increasing from the previous £200 to the current figure of £2,000 per property."

The community council has asked me to pursue the issue and to see what can be done to improve the regulatory framework.

The industry is highly regulated, and the system should be made more conducive gas transporters extending the network not just to rural communities but communities on the edges of towns. There seems to be a fair measure of consensus that the network should be extended, although it would be entirely unrealistic to expect all communities throughout the United Kingdom to be connected to gas.

Energywatch, the successor to the old gas and electricity community councils, accepts that there is a strong case for the gas network to be extended. The regulator, Ofgem—the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets—accepts that there is a problem, which has prompted it to embark on a consultation process in relation to amendments to the arcanely titled Gas (Connection Charges) Regulations 2001. Those regulations are important if not crucial to the problem. In its letter to consultees on 21 August 2001, Ofgem said:

> "Ofgem has become aware of a significant reduction in the extension of gas network extensions to rural areas, or 'infills', and the limited level of competition in this market".

The Lattice Group, the parent company of Transco, which operates the national gas network, agrees. Mr. Richard Grant, head of environmental affairs in that organisation, noted:

> "introducing gas to non-gas areas forms part of Lattice's overall sustainability agenda".

I am sure that the Minister will have no trouble in agreeing, as a basic principle, that that is also part of the Government's agenda for tackling fuel poverty—I refer to the fuel poverty strategy document, which was published in November.

The Minister will know that the industry has been involved in a working group chaired by the Department of Trade and Industry and involving the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and other organisations, which was set up to consider the issue. I understand that an initial report has been presented to the Department. Will the Minister say when that final report will be published and how the Government propose to proceed?

Ofgem has also referred to the social action plan—which forms part of the parameters laid down by Government—that governs the role of the regulators. The Government have referred to the need to bear in mind some main objectives when dealing with regulation of the electricity and gas industry. One of those was to tackle poverty and social exclusion in order to improve the health of the population overall. The Government do seem to be concerned, and I acknowledge the progress that they have made in tackling fuel poverty to date. They accept that vulnerable customers should not be at risk of suffering adverse effects from the operation of competitive markets.

In a way, the debate encapsulates a classic problem. The Government believe in opening up markets and the virtue of competition, because that is in the overall interests of most consumers, including poorer families and low-income households. The price of gas and electricity has gone down as a result. There are occasions, however, when the Government must intervene in the market to deal with distortions that have occurred and are occurring. The subject of this debate is a classic example of that.

Ofgem's social action plan goes on to say that it has to identify barriers to disadvantaged customers who participate in a competitive market, and that it would like to develop policy initiatives to allow such people greater access. I would be interested in what the Minister has to say on how we deal with fuel poverty overall. Gas has a part to play. It is a cleaner fuel, so it has an environmental advantage, and it is cheaper. A lot of people in my constituency have to buy oil, including me. It is messy and tends to be more expensive. Gas is an all-round option that many people would like to have.

I accept that the extension of the network requires the Government to deal with the structure of the industry and amend the regulations within which it operates. The current structure of the gas industry, which was brought about by the Gas Act 1986, as amended by the Utilities Act 2000 and other legislation, separates the function of gas supply from that of providing gas infrastructure such as pipes and pressure units. A company cannot hold a licence for two functions such as supply and transportation.

Before the 1986 Act, the old British Gas was an integrated business able to provide all gas services to its customers, including gas connections, supply and transportation. Many people fail to understand that. There is some confusion about titles and the new structure of the industry, although it has been in operation for some time. Transco, Lattice, Centrica and British Gas, not to mention other gas transporters, have a problem on their hands. I do not advocate that we go back to the old regime, but it is fair to say that it was able to recover the capital costs of extending the network in other sectors of its gas business, which was primarily based on the supply of gas. It is generally accepted that British Gas under the old regime provided a substantial cross-subsidy for the installation and extension of the network. However, we live in a different climate, and I accept the need for competition.

A gas transporter—a GT—is obliged to provide gas infrastructure to premises only where it is economical to do so. Of course, there is a 23 m rule whereby if someone lives within 23 m of a gas main, the GT has to connect him or her up to the mains. When the GTs determine the charges that they must apply, they are guided by the Gas (Connection Charges) Regulations, especially regulations 2(a) and 2(e). To make those extensions economically feasible, GTs have to recover the full cost of the mains installed within five years. That period is stipulated by the regulations, and the rule is inflexible and causes difficulties. It is clearly hampering the extension of the network to infill areas. It means that people like those living in Gellifor find the costs charged by GTs prohibitively expensive.

I would like to mention one other interesting aspect of the regulatory framework, which is condition 6 of the standard gas transporter's licence. It allows a GT to recover the costs of extending the network directly from the shipper, so that the shipper can recover it in due course from customers by billing them. The cost often does not appear on the bill. For many, that is a more

[Gareth Thomas]

palatable and straightforward way to proceed. I know that Ofgem will examine condition 6 of the GT licence, but I would like to know whether the Government have any views. I suspect that we will have to extend the prescribed period. That would help, but we may have to go further. We may have to introduce innovative projects to deal with fuel poverty and examine the licensing regime and conditions.

The Minister knows what I am looking for. First, I want the Government to acknowledge that there is a problem. Secondly, I want them to do something about it. Thirdly, I want them to publish the findings of the working party to which I have referred. Do they accept the case that I have made for greater flexibility? In broader terms, do they accept that relaxing the regulatory framework will help them to pursue their broader agenda of tackling social exclusion and fuel poverty, as well as ensuring that rural communities feel part of our wider community?

12.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West (Gareth Thomas) on securing this debate. He has raised a matter of general concern, not only to his constituents but to many people without access to mains gas.

In response to my hon. Friend about our acknowledgement of the problem, we certainly agree that around 4.5 million British households—roughly 20 per cent. of the total according to my figures, which may be slightly different from his—do not have access to mains gas. Some of them would be able to take up a connection if they wished, but most would not.

Those households do not have access to what is seen as the cheapest and most convenient conventional fuel. I agree with my hon. Friend about that, although it could be said that there have been times when gas was not the cheapest alternative. There are other factors that determine the relative costs of fuels from time to time, such as the environment, which my hon. Friend mentioned, and convenience.

I turn to the statutory position, which is of concern to my hon. Friend. Without losing him and myself in a snow storm of detail, it may be helpful if I first say a little about regulation and what it has and has not delivered. Connections to the gas network are governed by a range of primary and secondary legislation, and in particular by the Gas Act 1986. Companies are obliged to connect within 23 m of an existing main. The energy regulator, Ofgem, is required to encourage reasonable requests for connection where it is economically feasible.

As a result of the range of legislation, and most recently the Utilities Act 2000, the provision of connections is now fully competitive. My hon. Friend espouses the values of competition. As I am, among other things, the Minister for competition, I must encourage him to get behind the notion that competition benefits consumers and has done so tremendously. I am sure that competition is the way forward.

Communities and individuals are no longer forced to use Transco, but may access one of the dozen independent gas transporters. That relates to my hon. Friend's point about Mr. Lloyd Roberts's letter, to which I will return later. Consumers may also use self-lay companies. As a result of competition, 70 to 75 per cent. of connections to new housing developments are now carried out by companies other than Transco.

There is a lot of competition in the area, and it is working. However, competition alone cannot deliver connections to the bulk of communities and households outside the network—or rather, it can, but the costs involved in providing connections are often beyond what households are prepared to pay. That in turn means that potential take-up is not high enough to make it worth while for the transporter to make the connection.

In the past, a monopoly, did not have to respond to costs, or it could spread them across its operations. Now, in charging householders for connections, Transco must reflect the cost of doing so in order to avoid abuse of its dominant position—none of the independent transporters can afford to subsidise connections. That point relates to research undertaken by Mr. Lloyd Roberts into the options and various fees quoted in the constituency case cited by my hon. Friend. That has led to concerns about lack of access to mains gas and the cost of connection to it being raised on behalf of two sets of people—although the two may overlap. The first is of those communities that wish to be connected but who find the cost prohibitive. The second is the fuel poor. It has been argued that lack of access to the network keeps households in fuel poverty by denying them access to the cheapest, most efficient fuel.

I turn to a couple of specific points raised my hon. Friend about regulation. Ofgem is consulting on changes to the Gas (Connection Charges) Regulations 2001. Although change of the type proposed by Ofgem to encourage the taking up of new connections would help, the Government believe that the change would have only a marginal impact on the problems that we are discussing. The regulator's duty to help people on low incomes does not override its primary duty to protect the interests of all consumers. The balance is ultimately a matter for the regulator. As my hon. Friend is aware, the regulator is independent of the Government.

I turn to work done by the gas network group and the report mentioned by my hon. Friend. As he acknowledged, the Government are particularly concerned to address issues surrounding social exclusion and disadvantage. The fuel-poverty strategy, which was published recently, reflects that concern. That is why when drafting the strategy we gave a commitment that we would work with Ofgem to ensure that, whenever possible, the gas network provided the widest viable coverage and the fullest viable capacity.

Rather than have an introverted debate between the DTI and Ofgem, we decided to establish a working group to consider the issues surrounding the network in the context of fuel poverty. The group, which met for the first time in May, therefore included representatives of the Government, the regulator, the gas transportation and supply industries, consumer bodies and organisations with an interest in energy efficiency. My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy, received its report last month, and it will be published shortly on the DTI's website. We expect it to be published before Christmas.

I shall not discuss the findings of the report, because it is yet to be published, but the statistical information available to the group suggested that, for the 900,000 English fuel-poor households without gas, the provision of gas central heating and, where practical, loft and cavity wall insulation could remove between 600,000 and 700,000 people from fuel poverty. A similar impact would be likely in Wales and in Scotland. However, the report notes that similar results appear to be obtainable from insulation and central heating systems used in conjunction with other fuels, so there is a variety of approaches to tackling fuel poverty.

Before turning to the fuel-poverty strategy, I shall say a little more about gas versus other fuels. The installation of appropriate insulation and heating measures could significantly reduce fuel poverty, but it is striking that the key to removing households from fuel poverty may not lie exclusively with access to a particular fuel, but in the combination of the insulation measures and central heating. Gas is certainly more convenient and is at present cheaper than other fuels, but some of those other fuels, including fuel oil and solid fuel, appear to come close in providing affordable warmth.

Indeed, the Scottish Executive's central heating programme took the view that when use of gas is unfeasible, fuel oil and solid fuel represent valuable alternatives, and that may prove to be the case in communities in England and Wales. The Welsh Assembly is piloting a programme that uses disabled facilities grants and HEES— home energy efficiency scheme—funding to provide oil-fired central heating with insulation measures as part of adaptation work.

As for the fuel-poverty strategy, I explained that the drive to consider issues surrounding the network arose within the context of the Government's work on fuel poverty. We are committed to tackling social exclusion in all its forms. Fuel poverty is one aspect of social exclusion and it creates great hardship in the lives of the 4 million households in the United Kingdom that are affected by it. That is why we published last month our fuel poverty strategy, which was agreed with the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Our joint objective is to remove from fuel poverty by 2010 all vulnerable households—that is, those containing pensioners, small children, the disabled, or people with a long-term illness who are at risk of ill-health from cold homes.

Our latest analysis suggests that the number of fuel-poor households has fallen in the past few years, from about 5.5 million in 1996 to 4 million. That confirms that our policies of improving incomes and maintaining downward pressure on prices are working. The figures are based on modelling of changes in incomes and energy prices alone, and do not take account of improvements in housing energy efficiency over that time, so the real figure could be slightly lower. Whatever the real number, however, there are still too many such households. The strategy sets a framework for taking the work forward. It is only the start of the process, and we stand ready to review and revise policies in the light of practical experience in the delivery of measures.

Gareth Thomas: I agree with a large part of what the Minister has said, but will the Government reconsider, with a view to amending, the regulations within which the gas industry must operate?

Miss Johnson: As I explained, there are clear parameters within which the framework functions, and we have no specific proposals to reconsider that. We are watching for the outcomes of our policies within the framework. Much work must still be done in response to the strategy and to the report, which will be published shortly. We need to consider the action identified in that report, and how we might progress from it.

The range of measures in the strategy is aimed at materially helping all fuel-poor households, irrespective of whether they are connected to the network. The fuel-poverty strategy sets out in some detail the position for Wales. The long-term answer to fuel poverty lies in improved energy efficiency in housing. That is a devolved matter, and responsibility for housing improvement and energy efficiency lies with the National Assembly for Wales. There is at present no direct estimate of the numbers of fuel-poor households in Wales, but the National Assembly will work to determine the extent and distribution of the problem.

A currently used indication of the level of fuel poverty is the number of households eligible for assistance under the Welsh home energy efficiency scheme, based on the 1997-98 Welsh house condition survey, which suggested that about 220,000 households were eligible for assistance. The scheme is the main vehicle in Wales for reducing fuel poverty. The basic package comprises grant aid for insulation measures up to the value of £1,500 and an enhanced grant of up to £2,700, which covers new central heating as well, for households containing people over the age of 60, lone parents, the disabled, and long-term sick. The programme also covers conversion of coal-heating systems to gas firing.

Rural conditions were at the heart of my hon. Friend's debate. Difficulties with improving rural housing include lack of access to mains gas and the high incidence of solid walls in older properties. The Assembly has commissioned an examination of alternative fuels and insulation methods that could be used in hard-to-heat homes. The initial study will report early next year and is looking for proposals for practical pilot studies to evaluate the use of identified alternative heating fuels and insulation methods.

Much work is being done on the wider strategy, and the Assembly is in touch with all those involved, including the DTI and DEFRA—

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. We have run out of time. We thank the Minister for her reply.

School Transport

1 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I have called this debate to draw attention to the urgent need for the Government to take a more proactive approach to tackling the decline in the use of school buses. I have thought for several years that it is nonsense to cut home-to-school transport when our roads carry far more traffic than ever before and are therefore far more dangerous. At the same time, sensible environmental policy dictates that we should get as many people as possible out of cars and on to public transport.

The subject was brought to my attention again when the school year began in September. My constituency office was swamped with telephone calls from parents who had discovered that their children's school bus had been withdrawn or that arrangements had been altered. Many families were left in a difficult position, particularly those that could not make alternative arrangements. The villages of Horning and Southrepps were badly hit because the county council withdrew discretionary bus routes. The school bus to Antingham and Southrepps primary school was withdrawn completely because only one pupil lived far enough away to be eligible for free transport. That left two dozen other pupils who had taken up spare seats on the bus under the discretionary transport arrangements without any transport to school. As a result, far more cars must travel down dangerous narrow lanes to take those children to school, and the parking problems outside the school are horrendous. Several parents who try to combine work with child care face disruption, while those who take their children to different schools have a particular problem.

As regards Horning, parents were advised that they could use the public service bus to take their children to school when the school bus was withdrawn. However, the public service bus stops on the wrong side of a busy main road outside the school, and the children must then cross the road. It also arrives well before the start of the school day and therefore before the school is willing to accept responsibility for the children. That means that they must wait by the side of a busy road before being allowed on to the school premises. Thankfully, some children have been offered spare places on a minibus. However, that will be reviewed in February, and there is no certainty that they will keep their places.

I shall talk about the current legislative framework before highlighting the decline in school transport over recent years and putting the case for a substantial shift in direction. The rules on providing school transport date back to the Education Act 1944 and have remained unchanged. Unfortunately, the subsequent introduction of the parent's right to choose their child's school did not lead to a commensurate change in school transport rules—indeed, it has led to some crazy situations. A child might go to a particular school for very good reasons, but he will have no access to free transport if it is not the designated school.

Free school transport must be provided for children under the age of eight who live more than two miles from the nearest school. Older children must live more than three miles from the nearest school to qualify. Teenagers over the compulsory school leaving age have no right to free transport.

There is no comparison between the safety of roads 57 years ago, when the rules were introduced, and the situation now. Parents today understandably fear for their children's safety. Increased volumes of traffic create a much more serious hazard for all pedestrians, let alone young children. The child pedestrian death rate in this country is one of the worst in Europe; it is nearly four times that of Sweden and significantly higher than those of France or Germany. It is currently 0.87 per 100,000 children. Unfortunately, matters have worsened in recent years, because local education authorities in the past went well beyond the statutory minimum requirements and provided transport for children living within two and three-mile distances, depending on age. However, as budgets have been squeezed, local authorities have chosen to cut school transport provision rather than take money from schools. That has certainly happened in Norfolk, and I know from colleagues that the picture is similar around the country.

I am not trying to score cheap political points, but the Cinderella nature of the school bus service goes back a long way. I found a report of a court case involving Surrey county council in 1953. The county council had changed its school bus arrangements following a circular letter from the Education Minister,

> "urging education authorities to curtail expenditure on the transport of children to school so far as possible".

The problem is a long-standing one. However, such an approach—although I recognise that there are other factors at play—has contributed to a dramatic increase in the number of children taken to school by car. In the past 10 years the total has doubled, which means 1 million extra every day. An RAC report published this year seems to confirm that the decline of the school bus has continued since Labour came to power in 1997. That is a cheap political point, but the trend has continued.

During peak rush hour periods, nearly 20 per cent. of cars on the road are doing the school run. It is worth noting that in the United States, hardly a country recognised for sound environmental policies, 54 per cent. of children under 12 go to school in the traditional yellow bus. That figure compares with 9 per cent. in this country.

The result of what I have described is chaos on the roads. As Professor David Begg, chairman of the Commission for Integrated Transport, which was set up by the Deputy Prime Minister, put it,

> "Parents driving their children to school are a major cause of accidents. Double and triple parking outside the school gates cuts visibility and causes confusion."

That is a nonsensical state of affairs, with regard both to child safety and the environment. On its website about school travel the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions highlights the impact of the school run on local air quality, journey times and even local business competitiveness.

Two other matters cause me concern. First, provision for post-16 students is patchy. With no legal right to free transport the charges that are imposed are a disincentive for the children of low-income families to remain in education. I suspect that that hits low-income families in rural areas particularly hard, because the distances to college are greater.

A letter that I received from the Minister in October confirmed that variations in provision across the country

"have led to inadequate and inconsistent support nationally."

The Government recognise the problem. The Minister will know that concern has been expressed about the impact of moving post-16 education funding away from education authorities to the Learning and Skills Council. I would like reassurance that that change in funding arrangements will not lead to a decline in subsidised transport for that age group.

The second matter of concern to me is safety on buses, particularly the question of seat belts. A loophole in current legislation allows schoolchildren to be transported to school on a vehicle without seat belts, if that service is designated a public transport service, which does not have to be equipped with seat belts, rather than a school bus service, which does. In cases in Norfolk of which I am aware, little timetable information is available on the so-called public transport routes. For that reason, only schoolchildren tend to travel on them, yet because of the loophole, they do not have to wear seat belts and the bus does not have to be provided with seat belts. Lack of resources seems to be at the root of that unacceptable practice.

What then is the Government's response? The rhetoric is great: the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone" sounds rather like motherhood and apple pie, but the Government's declared aim was stated to be

"a fairer society in which rich and poor, old and young, town and country dweller, all have reasonable access to transport for work, for school, for shopping and leisure; giving people a choice in how they travel, reducing dependence on the private car."

The White paper states:

"Public transport has a vital role to play in meeting those objectives, and giving people an alternative to the car."

The Audit Commission, in a report entitled "Going places: Taking people to and from education, social services and health care", published in the last few days, refers to the Government's stated aim of "reducing unnecessary car use" as

"a key part of the Government's transport and environmental policies".

It refers also to the value of school transport in helping parents enter the labour market and hold down jobs. That is particularly the case with single parents. Women have less access to cars than men. School transport can therefore aid social inclusion. Yet the ridiculous decline in school bus transport continues and the number of car journeys continues to rise.

I recognise that a great deal of work is going on around the country.

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): Some of the work currently being carried out in Scotland involves the Scottish Executive's introduction of a safer routes to school programme. You mentioned earlier that David Begg—

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. I did not mention anything. The hon. Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Lamb) may have mentioned him, but I did not.

John Barrett: I beg your pardon, Mr. Winterton, and ask your forgiveness as a new Member learning the system of Westminster Hall debates. I was referring to my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). Does he agree that one of the key issues is the introduction of safe routes to schools programmes such as that at Carricknowe primary school in my constituency? Speed bumps and other measures to reduce traffic are being introduced and parents are being urged to encourage their children to walk to school or use school buses.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. Interventions must be brief. That appears to be more than an intervention. I will use my discretion, if the hon. Gentleman would like, briefly, to conclude his intervention.

John Barrett: Thank you, Mr Winterton. Urgency is key; any child injured or killed on the way to school is one child too many.

Norman Lamb: I very much agree. I recognise that there are schemes all over the country, including that fine scheme, which aim to make it safer for children to walk or cycle to school and to encourage car-sharing.

The Government established the school transport advisory group in 1998. I applaud such efforts, but they are not enough. They will not on their own reverse the current trends. I have the impression that the Government accept that, given the Deputy Prime Minister's announcement in February of a series of pilots of an American-style yellow bus service. I must ask, however, what action has been taken since then. I understand that the pilots are due to be launched in the new year. Will the Minister confirm where they will be, when they are due to start, the length of the pilots, whether they will operate under the distance rules from the legislation dating back to 1944 that I have described, whether pupils and students living within those distances will be charged for travel, and how much government investment will be? Finally, what are the Government's plans to extend the pilots across the country should they prove successful? If he cannot answer all those points today, I should be grateful if he would come back to me with full answers.

The potential value of an expanded school transport network, whether through the use of the designated yellow bus or greater investment in existing arrangements, cannot be overstated. Buses must have clear safety rules, ensuring the provision of the same driver each day, passenger checklists, installation of safety belts, and radio contact with an operations room.

Cutting morning traffic would be of enormous environmental benefit. Extending free transport rather than charging for it would have a big impact in persuading parents to get their children on to the school bus, but we must debate whether it should be free. As long as the 1944 rules remain, education authorities will be forced to make the impossible choice between increasing investment in public transport or in schools. Will the Government change the legislative framework? As Gordon Hanning, the head of the passenger transport unit at Norfolk county council, told me:

"Many people feel uncomfortable about the appropriateness of current legislation and that a new approach is called for."

Will the Government's worthy rhetoric be matched by investment?

1.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): My voice is going, and I hope that it does not go completely prior to the conclusion of my response. I congratulate the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) on securing the debate. All parties accept that the issue that he raises is important. The Government acknowledge the need to ensure that the current framework is working to the best effect and that significant resources are used in the most efficient way. Post-16 transport will continue to be the responsibility of local education authorities. That responsibility will not be transferred to learning and skills councils, which was made clear by the Learning and Skills Councils Act 2000. I will write to the hon. Gentleman about pilots, including all the details that he requested.

It costs about £500 million a year to provide statutory school transport for children of compulsory school age. We agree that school transport is relevant to all parents and children, whichever mode of transport they use. We often hear calls for an increase in home-to-school transport expenditure, but the figure is already substantial. About £485 million was spent in 1999-2000—an increase of approximately 9 per cent. on the previous year and above the level of inflation. Half of that expenditure was on children with special educational needs. They are high on our list when we consider young people who are excluded from society and education. School transport is funded by local education authorities, so any increase in transport costs would mean that less is spent on teachers, books, computers and school capital.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that the purpose of statutory school transport is to ensure that no child is denied the right to attend a suitable school. It is not and never was intended to be an all-inclusive transport service providing free travel for those who could reasonably walk or who have chosen not to attend the nearest suitable school.

We will continue to make substantial increases in education funding. In 2002-03, we will increase the educational standard spending assessment by more than £1.3 billion—an increase of 6 per cent. We are also increasing the standards fund by almost £160 million and the direct grant for schools by 2.75 per cent. That will help local education authorities to meet the escalating costs of school transport.

Norman Lamb: I recognise that the purpose of the 1944 school transport rules is to get children to school safely. However, we need a change. There is a sound environmental case for getting more children to school by bus. Does the Minister accept that the number of children taking a bus to school is declining, despite the investment?

Mr. Lewis: I accept the hon. Gentleman's general point. Of course, the objective must be to get more children to school by means other than cars. That would satisfy the requirements of an integrated transport policy and environmental and safety considerations. We absolutely agree. Where we part company, as we always do with the Liberal Democrats, is on the concept of infinite resources. Unlike them, the Government must work within the constraints of finite resources.

My next point will be a genuine one and not party political, although the last one was. To be fair, the hon. Gentleman acknowledged that he made one or two party political points in his speech. We must focus on ensuring that we get co-ordination and organisation at local level right, and that the significant additional resources that are going into the system make the difference in communities that they are meant to make.

The discussion is about diversification of modes of transport to get young people to and from school, but it is also about attitudes. It is not only in the context of education that attitudes to modes of transport have changed; it is a general phenomenon in communities and societies. The deregulation of buses in the 1980s contributed to it, but people are increasingly dependent on motor vehicles for a range of reasons.

Our 10-year transport plan, into which we are putting significant additional resources, is designed to create a far more balanced, integrated transport system. Clearly, that will affect how young people are transported to schools and college. It is essential to increase the use of alternative modes of transport to the car. I do not think that there is any difference in the ultimate objective, but we on the Labour Benches are persuaded that we can take measures within the existing legislative framework; however, we will introduce new legislation for post-16 education transport. I will discuss that in a moment.

We believe that we should use existing legislation better and ensure that the significant resources that we are putting in are used to best effect. In some ways, that is the dividing line. The hon. Gentleman advocates new legislation and infinite resources. The Government want to make better use of resources and ensure that existing regulations work to achieve the objectives that have been established.

On post-16 transport, we recognise that one of our primary objectives for education is to encourage more young people to stay on in education and learning after reaching the age of 16. We also recognise that a lack of access to acceptable transport is a contributory factor to so many young people dropping out of education at that age, especially in some rural areas.

We recently commissioned a study to map existing arrangements, to offer options for improvements and to produce good practice guidance. The study has been completed and the interim report made a strong case for re-ordering the legislation, specifically around post-16 transport. As the hon. Gentleman may be aware, the Education Bill had its Second Reading yesterday and will be in Committee next week. It includes clauses that specifically relate to the debate.

The Bill will give local education authorities a co-ordinating role in developing policies with key partners to provide effective and efficient post-16 transport arrangements. We propose that LEAs work with school governing bodies, colleges, learning and skills councils and passenger transport authorities. Crucially, LEAs will be obliged to publish a transport policy statement in consultation with those partners by 31 May each year, setting out what provision and support is available through schools and colleges in the local area. That is very important because it will ensure transparency and give students much better information on what is available. It will also drive more effective partnership working and facilitate the pooling of resources that is desperately needed.

Transport issues have dissuaded young people from continuing in education and learning, in part because of a lack of knowledge of and clarity in available services, and in particular because of a lack of collaboration between strategic transport authorities and educational institutions. The legislative framework will begin the process of dealing with several of the concerns expressed by the hon. Gentleman, particularly those relating to post-16 education.

I should emphasise that, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, statutory school transport is not the only source of assistance for young people with travel costs. Local authorities have the power, although not a duty, to establish concessionary fare schemes. Some 40 per cent. of shire counties, for example, run such a scheme. A few schemes are countywide, and some offer fare reductions during the morning peak. Strategic authorities have therefore introduced a number of discretionary schemes that go beyond their statutory duties. They recognise that a significant part of developing and achieving an integrated approach to transport in local communities is dealing with travel to and from learning institutions.

Local transport plans, which we introduced as part of the Transport Act 2000, set out the general strategies for tackling local transport issues. School travel is meant to be an integral part of those plans, as is tackling the issue of children's safety during journeys to and from school. The plans are also meant to include targets for a modal shift away from the use of cars for school journeys, and the monitoring of progress. Authorities are also asked to establish how they will work with individual schools to develop comprehensive school travel plans.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is providing funds for implementing the local transport plans. In 2000, the local transport capital expenditure settlement provided an £8.4 billion package for implementing those plans over the next five years. That is a further example of investing significant resources and developing a clear strategy. However, tangible benefits for communities up and down the country will take some time to feed through.

In an intervention, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) said that there is no time to waste, and that one child injured is too many. We agree, but it takes time for a new, cohesive framework and significant new investment to come together and make a real difference on the ground. As I always say to Liberal Democrats, there is such a thing as the concept of finite resources.

We are looking at a variety of ways to encourage sustainable travel from home to school and to reduce congestion. For example, the DTLR recently met major bus operators to discuss scope for greater standardisation in concessionary fare arrangements. Our concern is that such arrangements are patchy and differ greatly in different parts of the country. We want young people throughout the country to have universal access to arrangements that are similar to each other. At the conclusion of that meeting, the feeling was expressed that there is scope for standardisation. We need to focus on getting right the strategic responsibilities of local organisations.

The key to solving many of the problems that the hon. Member for North Norfolk mentioned during his valid contribution to the debate is ensuring that we adopt a cross-Government approach. Departments with responsibility for transport, education, health or other public services—indeed, any Department that is responsible for creating a more cohesive community—need to contribute to creating both a legislative and a non-legislative framework, ensuring the best use of the significant additional money that the Government have put into transport, particularly transport to and from educational institutions. We recognise that there is a lot to do. We cannot claim, by any means, that we have cracked the problem, but we believe that we are heading in the right direction—

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. Time is up. I thank the Minister for his reply and express the hope that his voice will recover. We move to the last of today's Westminster Hall debates.

Rent Restructuring

1.30 pm

Mr. Iain Coleman (Hammersmith and Fulham): I am grateful for the opportunity to have a debate that will highlight a range of concerns on the Government's rent restructuring policy, which was the subject of a recent statement. It is a fantastically complex area, and the moves arise from broad decisions announced last December.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his team of Ministers for having taken the time to listen to concerns expressed to them by tenants and by Members of Parliament. Significant concessions and alterations to the original proposals have been made, which I welcome. Last summer, I invited the noble Lord Falconer of Thoroton, then Minister for Housing, Planning and Regeneration, to visit my constituency. Not only did he visit a flagship housing development in Fulham of which we are especially proud locally, but he spent two hours meeting local registered social landlord officers and tenant representatives to hear their concerns about the Government's proposals. There remain, however, major concerns. My objective today is to highlight those and to ask my hon. Friend the Minister whether she can offer us any comfort on them.

The proposals, inevitably, have proven especially controversial in high-value areas among the few tenants who have found out about the potential impact on their rents. Although the proposals are broadly sensible as they affect the majority of tenants across the country, there are particular problems in areas of high capital values. I do not accept the premise that the notional value of a property should be a major determinant in the calculation of the overall rent of that accommodation.

Inevitably, the proposals affect families living in areas such as my constituency, where property prices are exceptionally high. Although that aspect of the formula affects tenants scattered across the country, those in London, particularly inner London, will be most adversely hit. The decision that capital values should be the second major criterion in calculating tenants' rents raises this question: why should a postal worker living in a three-bedroomed flat on the 14th floor of a tower block in Fulham pay £25 or £35 a week more for his accommodation than his counterpart postal worker living in a similar property in Newcastle? Why should a nurse living in designated key worker housing in a new development in Hammersmith pay significantly more than another NHS worker living in similar accommodation in Hastings?

During the past decade, my borough has acquired a record second to none among London councils in developing new affordable housing. In practice, the proposals bring into question how affordable that accommodation will be for future generations and especially for the key public workers who are so vital in any well-balanced and cohesive local community. Council rents in London have risen higher during the past decade than those in any other region. The practical effect of the proposals will be that many London tenants will face rent rises well above inflation rates every year for the next decade.

There are particular concerns about the rents that could be charged to housing association tenants. Housing associations are to be allowed to increase their rents to the new target level as soon as they re-let existing properties. This means that tenants living in self-contained two-bedroomed accommodation in a converted house in Fulham, where, as I have remarked, property prices are exceptionally high, will pay vastly different rents for identical flats located in the same house. I must ask my hon. Friend the Minister, where is the cohesion and fairness?

Indeed, if some of the more avaricious registered social landlords pursue such a policy, and it appears that some plan to do so, it will clearly be inconsistent with lettings for new developments where the grant assumption set by the Department will be based on a phased movement to the new formula rents for existing tenants. The inevitable consequence will be that applicants, especially poorer applicants, will be deterred from accepting housing association property. My local authority, in common with most others across London, has a strict one-offer policy on permanent accommodation. That will place some tenants at risk of being found to be intentionally homeless if they decline an offer of a property because of the new target rents being set rather than the existing rent regime applying, which is what I advocate.

The Government's introduction of the council tax benefit restriction scheme in April 1998—I recognise that this is not a policy for which my hon. Friend the Minister is responsible—is a nasty and regressive measure which saves the Treasury a miserly sum. As a consequence, poor tenants are penalised in my constituency if they are entitled to receive council tax benefit, as the level of benefit available to them is capped at band E. Some tenants are forced to pay up to £14 a week, or £700 a year, extra out of their already meagre benefit allowances. A further measure artificially to hike poor tenants' rents will again penalise poor tenants for living in high capital value areas, and it cannot be justified.

Will my hon. Friend the Minister examine this problem to see whether the Government can come up with a solution for a situation whereby housing associations, whose average rent is due to rise under rent restructuring, in practice increase rents for re-lets faster than rents for existing tenants?

Next year in Hammersmith and Fulham, the local authority will be required to set the rent for each home. The weekly rent charged must not exceed £85 for one-bedroomed accommodation, £90 for two-bedroomed accommodation, £95 for three-bedroomed accommodation or £100 for four-bedroomed accommodation. Those caps will rise annually by the rate of inflation plus 1 per cent.

Although I have said that the caps are welcome, I fail to understand the justification for increasing the cap by the extra 1 per cent. Why must rates always rise above inflation? Will the Department undertake to review the margin above inflation of the cap, if it can be demonstrated that the waged income increase for council and housing association tenants has increased by less than the average rate of increase in earnings? In recent years, the lowest paid workers' wages have not kept pace with average earnings.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that in several London authorities, including his and mine, the take-up of the working families tax credit is among the lowest in the country? Does he agree that part of the reason is that people entering the workplace find the added incentive insufficient to cover their housing bills? Does he agree that this policy may exacerbate that tendency?

Mr. Coleman: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I share her concerns.

A recent study showed that the increase in lower quartile incomes was only half the increase in median incomes. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will agree that the poorest members of society who are working should not have to spend an ever-increasing proportion of their already moderate incomes on accommodation when those of us who are earning far more do not. It has been calculated that, by the end of the 10-year phase-in period of the Government's proposals, council rents will have risen by approximately one sixth. That amounts to £1.2 billion a year before taking inflation into account. Can my hon. Friend the Minister confirm that figure or, if she disagrees with it, advise me of her Department's estimate of the extra rent that council tenants will be paying at the end of the 10-year period?

Concern has been expressed about the value for money that the rent restructuring proposals represent for tenants who are affected by them. In Hammersmith and Fulham next year, some rents will rise by as much as £4.09, or 4.31 per cent., a week. I am advised by my director of housing that only 101 dwellings, representing less than 1 per cent. of the council's housing stock, will have a weekly rent reduction.

One of the claims that the Government have made in favour of the proposals is that the new structure of rents will allow tenants to choose whether to pay more for a better property or to save money by choosing a less popular property. That element of choice will, of course, be welcome when and where it applies. However, in reality it will not apply in inner London, where the demand for social housing is so great that it massively outstrips supply. Unless there are exceptional changes in their circumstances, tenants in inner London will find that their ability to choose where they live and how much they pay for a different quality of accommodation is virtually zero.

In my experience, most tenants would be prepared to consider paying higher rent if there were a commensurate increase in the level of service that they received. More caretakers, more security, better planned maintenance and more generous decoration allowances—those are the sorts of enhancements to services that tenants will want and expect if they are expected to pay more rent. An extremely complex formula in the Government's summer consultation paper shows that nationally tenants next year will get only £1 in every £2 of the increased rent in extra or improved services. Will the Minister comment on the accuracy of that calculation? Can she offer tenants any comfort by assuring them that they will receive genuine enhancements to services if their rents are increased?

In my borough, the Government proposals will lead to higher rent increases in the next 10 years than in the past decade—I remind my hon. Friend that the majority of that was spent under a Conservative Administration—despite the fact that we have proved that London rent increases have been well above average during that time. The average rent increase in Hammersmith and Fulham over the past 10 years was 23.2 per cent., compared with the projection based on the current proposals of 29.5 per cent. over the next decade. That will apply particularly to one and two-bedroomed properties, which represent 73 per cent. of my local authority's housing stock. If we can demonstrate that the increase will lead to improved services, I believe that tenants will accept it. If not, they will not understand why they are asked to pay significantly more for no obvious gain.

I recognise that the Government have made strenuous efforts to respond sympathetically to the representations made to them by elected representatives and those landlords who have expressed concern about the proposals' practical implications. However, some of my hon. Friends and I would have preferred the Government to agree to defer the implementation of these policy changes for a further 12 months to allow for much wider consultation with tenants.

The overwhelming majority of tenants remain blissfully ignorant of the proposals. However, in the past few weeks increasing numbers have become aware, some have written to me expressing their surprise and anger about the lack of consultation and asking where the mandate for the implementation of the policy comes from. Will my hon. Friend the Minister examine ways of further ameliorating the effect on tenants who live in high capital value areas?

I am, however, pleased that the Government have agreed to a simplified commencement of implementation as from April 2002. I am also pleased that, in answer to a written question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon), my hon. Friend the Minister gave a commitment to have further consultations with local authorities and tenants' groups. What will those consultations mean in practice, and how will they be carried out, especially with tenants groups?

I am pleased that in the same answer my hon. Friend gave a commitment to review the policy constantly and to annual monitoring and fuller research of the policy in practical and operational terms. What will the three-year review that she recently announced cover? Will any issues be excluded from the review; if so, what will they be? How will the potential poverty trap implications be monitored in practice? How will local authorities, the National Housing Federation, tenants' representatives and Members of Parliament be involved in specifying the nature of the issues to be monitored and researched?

The Government's restated commitment to the future of public housing is very welcome. I recognise that Ministers have tried to assist those of us with serious worries about the impact of the proposals on some of the most vulnerable people in our constituencies whom we are bound to represent.

The Chartered Institute of Housing has responded in the past few days to the Government's proposals by emphasising that basing rents too much on house prices will inevitably create rent differentials throughout the country. It pointed out that if rents in some areas are too high, they will have an adverse effect on work incentives, trapping tenants in unemployment and adding to social

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exclusion. I agree with the institute and hope that the Government will continue to work with tenants, landlords and Members of Parliament to ensure that the policy does not, in practice, penalise the very people it was designed to assist.

1.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Coleman) on his success in the ballot and on raising this important topic. Before responding to the details of what my hon. Friend said is a complex policy on rent restructuring, I want to make two commitments absolutely clear. First, the Government are committed to ensuring that social housing remains affordable for people on low incomes. Secondly, we are committed to ensuring that low-income people and communities can continue to live in areas of high value, such as those in inner London. I accept the hon. Gentleman's point about rents in areas of high value, and the Government have taken steps to deal with that. I shall come back to that later.

Our policy on rent restructuring is part of the Government's wider housing agenda. The aim is to close the gap between rents in different sorts of social housing and, as my hon. Friend said, to pave the way for greater choice for social housing tenants. That applies not only to different council properties in the same area but to different sorts of social housing tenure, because at present the perception that housing association rents are high can be a bar to people who might consider applying for that sort of housing. We want a sensible structure of rents so that tenants can choose whether to pay more for a better property or to save money by choosing a less popular property. To achieve that, we are establishing a common basis for social rents throughout England by linking rents to both the value and size of the property and to manual earnings in the area. The new rents must be affordable and we are linking them to local earnings to ensure that. They will not be market rents. Rents in the social sector throughout most of the country will generally remain well below what a tenant would pay for the property from a private landlord. I said that that will apply throughout most of the country, because some areas have very low demand and different trends in property prices.

To put the matter in perspective, average manual earnings in London are around £19,000 a year, or £370 a week. Average local authority rents in London are around £60 a week. Someone on average manual earnings spends around 16 per cent. of his or her income on housing. We have not used average earnings because that would distort the position, particularly in London. The calculation takes no account of contributions from anyone else in the house who is also earning. That can be contrasted with someone renting in the private sector—I am sure that my hon. Friend knows the figures better than I do—in which average London rents are usually more than double those in the social sector for less space. It has not been possible to track trends over time, but I would be interested in doing that. I am confident that the ratios are good and ensure that rents are affordable.

We recognise that any increase is a financial pressure, especially for those on low incomes, and the need to protect tenants from large or sudden rent increases. We acknowledge the need for a smooth and gradual progress from existing rents to the new system. We must protect tenants, local authorities and housing associations during that period by ensuring that sensible and predictable changes in rents take place each year. We have therefore built in four safeguards. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and other colleagues, for lobbying for them.

The first protection that we have built into the system is that the move to new rents will take at least 10 years for most properties, and longer for others. For local authorities and registered social landlords, 10 years is a reasonable period during which to come to terms with changes to the financial structure.

Secondly, we want rent increases limited to the retail prices index plus 0.5 per cent. and £2 a week in any one year. That will help keep rents affordable and will mean that, if local authorities apply the formula, rent increases will be less during the coming decade than in the past 10 years.

Thirdly, we have capped the upper limits on rents. That will be £100 a week for a four-bedroomed property, and less for smaller dwellings. Where rent is already above the upper limit, it will be frozen or reduced. Each year, the limit of the cap will be increased by RPI plus 1 per cent.

Fourthly, local authorities can apply aggregate increases for the first year. That will particularly benefit those areas where there is wide divergence between property values—the peaks and troughs that affect my hon. Friend's constituency.

Those safeguards mean that there will be only a gradual change in rents for tenants. We have done some sums; it is likely that changes in rents nationally, as a result of rent restructuring, will be only half the increase of the past decade. Average rents in London are likely to move broadly in line with the national average. However, I will be careful when talking about rents for the next few years because housing associations and local authorities will remain responsible for setting rents. We should like local authorities to follow our policy, and we will influence their approach through the housing subsidy system, but we cannot take decisions for them. However, were Hammersmith and Fulham to decide to follow our policy on rents for next year, its average rent would go up by between £2.70 and £3 a week.

My hon. Friend asked what tenants will get out of rent restructuring. It is not the case that all council tenants will face a rent increase. The rents of about one in five council tenants will fall in real terms, which is a direct and positive outcome for them. More than 60 per cent. of social tenants receive housing benefit and will continue to receive that protection after the impact of rent restructuring.

My hon. Friend asked about the improvements that council tenants will see in their housing. I point to the Government commitment to make all social housing decent by 2010; that will include tackling the £19 billion backlog in council house investment, which we inherited. We have already made a start and the amount that we have allocated for housing investment is already twice that which the last Conservative Government planned for 1997-98. We plan further rises in investment. It is also right that tenants should make a greater contribution to the cost of the upkeep of their property as quality improves.

My hon. Friend asked about consultation. Considering the quantity of information available on the proposals, substantial opportunity has been provided for comment and discussion. The information that has been circulated through local media means that many people will be aware of what is happening. We consulted widely on the rent restructuring proposals last year, before announcing our decision in December 2000 in the housing White Paper. We consulted again this summer about the changes that need to be made to local authority housing subsidy so that it does not hinder progress towards the new rents.

Mr. Coleman: I am listening carefully to my hon. Friend. I recognise that the landlords were consulted widely before last December. Will she tell me or give me some practical examples showing exactly how housing association tenants were consulted? In my constituency, and I suspect in the constituencies of my hon. Friends, the vast majority of tenants were never consulted, know nothing about it and remain in blissful ignorance to this day.

Ms Keeble: It is hard to give examples that would cover the whole country, but I have seen reports based on housing authorities consulting their tenants at the time of the consultation on our proposals, which we carried out this autumn. It is clear from local newspapers that a number of local authorities did that. I find it hard to believe that all people are in blissful ignorance.

This issue has come up in meetings that my Government colleagues and I have attended, and there have been clear discussions among some tenants or tenant organisations about the proposals and the possible implications. I accept that it is impossible to say that every tenant knows what has happened, but there has certainly been more discussion and consultation than the Government are often given credit for.

Ms Buck: I certainly would not expect my hon. Friend to be able to answer a question of such specificity during this debate. However, I am afraid that I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Coleman) the confident view that most individuals had no idea about the implications of restructuring until, at the most, two or three weeks ago.

I wonder whether the Minister could write to me and my hon. Friends giving examples of letters or news reports where actual representations were made to tenants before, say, the beginning of November on the implications of rent restructuring.

Ms Keeble: I will certainly do that. I can think of local newspaper articles that I have seen, and I will arrange for us to track back and find out what happened. Clearly, local authorities will be consulting from here on in, as they take decisions about what to do about their rents for next year. We have clearly said that they have discretion in a number of areas.

I would like to deal with a few particular points that my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Fulham made. Housing associations are free to decide how quickly they move their rents to the levels required by rent restructuring, although they should aim to complete the process as far as possible in the next 10 years. We have advised the chair of the Housing Corporation that where housing associations do not need to put their rents up to remain financially sound, they should not be pressed to do so. I shall undertake to raise my hon. Friend's concerns with the chair of the Housing Corporation because it is in the interests of the council housing sector and housing associations to ensure that some equity is achieved.

My hon. Friend has also raised issues about different constituencies and the impact in different parts of the country. It remains a responsibility of local authorities and registered social landlords to decide rent levels and patterns. Local authorities will set rents for 2002-03 in January or February next year. A number of issues will not be resolved until then.

I want to leave one last thought with colleagues. Great attention has been devoted to the detail of the implementation of this policy. I would place it fair and square against the backdrop of housing policy as a whole. In government, we have to take a view across—

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. I regret to tell the Minister that, although we thank her for her reply, the time is up.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 6 December 2001

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Yugoslavia

[Relevant documents: Fourth Report from the Foreign Affairs Committee, Session 2000-01, HC 246, and the Government's response thereto, CM 5220.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

2.30 pm

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): It gives me great pleasure to open this debate on the report of the Foreign Affairs Committee, published in March, on Government policy towards the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the wider region following the fall of Mr. Milosevic. Indeed the Committee was in the region the previous year and visited Kosovo and Montenegro, but was unable then to visit Serbia. It was indeed Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark, but we have since repaired that omission. On reflection, so many significant developments have taken place since March, when our predecessor Committee published its report, that it all seems such a long time ago.

In the course of its inquiry, the Committee heard evidence from a panel of independent experts, including Charles Crawford, the excellent British ambassador in Belgrade, the European Commissioner for External Affairs, Chris Patten, as well as the then Minister of State for Europe, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz). In February, the Committee visited Belgrade, where we were fortunate to meet, among many others, Federal President Vojislav Kostunica and the Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic.

Two Members of the Committee left the main party to visit Kosovo, which the Committee as a whole previously visited in March 2000. The rest of us visited Novi Sad, a remarkable middle-European city and the capital of the Vojvodina region, where we were able to see for ourselves the damage inflicted by NATO bombardments on the bridges over the Danube and the regional television station. I was delighted to learn during the past few days that an agreement has been reached between the Danube Commission and the Yugoslav Government to allow the final phase of the de-mining and clearance of the Danube to go ahead. Indeed, the removal of debris is expected to be achieved by mid-2002, which will be a major contribution to the integration of the region.

The Foreign Affairs Committee in this Parliament has kept a watchful eye on developments in Yugoslavia and the wider region. We received a detailed memorandum from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office only a few days ago. That has been reported to the House and copies have been placed in the Library. A week ago today, we were delighted to renew our acquaintance with President Kostunica during his visit to London.

The background to the report scarcely needs reiterating. For much of the 1990s, western Governments appeared uncertain whether President Slobodan Milosevic was the problem, or whether he was part of the solution to the many crises in the region as the old Yugoslavia unravelled. Indeed, historians will point out a number of key mistakes made by western Governments during that time. The decisive turning point came with the Kosovo conflict, the programme of ethnic cleansing and the subsequent indictment of Milosevic for crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in May 1999.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Has there been any progress on indicting anyone in Kosovo for the second wave of ethnic cleansing—the Serbs, the Roma, the Gorani and the others who were driven out by the KLA when NATO ceased bombing?

Donald Anderson: I am certainly not aware of any indictments that have been laid by the ICT at The Hague in respect of Kosovo, but that is entirely a matter for the tribunal; if the evidence is available it should be followed through.

In response to the new situation, Britain and the European Union evolved a twin-track approach towards Yugoslavia, aimed at isolating the Milosevic regime and encouraging democratic and economic reform in Serbia. Our Committee concluded in the report that the approach was a success. Support by the Government was well judged, both for targeted European Union sanctions against Yugoslavia and for encouragement of the democratic opposition to Milosevic. The Committee felt that that strategy could provide a useful model for dealing with autocratic regimes elsewhere in the world.

The main thrust of the Committee's report looked to the future and the Government's action to help maintain peace and prosperity in the region. That inevitably concentrated on not only Serbia, but Montenegro and Kosovo, which are largely self-governing areas but remain in their different ways parts of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The report also commented on events in Macedonia, which at the time showed worrying signs of developing into a regional flashpoint. Indeed, paragraph 2 of the Government's reply to the report emphasised the key differences between their policy and the Committee's consensus, stating:

> "However, the Government does not agree with the Committee that UK/Western policy is based on two 'unreal' assumptions: that Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo can continue to exist in one state; and that Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo can build a multi-ethnic community."

Within Serbia, the Committee identified four principal areas of concern, which were the economy, the unclear division of responsibility between the federal and Serbian Governments, co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal at The Hague and extremism in the Presevo valley.

The Committee found that for once there was general praise for the European Union for its assistance on the economy. Yugoslavia faces the problems of reconstruction and transition following more than a decade of isolation and economic sanctions, as well as the burden of a massive national debt. In the longer term, however, as Yugoslav politicians realise, the aim must be to move away from reliance on aid towards self-sufficiency. Although aid is important in providing basic

[Donald Anderson]

needs and reconstruction in the initial, transitional phase, the longer-term priority is to get the policy framework right and attract significant private investment. Given Yugoslavia's history, it has proper foundations on which to build.

The danger of sudden economic reform is that the most disadvantaged elements of the population suffer. That is why the Committee recommended that the Foreign Office examine the current disposition of EU humanitarian and economic funding. I also welcome the Government's continuing input into the form and content of the CARDS country strategy paper for Yugoslavia, the £3.4 million given by the Government to pay arrears of welfare benefits and the commitment of £5 million towards paying family welfare benefits during the next three years.

On paper, the federal structure duplicates many functions at federal and republican levels, which causes confusion about where real power lies and creates competition between different authorities. The constitutional powers of federal positions do not reflect the authority wielded by their incumbents. In practice, the federal Government's writ runs only barely in Montenegro and only nominally in Kosovo. The powers of the federal and Serbian Governments largely extend over identical territories. It was clear during the Committee's visit that President Kostunica and Prime Minister Djindjic had different approaches on several issues. Clarification of the future of the federation is crucial for the effective governance of Serbia, as well as for the political stabilisation of Montenegro and Kosovo.

The International Criminal Tribunal at the Hague aims to ensure that suspected war criminals of all ethnic backgrounds are brought to trial for the crimes committed in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo. In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), Kosovo is certainly within its remit. When the Committee's report was published, Milosevic himself was still ensconced in Belgrade. Numerous voices there claimed that to send him to The Hague for trial would make him a hero at home and potentially destabilise Serbian society. Milosevic is in The Hague under arrest and, if anything, his popularity in Serbia seems to have decreased even further. Events have moved on and so, it seems, have the people of Serbia with their new European aspirations.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I do not really want to talk about Milosevic, but I had the opportunity, a year ago, to visit Bosnia with the armed forces parliamentary scheme. It was interesting to examine how the forces were trying to arrest war criminals, known as Pifwics, which stands for persons indicted for war crimes. How long does the hon. Gentleman—the report does not dwell on the matter for very long—think British troops should remain in such roles? We should consider not only how we conduct peacekeeping operations, but how we bring international justice to the appropriate quarters.

Donald Anderson: I am obliged to my hon. Friend for his observations. It is clearly of enormous importance that those responsible for war crimes should be brought to justice. It is true that our own forces have played a significant, leading role in that. The only answer that I can give is that so long as there is a serious hope of laying hold of those responsible for those crimes, we should be there doing that job. There appears to be a growing awareness that a country can be purged of responsibility for crimes committed in its name only if the individuals actually responsible for those crimes are brought to justice.

The Committee was keen to stress that domestic trials could not be substituted for trials at The Hague. No Bosnian Muslim or Kosovar Albanian witness should be expected to testify in Belgrade. On the other hand, it is crucial that the international tribunal be seen to be scrupulously impartial. That was one of the Committee's main concerns. Developments in the Presevo valley are encouraging. The Committee was fully supportive of the Covic plan to resolve the crisis peacefully. For Yugoslavia to be accepted back into the fold of western democracies, it is crucial that the Government in Belgrade address the grievances of minority groups, such as those referred to by my hon. Friend, and recognise the need to solve political problems by political means—as they seem to be doing.

Montenegro is the other constituent state of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, but to all intents and purposes has been autonomous since the mid-1990s. The writ of the federal Government only runs in Montenegro in respect of the armed forces and air traffic control. The British Government have repeatedly told the Foreign Affairs Committee that a unilateral declaration of independence by Montenegro could destabilise the region. The Committee was not convinced of this, but was convinced that a positive neighbourly relationship between Serbia and Montenegro was in the interests of both. President Kostunica stressed that to us last week. He has a vision of a rather minimalist federal structure covering foreign affairs, defence and macro-economic matters, but with major devolution. European Union High Representative Solana has been seeking to build bridges between both sides.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): To return to the question of ethnic minorities in Serbia, did the Committee examine ethnic minorities in and around Belgrade? Are there any Albanians in Belgrade and if so, do any of them hold positions of responsibility there? Was there any investigation of the position of the Muslims in Sandzak, a region of Serbia?

Donald Anderson: We did not specifically address those issues. However, the more that minority rights are respected in the new democracy of Serbia, the more Serbia will be ready to be fully accepted into the European comity of nations. That is a challenge for the new Government in Serbia, given all the tensions and pressures that draw people into their ethnic enclaves.

Events have moved on since our report was published. The minority, pro-independence Government in Montenegro seems determined to proceed to a referendum on independence, and many Serbian politicians seem content to let that happen. It would be useful to know how the Government intend to respond to a referendum.

The Committee was concerned about inefficiencies in the international administration in Kosovo. In their recent memorandum, the Government outlined positive and welcome moves to improve the morale of United Nations staff and strengthen law and order. Alas, Kosovo's status is an unsatisfactory fudge and will remain so for some time. However, the alternatives are worse. Independence would destabilise the region, while reintegration with Serbia is not on the practical agenda. The success of moderate ethnic Albanians in the recent elections and the relatively high level of participation among the Serb minority are welcome signs of growing inclusiveness and the rejection of violence, which we all hope will persist. President Kostunica told the Committee last week that all the peoples of the region must abandon any idea of living in ethnically pure states. He said that there should be no greater Serbia and no greater Albania. I am sure that my colleagues on the Committee agree with that.

When the Committee published its report, Macedonia was showing worrying signs of descending into the sort of inter-ethnic violence that had plagued much of the rest of the former Yugoslavia. The Committee recommended that the British Government take the most urgent steps to galvanise the international community into bringing the situation under control and countering Albanian extremist violence against Macedonia, much of which was coming across the border from Kosovo. It is heartening that the international community has learned some of the lessons of Bosnia and Kosovo and that the threat of widespread interethnic violence seems so far to have been averted. We all have before us images of the violence in the former Yugoslavia, in places such as Srebrenica, Mostar and Vukovar. The Macedonian Government must be held to their commitment to guarantee all their citizens equal rights. Ethnic Albanian leaders must be held to their commitment to join the political process and not resort to arms. I commend the speed of NATO's response on the surveying of weapons decommissioning in Macedonia. The operation was highly successful.

Finally, I commend the conclusions of our report and the Government's response. In paragraph 190, we made it clear that during

> "the last decade more than 90,000 have been killed in the Balkan wars and civil conflicts. At one time or another more than 4.5 million people have been displaced from their homes. NATO has been compelled to go to war for the first time in its history. More than 70,000 international troops, including 6,900 from the United Kingdom, maintain peace in Bosnia and Kosovo. This is certainly not a 'quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing.'
>
> Events in the Balkans cannot be separated from European security."

Although threats remain and economic difficulties will not be easily surmounted, there are real signs of hope in the region. Those include the development of a democratic and reform-minded Government in Belgrade, the opening of the Danube, the positive vote in the Macedonian Parliament and the result of the elections in Kosovo.

The United Kingdom and the international community must commit themselves fully to supporting the democratisation and economic reform that will enable the region to move beyond the narrow-minded ethnic divisions that have caused such suffering and tragedy. It is right, and in our national interest, for there to be stability within European borders and, in time, for those borders to extend outwards as Europe, and indeed NATO, welcome new partners in the European family.

2.49 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): It is a great personal pleasure for me to follow the speech of the distinguished Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson). I unreservedly applaud him and all the members of the Committee for producing the report. It is a valuable contribution to our understanding of the Balkans and it sets the tone for discussions of the future pattern there.

The Committee has made a positive contribution to the debate about the future of the region, and particularly the role that the United Kingdom Government can play in assisting with the complex political issues that arise there. The right hon. Gentleman has spoken of the terrible catalogue of displacement and slaughter that has taken place in the Balkans in the past few years. That has been a matter of international concern. With your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to discuss some background before dealing with the specifics of the report.

After the Balkan wars, the President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the then Foreign Secretary, said:

> "The Balkans do not need another tragic round of revenge killings. We must break the cycle of violence that perpetuates ethnic hatred and fear."—[*Official Report*, 17 June 1999; Vol. 333, c. 585.]

We support that sentiment and recognise the contribution made by the United Kingdom, through bilateral and multilateral action, to the establishment of a democratic Government in Belgrade. However, some questions that we have raised in the past two and a half years remain unanswered. Of course, it would be absurd to suggest that there is an immediate solution to the situation in the Balkans, given the history and tensions. There is too much historical baggage for simple answers, but Britain is a major military player in the former Yugoslavia. British forces were central to the NATO-led implementation force IFOR, which was in turn succeeded, after UNPROFOR, by the stabilisation force, SFOR. In the more recent past we need only think of the role played by British troops in attempting to secure peace in Macedonia.

The situation in the Balkans is fluid. In the seven months since the report was released, there have been welcome, historic, elections in Kosovo, constitutional amendments in Macedonia and an end to the United Nations Security Council arms embargo against the federal republic.

Mrs. Mahon: Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern about the second set of elections in Kosovo, in which voter turnout dropped and extremist parties obtained 30 per cent. of the vote—an increase on last year?

Mr. Spring: The hon. Lady is right. To suggest that there is any simple solution to the Kosovo problem

[Mr. Spring]

would be absurd. The growth—or existence—of any kind of extremism is a matter of regret, but it is not, given the history, entirely surprising. All that we can do is to hope that moderation and good sense prevail in the unhappy circumstances that still exist.

To make the peace a long-term one, the international community must work towards a framework, from which a consensus on long-term stability in the region can emerge among the Balkan countries, however difficult, and international players. We have long called for a policy that, rather than focusing on each individual state, would adopt a broad, embodying approach to the region. That way of thinking echoes sentiments recorded in the Committee's findings.

In its conclusion the Committee stated that what happens in Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Kosovo matters, and influences European security and stability. That is a crucial observation and echoes what the right hon. Gentleman said in his remarks. I pay tribute to the Minister for his interest and involvement in what happens in the region. There has in the past been criticism of what has happened and we should perhaps gently pass that by, but the interest that the Minister has shown in the area, on behalf of the Government, is appreciated. For our interest to wane once more would be a tragedy for the region, and such neglect might have implications for all that has been achieved so far.

Only five days after the report was published, a landmark in the political evolution of the Balkans was reached. Slobadan Milosevic was arrested and, in June, was extradited to The Hague to face the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. He inflicted terrible harm on his own people, masterminding a programme of ethnic cleansing throughout the western Balkans, so it is right that he should be brought to book.

We welcome the encouragement provided by the United Kingdom Government to the democratic opposition to Milosevic during the election campaign and subsequent transition period. The trial of Milosevic is a test of the integrity of the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. We welcome the progress made to date and, in the face of Milosevic's defiant words, his trial must be seen to deliver impartial justice, as I am sure that it will. The voluntary surrender of Halilovic to the International Criminal Tribunal showed that the tribunal has the potential to deal with injustice in the region. Therefore, we hope that it will be a success and complement the role of domestic courts.

The hundreds of millions of dollars of aid received by the federal republic since April are proving crucial in rebuilding the country's battered economy. However, I recently saw reports of concerns about the living standards of many in the region, most notably in Serbia, and I welcome the fact that the Danube is to be cleared. On 20 November, a letter appeared in *The Times* from the European Commissioner Lord Patten. When adding to his comments on the clearing of the Danube, he said:

> "Last year we took action to open the EU market to exports from the Balkans. And we are negotiating legally binding agreements with each country, which will help them to implement political and economic reforms and to achieve, over time, the fullest possible integration into the European mainstream. The EU has said clearly that all the countries of the Western Balkans are potential candidates for EU membership."

I am sure that all hon. Members would applaud those sentiments and welcome those observations.

The Committee noted in March that the growing tension and violence in Macedonia had a frighteningly similar pattern to that in Bosnia. Instability in Macedonia has proved a great threat to the region. I express our sorrow at the death of sapper Ian Collins, who died trying to restore peace to the region, and welcome a full investigation into his death. Macedonia must simply not be allowed to disintegrate into another Kosovo, Bosnia or Croatia, which would constitute a massive reverse for the United Nations, the European Union and NATO, as the report observed.

A strong international presence in Macedonia proved crucial in supporting the Government and deterring rebels. It remains important that the Kosovar Albanians do everything possible to ensure that ethnic Albanians end terrorist activities in Macedonia. We should remain unequivocal in our support for the Government of Macedonia, which is democratic, legitimate and endeavours to protect the interests of the Albanian minority. It should be little wonder that many Macedonians protested in June when Francois Leotard, the EU representative in Macedonia, stated that the Macedonian Government must hold talks with Albanian guerrillas. That is a difficult problem.

On the point of concern that NATO has not acted rapidly or effectively enough to prevent the flow of arms and men across the border from Kosovo to Macedonia, I remind hon. Members that NATO has been a prominent force for peace in the Balkans for a long time. NATO facilitated a situation wherein the strongest and boldest nations could play to their strength, while accepting that others had different sorts of capabilities. I am sure that all hon. Members will agree that NATO must remain at the heart of the debate about European security.

The Committee concludes that Montenegro has the right to seek independence. The decision to recognise the state is a matter for other states to consider, but we must not deny the people of Montenegro an independence for which they voted in free and fair elections.

Javier Solana, the EU High Representative, recently said that Montenegro's chances of gaining entry into the EU would be harmed if it left the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The matter is difficult and I am not clear exactly what he meant in that regard. To echo Lord Patten's comments in the letter, if that is the route that is ultimately taken, I hope and believe it will be possible in the fullness of time to embrace it into the European Union.

Some Members have argued that an independent Montenegro would provoke instability, but the Committee concluded that the problems caused by Montenegrin independence would be slight when compared with other factors contributing to regional instability. I understand that the Serbian and Yugoslav Governments have said that they will accept a legal and peaceful declaration of independence by Montenegro, although there may be an argument about some processes of devolution. I certainly support the Committee's conclusions on Montenegro.

The Committee links the issues of Montenegro and Kosovo. We have long argued that Kosovo's independence, or something close to that, is probably, ultimately the only feasible solution, although it is fraught with considerable difficulty. It is a province that has suffered immeasurably, so it is of little surprise that the Committee stated that

> "there is no possibility of any form of association between Kosovo and Serbia for the foreseeable future beyond that which already exists."

That bears out the fact that a different approach, backed by the international community, may be needed in Kosovo.

In the light of the desire of all factions to build stability in the region, I urge the Government, as the Committee suggests, to investigate the fate of those Serbs missing in Kosovo. That is important in demonstrating that equality and democracy are alive in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. I also urge the Minister to pay heed to the recommendation that the Government should attach a very high priority to providing assistance for the development of an independent and free media in Serbia. We have all too often seen how a free and fair media is central to democracy and stability, and it is an important element for the future democratic development of Serbia.

In conclusion, the conflicts in Kosovo and Macedonia have constituted the latest festering sores on the political landscape of the Balkans. If they are to be the last, the international community must play a facilitating role in the future development of the region. The Committee concluded that the real positive hope for the future of the region will be the development of a democratic and economically reformed Serbian Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. I would add that in the Balkans instability breeds instability and always has. We must try to break that cycle. The fall of Slobodan Milosevic and the process of the trial is only a piece, albeit a large piece, in that jigsaw. We have long argued—the Committee's report demonstrates this—that for stability to be achieved in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the international community must adopt a policy that broadly embodies and encompasses an approach to the whole region.

3.2 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): I congratulate the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs on its excellent report. Members of the Committee who are present will forgive me if I make the obvious point that it would have been much better if we had debated the report when it came out, particularly as it covers such a fast-changing region as the Balkans, and we have had a general election since its publication. One of the difficulties of commenting on the former Yugoslavia is the extraordinary pace of change not only since the report was published but since the Foreign Office responded to it. In some aspects, we are now a long way from the circumstances then.

I want to go back a little further. It is always possible to say that many things are going wrong, but in fact many things are now going right as well—it is important to record that—partly as a result of the international community's action. The history of the region and its future would have been radically different had there not been such intense activity by the international community. We should place on record our strong approval of the activities of NATO and, more generally, of other international institutions such as the European Union and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

In 1995—I offer it as a largely arbitrary point half way through the previous decade—optimists would have described Slovenia as a success in the wake of the break-up of Yugoslavia. Ironically, Macedonia might have been next in line for applause. My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson), who is Chairman of the Select Committee, asked whether Milosevic was seen at the time as the problem or the solution. I had some involvement in the region, and I doubt whether anyone saw Milosevic as the solution. The region was dominated by President Tudjman of Croatia, and if anyone deserved to appear before the war crimes tribunal alongside Milosevic, it was him. I regret to say, however, that he did not.

At that time, anyone would have said that it was impossible to put Bosnia back together, and that its ethnic, religious and other divisions were so intense that it could never make a viable nation in its own right. However, matters have moved forward. Milosevic has gone, Tudjman has long gone and Croatia is arguably a success story. There is a message in Croatia's progress that the rest of the region should bear in mind. During the time of Tudjman and afterwards, it was made clear to Croatia that it would pay a price if it failed to accept a road map to Europe, and that it would be recognised and welcomed if it took a different course to that which it was taking. That had two consequences, one of which was very important. It emboldened some in Croatia to stand up and say that the activities of the Tudjman Government were not in Croatia's interests.

Even during times when the level of control is not what we would want or accept, it is important that we give the strong message to those who oppose such regimes that there are different rewards for different kinds of futures. I strongly endorse the Select Committee's important observation that the role of the free press is fundamental in building democratic institutions in the region. However, it is important that the people of the region be able to discuss their future in the knowledge that there is a proper road map to the Europe of which the region is rightly a part, and from which it can benefit in the longer term. As the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) said, there is no doubt that the European Union and other European institutions beckon for those in the region who are prepared to take such steps.

Bosnia is no longer the basket case it once was. There is now multi-ethnic co-operation, and that is an issue on which I want to concentrate for a few moments. It would help if the Minister could put on the record his own view on where Bosnia is going, and on the problems as well as the successes. Bosnia is still undergoing enormous transformation, but it remains very important to the rest of the region. If Bosnia can get it right, we can dispel the myth of a Balkans that must always have splits and ethnic division. Ironically, that is a very glib reading of the region's history.

Mrs. Mahon: My hon. Friend might be interested in a summary on Bosnia that we received last weekend from Gary Dempsey, of the Cato Institute in Washington. He said that he was very sceptical about Bosnia. Although billions have been invested, it is still run as a

[Mrs. Mahon]

protectorate and people have many fewer rights than they had before. The advice that we received was that it was a failed experiment and that the people, and the international community, were not good at nation building.

Mr. Lloyd: I can think of no time when there were not those who were prepared to say of Bosnia, "It's too difficult to handle, let's redraw the Dayton map, or rip it up and move towards mono-ethnic solutions." The problem with mono-ethnic solutions is that they would leave the Balkans made up not of countries recognisable by today's standards but of tiny, ethnically pure enclaves. It would be a Balkans not of countries but of cantons. If my hon. Friend thinks that it is difficult to put a Bosnia back together, she should think about how a region of such cantons could be put back together. That would be massively difficult and not in the interests of stability in the region or more generally.

Mr. Wareing: Does my hon. Friend agree that the most ethnically mixed country in the former Yugoslavia is Serbia itself?

Mr. Lloyd: I do not particularly want to look down my hon. Friend's ethnic kaleidoscope, because I do not think that that would be very helpful. Of course Serbia is ethnically mixed; Sandzak and Vojvodina have been mentioned and some ethnic minorities living in Serbia suffered brutally under previous Belgrade Governments. The future, however, for Serbia and Yugoslavia is as a multi-ethnic country. There can be no doubt in anyone's mind that multi-ethnicity must be made to work in Serbia.

Multi-ethnicity must also be made to work in Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia and, although I will not go into the legal structures, Kosovo. There is no future for any of us if we begin to pick and choose which side we are on and which ethnic groups will be the inheritors. Montenegro itself is multi-ethnic. We must say to all parties that there can be no truck with those who look for ethnic solutions. Those days are long gone in the Balkans, and there can be no long-term future that way.

There is a future if we can—I hear the despairing voices—play a part in building a Bosnia with multi-ethnic institutions and politicians who are beginning to grow up. My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) made a point about the rise of the extremists in democratic elections in Kosovo. I ask her to cast her mind back to not many years ago when people were saying the same about Bosnia. It was divided, with the extremists in control of almost every part. Since then, Bosnia's people in each ethnic community have begun to say, "No, hang on, that is not a future for us. We are not prepared to have truck with the lunatics who did so much damage to the country." Increasing numbers of Bosnia's people are saying that they want to work with, and will vote for, politicians who campaign on the basis of being part of a multi-ethnic and multi-institutional solution.

Hope for the future lies in saying that those who want to work with civilised, acceptable, democratic values will get support from Governments such as the British Government and from the institutions on which Britain and the European Union have influence. That is the right and proper message to give.

There is a similar situation in Macedonia. The international community's work has been tremendously important there. I was at a meeting yesterday at which the High Representative spoke. Questions were put to him by Macedonians and others about the failure of European institutions to put Macedonia back on a firm footing. He rightly pointed out force-fully to all concerned that not many months ago when civil war was on the agenda in Macedonia the international community's work prevented the outbreak of a war that could have seen the whole region consumed by bloodshed.

Of course some unacceptable things took place, but the international community responded rapidly and with certainty about what it wanted to achieve. That is a model of how we should behave as good citizens in this common Europe. On record, I want to congratulate our Government and other Governments. The role that the Germans played in succeeding the British in their peacekeeping role should also be noted. That was a difficult decision for the German people, but they took that step because they recognised that, in modern Europe, Germany must move away from its past to a different future.

I strongly share the view that we must send signals to the whole region that we believe that its future is in the European family and that long-term membership of the European Union is important for each country. That is an important signal to send, but it must be given with the condition that those who want to split up the region will not gain support. That is why I disagree with the Select Committee's conclusions on Montenegro. It would be far more rational to give the signals that I have suggested to the people of Montenegro. Let none of us believe that the issue was ethnicity in Montenegro; it has a huge Serb minority and a mixed population.

One could hold a romantic view of a Montenegro that was once independent, but that is some time in the past. It is more plausible to talk of the future and understand that it would be dangerous to be party to a break-up of any part of the region, or give the signal that we supported or applauded that. We should say that we expect to see increasing co-operation in the Balkans and that rewards will be given to those who are co-operators and who build up common institutions. The economy and polity of that region depends, in every part, on strengthening the common role of the region; its future in a common Europe depends on that message being understood.

I would like the Minister to say whether we can begin to define a road map for the region and show each country that we recognise its difficulties by showing it the steps that it needs to take to strengthen democratic institutions, the free press and the control of the military. Those elements are hallmarks of a movement towards democracy. Under that framework, can we define how progress is to be made towards European institutions? That would be particularly relevant for Serbia. What message will we give to that country, which is inevitably bruised by its recent past? We should say that there is no antagonism or hostility towards the people of Serbia in general, just because it was disastrously ruled by Milosevic for a period and that, for them, the road map will mean a systematic dismantling of all of the regime's structures, which were designed to bear down on people. We should say that if Belgrade takes the right steps, rewards will come rapidly and will help movement towards the rest of the region, and Europe.

It is in our hands, through international action, to ensure that we are partners to helping those in the region to build a future, which is democratic and in Europe. We can give that signal and I hope that the Minister will say what the map will be for each nation.

3.18 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): Contributions from hon. Members, and particularly from the distinguished Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson), have already drawn attention to the inescapable fact that the situation in the Balkans changes rapidly and unexpectedly. It is worth reminding ourselves that the Select Committee report of March called for a resolution to the reluctance of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to extradite Milosevic, yet by the time the Government had responded to the report he was already incarcerated in The Hague. The report highlighted concerns over the instability in Kosovo, yet the elections in November brought fresh and hopeful mandates to the new provisional Government.

The report drew attention to the aspirations for independence in Montenegro—that was mentioned by the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd)—especially in relation to the potential clash with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia if Montenegro's political establishment continued to pursue those aims, yet elections in Montenegro and the removal of Milosevic have brought a new dimension to these arguments. The Committee was concerned about the fighting that had broken out in the Presevo valley, but those fears have now to some extent been allayed. Nevertheless, the territorial disputes spilled over into Macedonia during the summer, and it is fair to say that so far only a fragile restoration of peace has been achieved through the intervention of our EU forces.

Having studied the report and contributed to it in some small way, I believe that a key factor in the future stability of the region is the economic and political stability of the "new Serbia", as the report describes it. The coalition of democratic parties that swept to power on a promise of widespread economic and political reforms is key to the future of the democracy that is being established. Under the Prime Minister, Mr. Djindjic, the Serbian Government have managed to push through a series of important structural reforms—important enough for the International Monetary Fund to be impressed by their speed and commitment.

However, there is still growing discontent in Serbia at the slow pace of change. Salaries remain very low, strikes are frequent, output has fallen by about 60 per cent. over the past 10 years, unemployment is approaching 50 per cent.—admittedly that relates only to the taxed economy, not the shadow economy, but it still has a significant effect on the tax base of the country—and a 10th of the population are pensioners or refugees. That situation provides fertile ground for the ascendancy of the ultra-nationalist parties that supported Milosevic in the past. With elections due on 23 December, the Democratic Opposition of Serbia party looks increasingly fragile. It is worth remembering that when we met Prime Minister Djindjic in Belgrade, he said, "We're riding a bike, and if we don't keep pedalling we'll fall off." He meant that in order to keep pedalling the DOS Government were dependent on significant and appropriate aid from the international community.

The EU acted with commendable speed at the end of the war with Serbia. About 200 million euros of emergency aid was dispensed quickly, and in July the international donors pledged some $1.3 billion, of which the EU donated about $445 million. Overall, the EU has committed the staggering sum of 145.3 million euros, to be disbursed to meet essential needs this year. Over the next five years an even more staggering sum of about 4.65 billion euros will go to the region as a whole.

That is pretty impressive by any standards, but the critical factor is how, when and how quickly the aid will be disbursed. I understand from the Foreign Office report that work on a country strategy for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Macedonia is due to be completed by the end of 2001—that is, of course, the end of this month. However, will that allocation of aid be sufficient to restore economic stability in the long term and, more importantly, to maintain political stability in the short term? The President, Mr. Kostunica, tells us that the cost of repairing NATO bomb damage alone is twice the national debt. I do not have a figure for the national debt of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, but I suspect that the Minister, who takes great interest in these matters, and is an encyclopaedic fund of knowledge on matters to do with central Europe, will be able to give it to me and put it in the context of the money that we in the west are offering to help restore the country.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): The estimate of the cost of damage caused by bombing is $28 billion.

Mr. Chidgey: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. It appears that the national debt of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is $14 billion, which is an interesting figure in comparison with the amount of aid that the west is currently offering over a five-year period.

If we shall not have the report on aid strategy for Yugoslavia until the end of this year, and given that elections will be held on 23 December, there is a danger that, given the current economic situation, the ultra-nationalist parties could begin to gain ascendancy, which would damage the fragile democracy that the DOS has established. The disbursement of international aid to Yugoslavia is linked closely, if discretely, to co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The extradition of Milosevic was directly to linked to the United States deciding to withhold its aid programme until the last minute, but the situation is more complicated than that.

The issue is clouded by Yugoslavian political rivalries, which are the bedrock of Balkan politics. Although President Kostunica argued that the rule of law in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia could not accommodate the extradition of Mr. Milosevic, the Prime Minister, Mr. Djindjic, who is a realist if ever I

[Mr. Chidgey]

saw one, acted pragmatically by delivering Milosevic to secure aid. The dire warnings from President Kostunica that extradition would make Milosevic the people's hero, which would destabilise the Government, have failed to materialise.

Events in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia have moved on, and to counter the President's arguments, opinion polls taken over some time show that public opposition to the extradition of indicted war criminals has declined markedly. The pre-eminent issues for the Serbian people understandably concern domestic matters such as employment, wages and the economy. Sadly, there is little political appetite for pursuing the extradition of other indicted war criminals because the political rivals are preoccupied within their internal power struggle, and extradition may be seen as a lever to gain political advantage among the competing parties.

It is interesting to note that Carla del Ponte, the tribunal's chief prosecutor, has criticised President Kostunica for not releasing army files to enable the tribunal to pursue indicted criminals because they may contain state secrets. Although Milosevic's extradition on Djinjic's orders did not destabilise the Government, President Kostunica was reported in *The Sunday Times* on 25 November to be arguing that. He said:

> "These questions are too complicated to move forward without a proper legal framework".

Carla del Ponte claims that the Serbian army is sheltering Ratko Mladic, a wartime commander who has been indicted for genocide. It takes only a brief assessment of the political intrigue that still exists in Serbia to reveal that the situation is more complex than we might think.

Examination of the views currently being expressed in Serbia indicates that there are different opinions on what is happening. On 21 November, the Serbian magazine *Reporter* published a list of members of the Yugoslavian special police forces who, it alleges, had been indicted by the tribunal for war crimes. Spectacularly, *Reporter* claims that the list was leaked from President Kostunica's office in a secret deal with Prime Minister Djindjic. We need to remember that the special police forces, or the red berets as they are known, are the same forces that committed the worst atrocities in the course of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, under the direct command and control of Arkan. In Serbia today, there appears to be no one controlling these special police forces. Apparently they are organising strikes and road blockades around Belgrade in protest at the indictment of their colleagues by the tribunal. The question of who controls the red berets is causing deep concern in the Republic of Serbia. There are an increasing number of protests that should be reigned in under the control of the national police force, and not be aligned with nationalist politicians.

The Reporter accuses the Democratic Opposition of the Serbian Government of being unable to contain Arkan's red berets. Yet, according to President Kostunica, they are under the control of Prime Minister Djindjic. I wanted to set out that piece of information to show just how complex and devious politics can be in this region. If the red berets are controlled by Prime Minister Djindjic, it begs the question why Djindjic does not follow the example that he set with Milosevic, and order the extradition of the indicted war criminals in the ranks of the special police forces as a matter of priority. Among those ranks are the very people who are suspected of still working with Milosevic. They have a prime aim to destabilise the Government before the elections which are due on 23 December, just two weeks away.

If the UK Government are following the events in "new Serbia" as closely as I hope they are, they will be aware that it is vital to ensure that the aid to support economic stability, and of course political stability, is disbursed quickly and appropriately. They need to do this if they are to be sure that the Government of Serbia will survive and not suffer a major reverse. The timing of aid and extradition is crucial, but the Government must be aware of the pitfalls of overplaying their hand.

In the Foreign Affairs Committee report, the Committee dwelt at some length on Montenegro. It is important to remember that relationship problems between Serbia and Montenegro are still unresolved. Even though the Montenegrin President, Mr Djukanovic, failed to secure a sufficient mandate for independence when he won the elections in April, he still insists on holding a referendum. I understand that the laws to enable one to be introduced are being worked on now, and they are expected to be ready early next year. President Djukanovic is on the record as saying that the question is not whether a referendum will be held on independence in Montenegro, but when and under what conditions.

Members might like to reflect on the fact that Montenegro is already independent in all but name. It controls its own monetary policy, its own foreign affairs, its own security and its own customs. The only things it seems not to control are the army, which is Serbian, and air traffic control, which remains in Yugoslav hands.

We all know that the international community openly opposes independence for Montenegro because it does not fit the ball game; it does not fit the chart that has been mapped out. There is obviously a tremendous fear of a domino effect redrawing the borders and leading perhaps to the Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia, or even the Serbs in the Republic of Sprska, seeking secession. We should recognise that the Montenegrins see that as unfair. As a former full republic in Tito's Yugoslavia, under the EU's guidelines Montenegrins should claim the same rights as other republics.

Mr. Randall: The hon. Gentleman is right about the referendum question, but does he have any idea whether the idea of independence is popular among the people of Montenegro?

Mr. Chidgey: I was not suggesting support or otherwise for whether Montenegro should become independent. My point is that we must accept that they will have a referendum. We must accept also that the people of Montenegro have the right to show their feelings and register their views as part of the democratic process.. It is not right for us, in the august chambers of Westminster, to tell people around the world how they should run their own affairs. They have the right to self-expression, including Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and

Macedonia. They were all republics in Tito's Yugoslavia. We cannot have one form of self-expression without the other.

Mr. Lloyd: That touches on a fundamental point. Many of us grew up with the right to self-determination. My lifelong belief in it is based on the struggle for independence in Ireland—very romantic. However, there is a problem with characterising that right as unlimited, as the hon. Gentleman said. It opens up the question of the right to self-determination of the Serbs in the Republica Srpska and Croatia and, very importantly, that of the Albanians in Macedonia. These issues are very difficult. I ask the hon. Gentleman to reflect on the balance between the right to self-determination and the right to maintain the integrity of international borders.

Mr. Chidgey: I chose my words carefully. I spoke about the peoples of those republics, not the ethnic groupings. That is the essential difference. The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) made it clear that it is for the people of those areas to express their views, not ethnic groups. It is no good us assuming that the problem will go away. We must accept that these peoples, whatever their ethnic background, will express their views. We must be flexible enough to understand and work with that.

According to the Montenegrins, the international community has changed the rules of the game. It is believed in some quarters that Montenegrin independence would have negative consequences, and that takes precedence in some people's minds. However, no one in Belgrade or Podgorica denies the right of the Montenegrins to vote on their future. Heavy-handed opposition could be counterproductive and could strengthen the independence vote, for obvious reasons. The international community must be prepared to react flexibly, even if it is displeased with the results of the referendum. Failure to do so would be a recipe for future instability.

Kosovo is a major part of the Committee's report. Its status has not yet been resolved, and probably will not be for some time. It will remain for some years under UN administration. However, the mid-November elections were a major step forward in establishing democracy, particularly as Serbs participated in significant numbers for the first time. The elections produced a clear victory for the Democratic League of Kosovo, led by Dr. Rugova, which augers well for the democratic process. Even so, Dr. Rugova, who is known for his pacifism, on winning the election promptly called for Kosovo's independence "Today or tomorrow". That call was approved by 90 per cent. of Kosovo Albanians. Prime Minister Djindjic of Serbia recognises that approval. He was quoted in the *Financial Times* of 2 July 2001 as saying:

> "If the world gave us back Kosovo, what would we do? Send in the police and the army?"

That is clearly not a prospect that he relishes. He is far more concerned with protecting the Serb population that lives mainly in the north of Kosovo. The international community must recognise, and persuade the key players in the region to recognise, that as a quid pro quo for 36,000 NATO troops being deployed to keep the peace in Kosovo, Dr. Rugova should be devoting his energies to proving that he can form an effective and stable Government that will fight crime, defend Serbs' property rights and begin reconstruction. If he succeeds in those three basic tasks, debates on independence will be far easier to manage two or three years down the road, by which time we hope that the situation will have stabilised. Meanwhile, whether we like it or not, it is obvious that a long-term commitment for international troops for KFOR will be necessary. The clear message of the election results is that sustained investment in troops and economic aid pays off and that the UN-led, NATO-policed building of a nation can work; but it will require the further commitment of military peacekeeping troops, of international administration and of economic aid.

A number of Members have spoken about the Foreign Affairs Committee report on Macedonia, which is critical. In paragraph 164, the Committee highlights its concern that NATO had not acted sufficiently rapidly to prevent the flow of arms and men across the border from Kosovo to Macedonia. The Committee also pointed out that although Macedonia had been a model in multi-ethnic and democratic government, it could disintegrate into another Kosovo. It called upon the Government to take the most urgent steps to galvanise the international community to counter Albanian extremist violence. In the event, action was taken, and operation Essential Harvest secured a tenuous cessation of wide-scale violence. However, a large question mark still hangs over the political and economic stability of Macedonia.

A major concern must be the withdrawal of the Social Democratic Alliance from the governing coalition. Its departure is likely to strengthen the position of the Macedonian Nationalists, which has taken a hard line on the unrest in the country, and particularly on the ethnic disparity in the north of the country. The rise of the Nationalists will heighten ethnic tension.

Macedonia, too, is suffering from a fragile, unstable economic base. In 1998, more than a third of its working population was unemployed, and more than 80 per cent. of manufacturing and other equipment was obsolete. Inward investment was less that half what it was in 1972. Macedonia's Minister of Finance points out that, among transitional countries, Macedonia is at the bottom of the ladder in terms of inward investment. However, it is clear that investments are unlikely to materialise until there is some certainty that political and ethnic stability can be restored. The situation gives even greater weight to the Committee's recommendation that the Government must give a clear lead by ensuring that measures agreed by the Macedonian Government to give greater recognition to ethnic Albanians—measures essential to reducing ethnic tension—are implemented.

Finally, will the Minister tell us what progress has been made in increasing the proportion of Albanians in the police force from 5 per cent. to the target of 25 per cent.; what progress has been made in introducing the Albanian language into state institutions; and most important, what progress is being made in the investigation of the war crimes allegedly committed by both Government and NLA forces in Macedonia earlier this year? In Macedonia, as in Kosovo, Montenegro and the new Serbia, the Government have a key role to play in trying to bring stability to the region.

[Mr. Chidgey]

Although the Government's response to the Committee's report is in many ways encouraging, rapidly changing events make it clear that much more needs to be done, both now and in the longer term. It would be folly to underestimate the destruction wrought by Milosevic and his cronies in every sphere, or the effort that is needed now by the international community to help rebuild shattered communities. It must be accepted by our Government and their partners that a long-term commitment is essential. We must continue to deploy peacekeeping forces sufficient for the task to rebuild political institutions and restore democracy, to restore economic stability and, above all, to give all the peoples of the region the right democratically to express their views on, and pursue the determination of, their future.

3.44 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I welcome this opportunity to discuss Yugoslavia. The Committee's report was produced in March and is based on information that is at least a year old. Given that the report concludes that the Government played an important role in bringing about the present situation, we are entitled to know what progress has been made on the many outstanding problems that the report highlights. I hope that the Minister can update us.

Hon. Members know that I do not share the Committee's favourable view of the United Kingdom's role in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. I thank my colleagues for re-electing me to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. My position as a delegate has allowed me to observe events at first hand for a decade, and I know that the picture is not as rosy as the report paints it, despite dwelling on the problems in the former Yugoslavia.

I wish that the report had placed a little more emphasis on refugees. I do not know whether the Committee visited any of the many refugee camps in Serbia, but I have visited one or two. Serbia has the largest refugee problem in Europe, but because the Serbs were so demonised they received the least help from the aid agencies. Those agencies purport not to be political, but they have acted very politically in recent years.

The Yugoslav experience is not a useful model—bombing is not a useful model for anyone to adopt. The Labour party used to have an honourable record on diplomacy. It sought to be a peacemaker rather than to take immediate military action. Now, however, we take so much notice of American foreign policy that we support almost everything with a military outcome.

I want to concentrate, however, on the present and the future. In particular, I want to consider international terrorism and Kosovo. We cannot separate the situation there from current events, nor can we discuss international terrorism without considering Macedonia. Events in Yugoslavia led to the situation in Macedonia.

I have been to Macedonia several times. I recently spoke to Government and non-Government representatives, and I assessed the situation myself. In the recent terrorist attacks—we cannot call them anything else—hundreds of citizens, including moderate Albanians, were abducted and killed. Those attacks happened because KLA terrorists entered the country over the border with Kosovo. A large proportion of the terrorists' weapons came from the west, including from the United States and Britain. There is also evidence that the United States trained some of those involved.

I am totally in favour of civil and political rights for minorities in Macedonia and elsewhere. That includes giving the Albanian language more status. However, the Macedonian Government have been doing something about that. Six members of the Cabinet are Albanians. My friends there include both Slavs and Albanians, and I have talked with them many times over the years. Education up to secondary level and now at university can take place in the Albanian language. I am not saying that the situation is perfect, but people have been doing something about it. It was certainly not worth taking up arms over. It would be wrong for the Scots or the Welsh to attack London because they wanted greater autonomy for the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Assembly.

Mr. Randall: The hon. Lady will probably be aware that Lord Robertson described the attacks in Macedonia as terrorist incidents when they first happened. Ordinary Macedonians have a little difficulty understanding why the west takes a different view of different forms of terrorism.

Mrs. Mahon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. The KLA was number two on the most wanted terrorist list, and many people in Yugoslavia were amazed when its status suddenly changed when America decided to take its side and bomb Yugoslavia. Suddenly its forces were our allies rather than the second-most wanted terrorists on the State Department's list.

Macedonia has been a model in the region. Paragraph 168 of the report concludes:

> "Macedonia has been a model in the region of a multi-ethnic and democratic government...If Macedonia should disintegrate into another Kosovo, Bosnia or Croatia, it would be a massive reverse for the United Nations, the EU and NATO".

That is not altogether to be ruled out, as the Albanian nationalists are not satisfied. The country has de facto been divided. Some of the excuses made in the west for the people who went into another country and encouraged an uprising are shameful.

I want to concentrate on the KLA and terrorism. Kosovo is a lawless state, and not one to be proud of. A direct link between bin Laden and the KLA is well established. At a recent NATO Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Canada, we were given a briefing and a report from Gwen McClure, the assistant director of the criminal organisations division of Interpol, about the Balkans route for drugs and human smuggling. The emphasis of her speech was on the links between terrorism and criminal activity. She said:

> "There is a fairly accepted view in the international community that in recent years, direct state sponsorship"

of terrorism has declined. That is important to note with regard to the bombing of Afghanistan, and the threats that Richard Pearl and others keep making about extending the bombing to other Muslim countries, such as Iraq, Somalia and the Sudan.

The assistant director went on to say:

> "therefore terrorists increasingly have to resort to other means of financing, including...drug trafficking, extortion/collection of taxes, armed robbery and kidnappings."

She says that her investigations revealed that

> "Albanian organised crime groups are hybrid organisations, often involved both in criminal activity of an organised nature and political activities, mainly relating to Kosovo. There is certain evidence that the political and criminal activities are deeply intertwined. Also, it has become increasingly clear that the Albanian crime groups have engaged in significant cooperation with other transnational crime groups".

She said that the Albanians were

> "ideal couriers in the drug trafficking business running through Albania"—

the same applies to Kosovo—

> "after the outbreak of war in Yugoslavia as they were able to circumvent...border controls."

We should bear in mind that Afghanistan produces 75 per cent. of the world's heroin supply, even now, despite the Taliban pretending that it would stop that.

The assistant director continued by saying that 80 per cent. of the heroin smuggled into, for example, Sweden and Norway was linked directly to Albanian networks in the region. She said:

> "Throughout Europe, around 40 per cent. of the heroin trade seems to be controlled by Albanians."

I hope that, at some point, the Committee will consider the criminal activities in Kosovo. It is now a criminal state. Remember that I am quoting directly from Interpol. Gwen McClure said:

> "Intelligence shows that...at a meeting in Albania, which could have also been attended by Osama bin Laden who was believed to be in Albania at the time"—

it was the late 1990s and the Albanian police confirmed his presence, although the Albanian Government later denied it—

> "many structures and networks were established for propaganda and fund raising activities...another link to bin Laden seems to be the fact that the brother of a leader in an Egyptian jihad organisation and a military commander of Osama bin Laden, was leading an elite KLA unit during the Kosovo conflict."

It is ironic that the story had moved on and the KLA's members were no longer the second-most wanted terrorists on the CIA's list, but were our allies. We were acting as the KLA's air force while it might have been plotting some dreadful terrorist act on America or elsewhere. We cannot afford to ignore that serious issue.

On Kosovo and the KLA, the Committee said that:

> "KFOR has now reached its full strength of 50,000 troops"

and that

> "KFOR's presence helps to create a general climate of security".

Tell that to the Serbs, the Roma and Gorani, who live in the tiny enclaves, or the people who try to protect with tanks the wonderful monastery at Decani. Given the information that we have about the connections between bin Laden and the KLA, should not KFOR be doing something in response and tightening up on the groups that continue to operate? Certainly, it should tighten up on Kosovo's borders with Macedonia, in that regard.

Paragraphs 122 and 123 of the report say that the Kosovar police service is overwhelmingly made up of former members of the KLA, and suggest, unsurprisingly, that the Serbs and other minorities in Kosovo have no confidence in it. I can confirm that from my own experience, but what alarms me more is the influence of Agim Ceku, who was rumoured to be sought by the international war crimes tribunal at The Hague for war crimes in the Krajina. He was responsible for Operation Storm, which drove 250,000 Serbs out of the Krajina. I recently visited that region independently and with the Committee and looked at the mass graves that, six or seven years on, are still waiting to be exhumed. I talked to people—Serbs mainly—who had returned and were not having a happy experience.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) mentioned Vukovar and Srebrenica and some dreadful crimes committed by the Serbs, but let us be even-handed and go to Knin and the Krajina and look at the dreadful crimes committed against the Serbs as we bombed them and they were driven out by the Croatian armies. Agim Ceku is now in charge of the renamed Kosovo Protection Corps. As an international community that believes in the rule of law and that war criminals should be tried, we cannot have good terrorists and bad terrorists; we cannot have double standards.

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend's last point is right. No observer has any doubt that dreadful crimes were committed by every group. That is the brutal, nasty reality. Atrocities were recently committed in Macedonia by ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, which gratifies neither side. All those atrocities need condemnation. My hon. Friend is right to say that the tribunal on the former Yugoslavia has a remit that would cover Kosovo.

Mrs. Mahon: I am just coming on to that.

Mr. Lloyd: I agree with my hon. Friend, but those guilty of crimes during the most recent upsurge of violence, whether they are Albanians or Serbs or from any other group, should face that tribunal. However, we should get away from the idea that anyone who condemns Serb violence wants to support Croat or Bosnian violence. That does not follow.

Mrs. Mahon: No, but it would have been helpful if the west had been more even-handed in its statements and in pursuit of criminals from the other groups. I visited the international war crimes tribunal in The Hague with two other people, and had an interview with Carla del Ponte when I returned from Krajina. She assured us that her people would look into the graves, which they know exist—we photographed them—and she wanted to be even-handed. On the wall of her office, however, she had a cartoon of four wanted Serb criminals and, look as I could, I could see no such pictures of anyone from the Muslim or Croatian communities.

Shortly afterwards, we visited Banja Luka in the Republika Srpska and met Mr. Collett, a British policeman from Preston. We chatted, and I was the Chair of the Committee when he briefed us. He said that only Serb war criminals were being sought, so that is on the record.

I return to those people who are operating freely in Kosovo, with our approval. One of them is head of the Kosovo Protection Corps and another is standing for

[Mrs. Mahon]

office, posing as a democrat. We cannot allow those double standards; they will come back to haunt us. Of course, the Kosovo Protection Corps sees itself as the core of a future Kosovo army, and it is possible that military training has recently been undertaken, unmonitored by KFOR or UNMIK—the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo—which both look the other way.

Just what are those 50,000 troops doing in Kosovo? What good can it do Rugova and the moderates who were recently elected if an army of ex-KLA people is still operating in Kosovo? After all, they found it very easy to stir up trouble in Macedonia and take lots of weapons. Although I would praise George Robertson, the NATO Secretary-General, and President Solana for their efforts in bringing about peace—of course I do—no one is fooled because the real store of weapons is undoubtedly still in the bit of Macedonia that has effectively been taken over by the Albanians.

The recent elections were welcome but, as I said earlier, there has been a drop in turnout since last year and more people voted for extremist parties. It is time that we took control. It is time that we did something about getting many of the returnees back. We have 50,000 troops there; that begs the question of why, with all that protection, does the KLA need an army?

We should be doing something about the Serbs and others who are living in terrible conditions under siege. They are the forgotten victims of the international community; they are second-class citizens. As they made their exodus from Kosovo, driven out and burnt out, many of them were killed. I remind the Chamber that 1,300 of them are still missing, but the Albanians refuse to say anything about them, as does the KLA—I make a distinction between those who support Rugova and those who support Hashim Thaci. When the Serbs were leaving in their tractors, the BBC and other media were shamefully missing. It was not reported—or only in very small numbers.

It is not good enough, as the report suggests, to pat ourselves on the back for deposing Milosevic. I am no supporter of Milosevic. However, he was an elected representative, and it is the Serbian people who deserve credit for getting rid of him—and for voting in large numbers to achieve it. We are partly responsible for the economic mess that the country faces today, and nothing like enough is being put in to put the mess right.

I turn briefly to some other problems. We discussed Montenegro at some length in Washington at the weekend, and the representative from the Yugoslav Government pointed out that they had agreed to abide by a referendum. However, it was pointed out that the general feeling was that a loose federation was wanted; and the west is not supporting separatism.

It is time that we were given a detailed picture of the economic situation, especially in relation to sanctions. I hope that the Committee will support me in seeking an undertaking from the Minister that he will give Parliament an update and lots of information on that in the near future.

We have heard about the bomb damage. It is likely to cost £28 billion. I can testify to that, because I was there during the bombing and I have been many times since. Many of the places that were bombed were not military targets, including the bridges over the Danube. I stood on the last bridge over the Danube—a bridge used by the train. A very multi-ethnic group of people was there, including Albanians, ethnic Hungarians, Serbs and many others, in their different costumes, two nights before that last bridge was bombed. That was not an action against a military target; the purpose was to smash Yugoslavia, and it made a very good job of that.

The report says that sanctions were instrumental in bringing about Milosovic's downfall. I believe that they played a role, but the people were more instrumental and we should give them credit for that. Have all the economic sanctions been removed? A modest sanction concerns Yugoslav Airlines—JAT—which has been unable to increase its flights between London and Belgrade. That is creating major problems as the airline tries to compete in a difficult situation. It has tried and failed to claim its rights and our Government Departments have been less than helpful in resolving the problem. I ask the Minister to look into the specific complaints from JAT.

Reports from NATO—I received some this weekend—suggest that, sadly, the stability pact is simply not doing its job. We all had high hopes that it would do some good, but people are very disappointed. The criteria for receiving grants and help are tightly drawn; they do not fit in culturally, and the advice has not been good. People may have to change how they do things culturally, but if the advice is not correct, they feel as if they are operating in a maze and that someone is deliberately sending them round and round.

The memorandum submitted to the Committee by the Serbian Unity Congress said that the situation was still dire earlier this year. I know the people concerned and they are certainly not Milosevic supporters. They kept hope alive in the diaspora and within their country. They campaigned publicly for a number of years to get him out. They are very depressed about the situation and frightened that it might open the door to unpleasant parties that none of us wants to see operating again.

The memorandum submitted by the Serbian Unity Congress in appendix 6 on page 90 of the report states:

> "Sanctions were not lifted after the bombing of Yugoslavia ... but were tightened instead. The Yugoslav authorities could not buy the necessary equipment and parts from the EU countries with ... money for re-construction of war damage. The damage caused by NATO bombing alone is estimated at $30 billion."

That is not too bad, so there was a bit of exaggeration.

I referred to the bridge, but the town where the Zastava factory was has also been destroyed because we fired 21 cruise missiles at the factory. The only part of the factory with any military connections made fancy shooting guns, which are known worldwide. That was left standing, but the remainder of the factory—it made tractors and so on—was flattened and the whole area devastated.

The figures add up to a devastating impact on the daily lives of ordinary citizens, especially the elderly, the sick, children, refugees in particular and displaced people. At one of the camps I visited in Serbia, I met a woman from Bosnia who had been there for nine years and others from Krajina had been there since 1995-96. The irony was that there were also some moderate Albanians of whom the Kosovo Liberation Army had not approved because they had been in business with Serbs—they were frowned upon and not looked on as friends—so they had come out with the Serbs. The dire conditions for the Roma must be seen to be believed. The Committee should take on board what is happening to refugees in the heart of Europe.

Finally, what about the environmental clean-up? What are we going to do about the depleted uranium and the cluster bombs that still litter parts of Yugoslavia, particularly Kosovo? Incidents happen every couple of weeks because of the ordnance we dropped.

My message to the Government is that we want the facts about Yugoslavia. We do not want bland assurances now that we have moved on to another military operation and are obsessed with it. We must examine what is still needed in Yugoslavia and we really must get a grip on the criminality in Kosovo.

4.10 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): The right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) spoke of the mistakes that the international community has made over several years, following the break-up of the Tito empire in Yugoslavia. I agree that, with the benefit of hindsight, we can see that mistakes were made. However, as we debate the subject today, my overwhelming feeling is that the situation in the former Yugoslavia could have been much, much worse had not western countries intervened.

In Bosnia, ethnic violence, which was on an appalling scale, has been stopped. A few months ago, Macedonia looked in serious danger of disintegrating with the possible terrible consequences that we had already seen in Bosnia and Kosovo. That possibility has been arrested, and I speak highly of the personal contributions of the Secretary-General of NATO and the EU High Representative in achieving a degree of stabilisation there. Kosovo has just had elections and, against all the odds, there was Serbian participation in them.

As several hon. Members have said, just over a year ago, we saw the hugely brave and effective overturning of the Milosevic regime in former Yugoslavia and its replacement by a genuinely democratic Government. Last but by no means least, we now have Mr. Milosevic where he belongs: behind bars in The Hague, awaiting trial. All those things together form a striking testimony to the overall effectiveness and validity of the policy that the western countries have pursued including, I must say to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) the military interventions.

However, none of us can be remotely complacent. Huge areas of concern remain. I am sure that ethnic violence is festering, probably just below the surface. There is much obscurity about the political long term, especially for Bosnia and Kosovo. The commitment of the international community to that part of the world looks to be almost indefinite, which is not a pleasing prospect. Against that background, there is still much that needs to be done. There is a substantial unfinished agenda. I would like to highlight four areas of that unfinished business.

The first relates to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the ICTY. In its early stages, there was much writing down of the efficacy of the ICTY, but it has surpassed the original expectations for it. However, major figures who are the subject of allegations of, and indictments for, crimes against humanity are still at large. The most conspicuous are Karadzic and Mladic. I hope that the Minister can respond to the remarks of the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) about Carla del Ponte's public Speech saying that Mladic is being sheltered in the former Republic of Yugoslavia. That is a serious allegation, and one assumes that she would not have contemplated making it public without strong grounds for doing so.

Equally significant are Carla del Ponte's allegations about the authorities in Republika Srpska, including the one that they are harbouring Karadzic. Will the Minister say whether the British Government endorse her allegations? If they do, I hope that he can assure the Chamber that, bilaterally and through the international community, the Government will leave the authorities in Belgrade and in Republika Srpska in no doubt that it is wholly unacceptable to harbour those who, allegedly, have committed the major crime against humanity of genocide.

The second big area of unfinished business that I want to highlight is economic reconstruction, to which many hon. Members have already referred. Like other members of the Foreign Affairs Committee who visited the former Republic of Yugoslavia in February, I have an abiding visual memory of what is left of the huge road bridge high over the Danube at Novi Sad. Until its collapse on being hit by an American cruise missile, it must have been an extraordinarily graceful sight. Although a remarkable demonstration of the accuracy of such technology, it has also served as a reminder—as if we need any reminding—that what can be destroyed in moments costs a lot of money to rebuild. In the meantime, the destruction of that bridge has inflicted considerable economic damage on the civilian population, particularly as it bestrode a major transport artery.

Like the right hon. Member for Swansea, East, I am pleased to hear that American aid is being resumed, and that agreement has now been reached on clearance of the Danube. I hope that the Minister will say whether agreement to clear the river and make it navigable again has been accompanied by sufficient funding to enable that crucial bridge and others that cross the Danube at Novi Sad to be rebuilt. What is at stake is not merely the navigability of the Danube, but major arteries, both rail and road, that cross it in the former Republic of Yugoslavia.

Perhaps the Minister could also explain the extent of the present American Administration's willingness to engage in economic reconstruction of the former Republic of Yugoslavia. Several hon. Members have mentioned the scale of the sums involved. We can all recollect that both the Clinton Administration and the Bush Administration have said that the cost of reconstructing the former Republic of Yugoslavia after the Kosovo war is essentially a European matter, and that the United States should not be seen to be a major financial contributor.

Donald Anderson: My understanding of the balance between help from the EU and from America on the

[Donald Anderson]

Danube clearance project is that up to 85 per cent. of the funding comes from the EU and only 15 per cent. from other sources, which may include the US.

Sir John Stanley: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that information, and I hope that the Minister will provide further clarification.

The third area of unfinished business is the huge requirement for civilian government capacity building, most conspicuously in Bosnia and Kosovo. In both areas, the situation must be almost equivalent—on a reduced scale, but every bit as critical—to that in Germany post-1945, where to all intents and purposes the existing civilian administration had fallen away and new administrations had to be built up.

In both countries, there is a key need to strengthen the capacity for civilian administration to take over, and to do so without the side effects to which the hon. Member for Halifax referred. Police forces must carry out proper independent policing and not be seen as arm of an ethnic group, whether it be a minority or a majority. A proper system of central and local government administration and tax collection must be established. Those are huge tasks and there is no doubt that the international community will have to make a significant long-term contribution. I hope that the Minister will bring us up to date on what the Government are doing in that respect. Obviously the British Government are just one of many, but I have no doubt, given the quality of the police force and the standards set by the civil administration in this country, that we can make a significant contribution in helping Bosnia and Kosovo.

The final and ultimately most difficult aspect of unfinished business is what is to emerge as the long-term nation statehood of the area covered by the former Republic of Yugoslavia. The most problematic region is the rump comprising Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro. There is no question but that, beyond the territory of Serbia, the nation statehood of the former Republic of Yugoslavia to all intents and purposes barely exists. Only the most limited writ from Belgrade runs in Montenegro and no writ from Belgrade runs in Kosovo. Speaking bluntly, the Republic of Yugoslavia is substantially a fiction in the territorial area covered by Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro. It is almost completely a fiction in Montenegro and a total fiction in Kosovo. Although I can understand why it is in the interests of the international community to maintain the fiction for a time, that position will not be sustainable in the long term. It is always dangerous to base a foreign, or an economic, policy on a fiction. Reality will always break through, as it will here.

On Montenegro, the wording in the Committee's report is measured and objective. We set out the issues clearly and dispassionately and came to a unanimous conclusion. Paragraph 92 states:

> "Given that the Serbian and Yugoslav governments have said that they will accept a legal and peaceful unilateral declaration of independence by Montenegro, we recommend that the United Kingdom Government should be prepared to recognise Montenegro in the event that it has achieved its independence through a referendum which has been held freely and fairly."

The Government ducked the issue in their reply, saying:

> "The key point is that Montenegro and Serbia should talk about the future of their relationship. A creative way forward within a single state can be found. Not least in view of the deep division within Montenegro about the question of independence, exposed by the 22 April elections, the Government believes that our focus should be on trying to maintain and improve stability and practical co-operation between Serbia and Montenegro, rather than concentrating on hypothetical scenarios."

That got the FCO past the obstacle of replying to the Committee's report.

The Minister will be in no doubt that what he describes as a "hypothetical scenario" will almost certainly become a new feature of life in this part of the world within a matter of months. It appears certain that there will be a referendum on independence in Montenegro next year, and if that referendum comes out in favour of independence, it will be up to the British Government, and other Governments around the world, to make a decision on recognition. The Committee reached the unanimous view that recognition should be granted in those circumstances.

I recognise that the situation is more difficult in Kosovo. It is inconceivable that the Albanian majority would accept a return to sovereignty over their country by Belgrade, and the independence issue has greater potential than that in Montenegro to knock on to the situation in Macedonia. On that matter, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was prepared to go no further than this delphic reply to the Committee:

> "As required by UNSCR 1244, UNMIK stands ready to facilitate a consultation process on Kosovo's future status when all the parties, including Belgrade, are ready."

That is a reasonable holding position, but I should like the Minister to focus his attention on the long term, which is admittedly difficult to address. The stark and inescapable long-term choice that must ultimately be made is between granting Kosovo independence or the international community remaining as the ultimate civil and security administration in Kosovo for the foreseeable future. The prospect of Kosovo being an international, governmental and security responsibility for ever more is an unattractive possibility of doubtful sustainability. I accept that as far as Kosovo is concerned the Minister is unlikely to want to deviate from the FCO's response today.

During the many years since the break up of the former Yugoslavia, Tito's death and the rise to power of Milosevic, there has, properly and reasonably, been a difference of view in the House during successive Parliaments. In the past, a minority view has been reasonably expressed—the hon. Member for Halifax eloquently articulated it today. That view is that this is not an area for western military intervention and that, by implication, we can stand on the sidelines to a certain extent. That view has not been confined to Labour Members; members of my party have strongly articulated the view that we should not get involved in the Balkans and should leave it to its own devices.

However, the majority view is that there is the potential for a humanitarian disaster on an even greater scale than has occurred, and that is so compelling and pressing that we cannot stand aside. The majority view has also been that conspicuous circumstances in Bosnia, and later in Kosovo, have meant that western military intervention was the only possible means of stabilising the situation and preventing further bloodshed. I offer the Chamber a thought that will not be universally shared: the course of events during the past eight years has wholly vindicated the majority view that we should intervene and that, on occasion, we should do so militarily.

4.32 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I am glad to follow the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) because not everyone who now believes in military intervention, or any intervention, in the area of the former Yugoslavia has always felt that.

In December 1990, I saw the then Minister of State at the Foreign Office, the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), and told him what I thought would happen in Yugoslavia. I was told that the European Union, or any of the western countries, had no part to play in what was happening in Yugoslavia. That was four months before I received a letter from John Major who agreed that it was for the west, and particularly for our country, to uphold the international integrity of the territory of Yugoslavia. Of course, all that was forgotten when the Maastricht treaty came along and the Conservative Government wanted a quid pro quo to go along with Germany and recognise Croatia as an independent state.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) and his Committee on the comprehensive report. It is material that will be used by historians in years to come. I have some criticisms, however, which he no doubt expects. It is a pity that there is so little in the report about Bosnia-Herzegovina. The report refers to Yugoslavia and Government policy towards it since the fall of Milosevic. One myth that must be put to rest is that Milosevic fell because of NATO bombing, as was claimed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). That is not the case. Milosevic remained there until about 18 months after the bombing. The writing was on the wall for Milosevic not because of the bombing, but because of the local elections that took place in Yugoslavia two years earlier. There was some opposition by Milosevic, at first, to recognising the results of those elections.

A comparison, as is sometimes made, between Yugoslavia under Milosevic and a dictatorship along the lines of Hitler's or Mussolini's is, in my view, false. I have visited Yugoslavia many times—I have been in the country more than 40 times during my life. Elections took place when Milosevic was there, and his regime had a stranglehold on the media, but no more so than in Russia in 1996. According to *Time* magazine, the Americans were pouring in money to help Yeltsin, who received almost 100 per cent. support from the media, which was then Yeltsin-controlled. There was nothing particular about Yugoslavia to denote it as a regime like Hitler's Germany.

The report refers to the attitude of the Serbs towards the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague. I can well understand the views expressed. Paragraph 32 states:

> "Many Serbs view the ICTY as a one-sided attempt by the international community to punish Serbia as a nation for the crimes of individuals. The Serbian Unity Congress writes that 'it is a commonly held belief by Serbs in the homeland and diaspora that the Hague Tribunal is one-sided, biased and politically motivated in its alleged pursuit of justice'."

Misha Glenny confirmed that. As my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) said, paragraph 33 states:

> "The Tribunal's 'refusal to indict the late Croatian President Tudjman...and...to investigate NATO for the possible commission of war crimes' have been identified as two particular decisions which 'were bound to consolidate sentiments among the Serbs that this is not a fair court'. Tim Judah has quoted President Kostunica as saying that crimes committed against Serbs by Kosovo Albanian guerrillas are another category of war crime which 'have never been treated by the court and never would be treated by the court'."

Paragraph 36 points out:

> "Far more ethnic Serbs have been publicly indicted...than other ethnic groups. 78 per cent. of those publicly indicted have been ethnic Serbs. Of those publicly indicted...and still at large 96 per cent. are ethnic Serbs."

Paragraph 46 refers to the

> "former Croatian general Mirko Norac, who has been accused of the killing of ethnic Serbian civilians in the town of Gospic in Croatia."

He offered to hand himself over to the Croatian courts provided that they agreed not to hand him over to the ICTY in The Hague. Apparently, The Hague was complicit in that situation.

I do not regard the ICTY as not politically motivated. I only wish that the Americans would agree to the setting up of an international criminal court so that there is a proper international institution in future and decisions of international justice, such as these, do not have to be left to a politically motivated and biased tribunal.

There does not seem to be any real reference to the problems of the Serbs in Krajina. There was a large Serb minority in Croatia, including in the capital, Zagreb. They were ethnically cleansed, but we heard very little about that in the western media. We know that in Krajina crimes were committed against Serbs who were trying to get out of the country as quickly as possible to Serbia proper. We know that when, in 1995, the Croats occupied western Slavonia—that part of Croatia had a large Serb majority—they refused the international community any sight of what was happening there. However, Croatia got off fairly well scot free.

Then there is the question whether Milosevic was a problem or a solution. The way in which he was treated by the west during the 1990s is relevant. When the Vance-Owen peace plan was being advanced, together with a small, all-party group, I met Karadzic and I think we played a part in persuading him to sign the accord at Athens. As a start to negotiating the future of Bosnia, the Vance-Owen peace plan had something to be said for it. It was Milosevic who, with the encouragement of the west, went to the Bosnian Serb Parliament, but found that there were no takers. Karadzic could not carry the Bosnian Serbs with him.

The following day, the group of us who had seen Karadzic in Belgrade went to Bosanski Brod in the north of Bosnia, close to the border with Krajina, to try to persuade some Bosnian Serb politicians to accept the Vance-Owen peace plan. However, on that day, 2 May 1993, I saw something that I hope I will never see again. I was witness to the exhumation of bodies from a mass

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grave. Before we left—and they were still digging—there were more than 40 bodies of Serbs and some Muslims who had been murdered when the Croats occupied that part of northern Bosnia three to six months before. I will never forget it. I remember seeing a woman being exhumed. I could tell it was a woman only because she still had her blue skirt, with white spots, around her waist. When they tried to lift her up, very carefully, her head fell off. The smell; the flies; yes, I have seen the result of a war crime. But what happened? The media in this country did not want to know. The present Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid), who was with me, reported it to a Scottish newspaper and was asked, "Who were these people you are talking about?" He said, "These are Serbs, who were murdered by Croats." "Oh," he was told, "we can't print that." Why not? It would only confuse people.

That was part of the anti-Serb hysteria that we were supposed to go along with throughout the 1990s. Many Serbs wonder why the British should have taken part in bombing their territory. They are confused. Did not we, they say, fight on the same side in the first world war and the second world war? What about the Ustashi and the fascists in Croatia? Not all Croatians, of course, are fascists. Tito was a Croat. The fact is, the word "Ustashi" could be seen as graffiti on the walls of Bosanski Brod, written there by Croats when they had occupied the territory. The HDZ party, which controlled Croatia during the time of Tudjman—is the child of the Ustachi. I am pleased that it is no longer part of the Government, but it still exists and could be elected in future. The party has the same philosophy as those who supported fascism and Hitler during the second world war

Misha Glenny, whom I met in 1991 when the war was beginning, is mentioned a lot in the report. He is an expert on the Balkans and I am glad that the Committee listened to what he had to say. It is a pity that western Governments did not listen more closely to what he had to say during the early 1990s. I remember having a conversation with him sitting outside a cafe in Zagreb in August 1991, when Serb extremists had murdered 19 Croatian policemen in Osijek. Glenny told me that he was concerned about the activities of Vojslav Seslj, who has never been indicted as a war criminal and has certainly not been taken to The Hague. Seslj was responsible for the people who murdered those policemen.

Many of the war crimes committed in Bosnia on all sides—by Serbs, Croats and Muslims—were committed by groups that were not really controlled by the nominal powers in the territories. Seslj and Arkan, whom the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) mentioned, played a leading role in war crimes, particularly in the early part of the civil war.

Mrs. Mahon: People never mention Naser Oric. There is well documented evidence about that man and his gang's activities. He went around rural areas killing elderly and young Serbs. He now runs a bar in Tuzla. People know that and use it to illustrate the hypocrisy of the west.

Mr. Wareing: I thank my hon. Friend for that information. I am not surprised by it, because the west took a one-sided view of the situation. Those of us who wanted an even-handed approach were often looked on as pro-Milosevic. That was the sort of thing that was said about us. Nothing could be further from the truth. I was the first Labour MP to meet Milosevic in Belgrade in 1991 and attack him on the situation of the Albanians in Kosovo. That was long before some members of the present Government or the previous one had heard of Kosovo or knew where it was. I was tackling him then. Milosevic was used. He was used at Dayton as an instrument for bringing about the peace agreement. The western powers got him to assist them when it suited them.

The idea that the Dayton agreement will bring lasting stability to Bosnia is poppycock. The Committee's report mentions the events of March 2000. The Croats in Bosnia were appealing for independence. Bosnia is not a state or a nation, but a geographical expression. It consists of Serbs, Croats and Muslims, and even the Muslims are Serbs, because they are descendants of Serbs who converted to Islam during Turkish times. There is no such thing as a Bosnian. One can adopt that fiction, if one likes, but it is not likely to last. After the events in March 2000, the international high commissioner dismissed the members of the Croat leadership in Bosnia. He had taken similar action in the Republika Srpska a few years previously. There had been a democratic election, but the people elected an extreme nationalist so the international high commissioner got rid of their elected representative.

There is as much chance of Dayton bringing long and lasting stability to Bosnia as there was of the Congress of Berlin in 1878 bringing a long and lasting solution. We know what happened then. It is impossible to hold people down for ever. Bosnia and Kosovo are, in essence, NATO protectorates, but the day will come when sense prevails. The Republika Srpska will be allowed to join the rest of the former Yugoslavia, and something similar will happen with the Croats. That may take a few years, but we would be fools to think that the present arrangement is lasting. The report does not tell us how many times the collective Bosnian leadership has met since Dayton. It is supposed to be the supreme body in Bosnia, but what has it done? The answer to that question proves that it is unrealistic to expect the present situation to continue.

I shall say only a few words about Kosovo because other hon. Members have spoken comprehensively about it. The bombing of Kosovo and Yugoslavia was contrived through the Rambouillet ultimatum, which no one has mentioned. Appendix B to that so-called accord was no more than an ultimatum to Milosevic. No leader—whether or not he is a dictator—could agree to an ultimatum that allowed foreign troops simply to walk on to his country's soil, occupy its airports and sea ports, use its roads and to be completely in control. Appendix B provided the excuse for bombing Yugoslavia.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax referred to the ethnic cleansing of the Serbs in Kosovo, although there was ethnic cleansing all around. That could have been prevented had one part of the jigsaw—Russia—not been left out. The Russians should rightfully have been given a sector in Kosovo. If they had been, we would have had a better chance of preserving the Serb minority population. I do not know why Russia was left out. I am glad to say that there has been much greater closeness between ourselves and Russia since September 11. However, our actions in Kosovo did nothing to improve confidence and the relationship between our two important countries.

To conclude, I appreciate the report, which will be useful for years to come. Government policy towards Yugoslavia should consider ways and means to restore reality to that part of the world. The rights of Serbs to self-determination and their own state should be recognised as much as the rights of Croats. I agreed with some comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd). Self-determination has a limit but, given the geography of Yugoslavia, it is apparent that it would be possible to have one federal state of Serbs and one of Croats. Until those people attain their nationalist aspirations, there can be no stable or long-lasting peace in the Balkans.

4.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): This has been a good debate on a fine report. It was a great pleasure to take up my ministerial responsibilities and have a vade-mekum presented to me in my first red box. I invite the Select Committee to make similar reports on other parts of the world to help Ministers as they try to work their way through the maze of Government policy and choice. I say that not to flatter, but to express real appreciation for the quality and depth of the report.

There has always been a strong British connection to Yugoslavia. One of our historical advantages is that, unlike some of our European partners on the continent, we have not been especially parti pris in favour of one of the nations or communities in that country. We have not been pro-Serb or pro-Croat, and instead have enjoyed a rich relationship.

That is much reflected in our literature. One thinks of Manning and Rebecca West. I remember reading "Eastern Approaches" by Fitzroy Maclean as a boy. I seem to re-read it in almost every ambassador's residence in which I stay in the former Yugoslavia, to see what insights he had. Reference has rightly been made to the contributions of Misha Glenny, Tim Judah, Noel Malcolm, Anthony Lloyd and other British writers who have examined the problems of the area, sometimes from one perspective and sometimes from another. Such literature helps us to come to grips with the situation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) described Bosnia-Herzegovina as a geographical expression. That phrase was first put into international diplomatic history when Count Otto von Bismarck dismissed Italy as merely a geographical expression. We remember what happened to him, and Italy is now a good, solid nation state and community.

Mr. Wareing: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. MacShane: I would rather not.

Mr. Wareing: I merely want to point out that, not being German, I cannot become the German Chancellor.

Mr. MacShane: I shall refer to another German political leader, Peter Glotz, whom I heard address a conference in Montreal in 1988. He referred to a speech made by a Mr. Milosevic at a place called Kosovo Polje, in which he invoked Serb nationalism as the guiding force for his new Serbian politics. Dr. Glotz, then the general secretary of the German Social Democratic party, said that he had thought that he would never hear in Europe language that reminded him so much of the nationalist extremism that led to the disasters of the 1930s. I recall that I was with many trade union colleagues at the time, and we all said, "Miloso-who? Kosovo-where?" We did not understand the references, but Dr. Glotz, as a wise German politician and intellectual, understood the direction in which Yugoslavia was heading.

In 1990, all Yugoslav citizens were far richer than every Pole, Czech or Hungarian. They could travel freely without any visa limitations. The Danube carried $113 million worth of trade in 1990. By 1996, the Danube was carrying a bare $50 million worth of trade, and the other difficulties of the terror that we know about were already well in place. Let it not be said, however, that intervention by the international community caused the current problems. They were there from 1990 onwards.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson), the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, was right to say that there were real signs of hope. The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) was right, too, when he said that the situation would have been hugely worse without intervention. I can report to the House that this has been a good year for the Balkans. It has not been perfect and much remains to be done, but we now have democratically elected Governments throughout the region committed to the rule of law, international obligations and minority rights.

I shall lift the veil on what sometimes happens behind the closed doors of diplomatic gatherings. Last week, I was in Bucharest, and just before the ministerial conference at the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, while taking coffee in one of the anterooms, I saw Foreign Minister Svilanovic of Yugoslavia, Foreign Minister Picula of Croatia and the new Foreign Minister of Macedonia, Mr. Casule. They were talking in an intense huddle, and shared a common language and understanding. I was about to say hello to them when I realised that I was seeing what any democratic politician would have understood. That group of democratically elected men, who were representing their Governments, were trying to sort out their problems. That such a return to political normality

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should not have caused tension, passion and angry headlines is to be welcomed. That was reflected in the report.

It has been an important year for the three Rs of reconstruction, reconciliation and reform. Reconstruction is best symbolised by the rebuilding of the bridge at Novi Sad and the reopening of the Danube to commercial traffic on 29 November. The EU has contributed 85 per cent. of the funding for the Danube Commission, a total cost of about 26 million euros. I understand that there is a proposal to rebuild the Slovodon bridge at a cost of 22 million euros. It is not only the river that is being reopened, but the bridges that cross it.

Much of that arises from the brave decision of the people of Yugoslavia and Belgrade to abide by the obligations of the international commission at the Hague and surrender Mr. Milosevic to the international rule of law and justice. In passing, I ask right hon. and hon. Members to ease some of their criticism of the work of Mrs. del Ponte. She was a distinguished procurator-general of the Swiss confederation, who bravely tackled problems to do with political and financial corruption that touched on the sensitive area of Swiss banking secrecy. She had to deal with some rather entrenched establishments in her own country. She is a distinguished European jurist, and we should listen to what she has to say about her current job. I shall return to that matter in a moment.

The good news is that the crimes, the terror, the pain and the violence of the last decade of the previous century are, on the whole, behind us. The security situation is relative stable despite sporadic attacks on security forces in recent months. Attention has been drawn attention to threats by Albanian extremists with a wider political agenda, and we are aware of those. We must remain vigilant and tackle underlying problems in areas that contain extremism.

My first visit to the region as a Minister was to Pristina. I said on television, face to face with Albanian political leaders and in articles in the press, that Albanian extremism and the use of violence to achieve political ends was wholly unacceptable. I offered the analysis that the transfer of Milosevic from Belgrade had changed the international community's relationships, perceptions and willingness to deal with the Serbian authorities in Belgrade. I said that the time for any indulgence towards the Albanians was over as far as the British Government were concerned.

British troops are patrolling night and day on the Kosovo-Macedonia border. I wish that troops from other nations were as aggressive as ours and that they, too, operated 24 hours a day. However, Kosovo and other countries in the region need fewer troops and more police. The report made that point well. The OSCE's multi-ethnic police force is a key confidence-building measure.

The UK has played its part. I offered a mince pie and a cup of tea to retired police officers in my office on Tuesday. Our police officers retire when they are, in every sense, fighting fit for future duty. Today, they left for Pristina in a chartered plane and will spend their first Christmas there. They will add to the professionalism that we need in the streets, communities and towns of Kosovo to rebuild the police.

Mr. Lloyd: I shall pass over the fact that there was only one mince pie among all those people. The slow build-up of the civilian element has been criticised. It is crucial that civilian policing and support for it from outside the region are intensified to encourage the process of normalisation. Can the Minister give us any hope that other countries will recognise their obligations, as Britain has done?

Mr. MacShane: Yes, of course. It is perhaps easier to put together a military force. On the whole, soldiers do the same things in the same way. Police officers come from such different backgrounds and recognise such different norms of law that it is difficult to knit them together.

The four words that one does not here often enough in Kosovo and other parts of the region are "Here comes the judge." There is no robust independent judicial system and no adequate civilian policing system. Many hon. Members mentioned criminal elements, but we do not have enough jails to allow us to put them behind bars, which is where they belong. However, we are emptying prisons of people who should perhaps not be there. Since the beginning of the year, 1,800 out of 2,000 Kosovo Albanian prisoners have been released. According to the Serbian Ministry of Justice, 181 Albanian prisoners are in Serbian prisons on a range of criminal charges, and 34 cases are due for judicial review. I am pressing the Belgrade Government to complete the reviews swiftly, which was one of the report's recommendations. I raised that matter just last week with Foreign Minister Svilanovic during his visit to London on 29 November.

We have discussed independence for Montenegro, but I am not tempted to answer hypothetical questions. That may not satisfy right hon. and hon. Members who believe that Ministers should be able to see into the future, but I hope that they accept my reticence. Any formal suggestion of what the Government's response would be were certain situations to develop constitutes an intervention in that process.

Our concern is to preserve regional stability, which is why the Government and our EU partners are not ready to wave the flag for independence for any particular group or people. Under OSCE rules, we do not support the independence or separatist claims of nations that form part of states elsewhere in Europe. We must wait and see Montenegro's position, and from the discussions that I had in Bucharest with our OSCE partners, that is also the position of Russia, of the OSCE and of the Council of Europe's Venice commission.

Mr. Chidgey: Will the Minister tell us whether the Government would be prepared to accept the Serbian Government's decision on the results of a referendum in Montenegro?

Mr. MacShane: Mr. Solana visited the region at the end of last month, and he put forward a proposal to the federal Serbian and Montenegran authorities to organise discussions to find a way forward on this question. A point that I make continually, and my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) conveyed the same message when he held these responsibilities four years ago, is that the way out of the different imbroglios in Yugoslavia is fully to engage in Europe. The European road will help Yugoslavia to find peace and resolve its different conflicts.

There have been significant developments in Kosovo since the Committee's report was written, the most important of which were the peaceful, multi-ethnic elections on 17 November. For the first time ever, the people of Kosovo were able freely to elect a truly representative assembly. About 2,000 international observers—the British delegation was headed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who is Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence—attended, and they praised the excellent way in which the elections were conducted. I also pay tribute to the strong encouragement from Belgrade, from the Serbian authorities and from the Orthodox Church to Serbian citizens to participate in those elections. There was a 63 per cent. turnout, which included a 46 per cent. turnout by Serbian electors. I do not recall the turnout in right hon. and hon. Members' constituencies in June 2001, but the Serbs in Kosovo may have put one or two right hon. and hon. Members to shame by their participation in elections.

The new assembly will meet for the first time on 10 December. The seven members of the presidency of the assembly, which is essentially the executive committee, will include two Serbs and representatives of five other minority communities. The voice of the Serb community will be heard, and I hope that the political road will be chosen to effect reconciliation.

I accept that we must have greater security for the Serb population in Kosovo. I have seen British soldiers installing panic buttons in Serbian villagers' houses so that if the villagers feel threatened they can send out a signal and a British vehicle with soldiers in it will arrive quickly to give them the assurances that they need.

I have made it clear that any attack on Serbian cultural heritage in Kosovo—the cradle not of Serbian but of European cultural heritage—is wholly unacceptable, just as the burning of mosques was wholly unacceptable. As I have said, KFOR needs to act robustly to counter the flow of personnel and materal across the border from Kosovo to Macedonia. Thanks to the presence of German troops who are maintaining peace and security in Macedonia in the wake of the Lake Ohrid agreement, those operations will become more successful.

Macedonia is a worry for all who are concerned about peace and security in the region. The British Government and Lord Robertson, General Secretary of NATO, can take some credit. Chris Patten, Javier Solana, and Alain Le Roy, who replaced Francois Leotard, are working for the EU to maintain the international community's presence in Macedonia.

I should remark on the high quality of our diplomatic staff and ambassadors in the region. Reference has been made to evidence given to the Foreign Affairs Committee. Ten years ago, we had but one embassy in Yugoslavia; now, we have five fully fledged embassies and a mission in Kosovo. I have been very impressed by the hands-on quality of their work, their interventions in the community and their contribution to bringing stability to that troubled region of Europe.

As I have said, we need to implement fully the framework agreement that was signed at Lake Ohrid. The Macedonian Parliament has now endorsed it, and as I made clear to the Macedonian Foreign Minister, the time has come to stop seeking to rewrite bits and pieces of it, and to get on with building a peaceful community in Macedonia and accept the rights of Albanians in terms of language and administration of the country. Equally, I am happy to use the words terrorists and terror tactics. The behaviour of Albanian extremists who resort to violence is unacceptable, but should one counter it through policing or a heavy-handed military riposte that engenders more violence?

I do not want to stray into talking about other regions of the world, but we should not forget the following lines from a 1930s W. H. Auden poem:

> "I and the public know
> What all schoolchildren learn,
> Those to whom evil is done
> Do evil in return."

This Government are determined not to see history repeat itself, and that is why we are in the region. The west's policy in the early 1990s of non-intervention, hand-wringing and issuing press releases failed. That is why this and other countries that have Governments who are ready to take a lead and accept their international responsibilities can be proud.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) mentioned the question of ministerial oversight. I have tried to visit all the Balkan capitals, and I shall visit them again, although I have to combine such visits with trips to Asia, Latin America, China, Korea, Australia, New Zealand and about 20 agreeable islands in the Pacific. None the less, I accept that the Balkans, a region which has been visited more times than any other region in the world, is my primary responsibility. More than that, it has been a pleasure to see President Kostunica here, and it will be a pleasure to welcome President Mesic in two weeks.

There was discussion about Bosnia-Herzegovina, and a little over a month ago I was able to give dinner to Prime Ministers Ivanic, Behman and Lagumdjzia, representing the three communities that constitute Bosnia-Herzegovina. They are committed to making that state work. If my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby will forgive me, I shall go with their vision of their own country's future instead of his more gloomy animadversions dating back to the congress of Berlin.

We have a strong British presence in Bosnia-Herzegovina, including 18,000 troops in Bosnia, 3,500 troops in Kosovo, and administrators and colleagues from the Department for International Development, the British Council and non-governmental organisations. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) and my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Mr. Roy), who went to Macedonia at my invitation in September. They went quietly and behind the scenes with no publicity to talk to Macedonian parliamentarians as fellow parliamentarians, and to urge acceptance of the Lake Ohrid agreement. I am determined that those contacts between parliamentarians and others will be sustained.

[Mr. MacShane]

We are looking forward to the role that Lord Ashdown may play in the region. We have all listened to his speeches over the years. He must often have felt like Cassandra standing to discuss in detail the complexities of the region as the House emptied, but I suspect that in his analyses and warnings he was right more often than he was wrong. We are delighted that he has the support of EU countries to become the High Representative in Bosnia later this year.

I turn briefly to the question of economic aid, to which a number of hon. Members referred. It is the key to moving the entire region out of its current difficulties. Economic sanctions were lifted after Milosevic was transferred to The Hague, but I shall look into the question of landing rights for JAT—the Yugoslav airline—and reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), although landing rights at London airport seem to cause a great deal of trouble for more than just the Yugoslav airline.

I have encouraged and continue to encourage business investment in the region, but we must have the right economic conditions. There is far too much economic activity there that no normal democratic market economy would recognise. The Foreign Affairs Committee reported that state firms were privatised and transferred to cronies of Mr. Milosevic and there is a huge amount of criminal activity, particularly involving cigarette production and smuggling, which is politically linked. It would be helpful if hon. Members, in addition to naming war criminals who should be at The Hague, would say loudly and clearly that politics and direct economic business activity, particularly in the area of cigarette production and smuggling, is unacceptable. The Balkans are the through route for drug smuggling, cigarette smuggling, arms smuggling and money laundering. I suspect that all of us know asylum seekers or economic refugees in our constituencies who have come through that route. That is why we need effective stability in the region, and the fullest co-operation with The Hague tribunal.

It is completely unacceptable that Messrs Karadzic and Mladic are not in The Hague. People know where they are. People know where they are. I have no evidence of where they are, but their friends, families, colleagues and contacts must. I am not going to make accusations about governments harbouring and sheltering them, but I think that Mrs. del Ponte made a fair point. As I made that point to the president of Croatia when I was there two weeks' ago, that it also goes for General Gotovina. He is a Hague indictee and he belongs in The Hague. I was told, "He started life in the French foreign legion. You know what these legionaries are like, you seek them here, you seek them there, but gosh, they can hide inside a desert dune." I said, "I'm sorry, Croatia is not the caves of the Hindu Kush or around Khandahar; he is living in a house, he is being fed and watered and he is seeing his family and his friends." This Government or governments of other international communities will not fully normalise relations until there is closure, and the indictees are in front of The Hague. The quicker that they are in front of The Hague, the quicker we can seal that part of the history.

Mrs. Mahon: I take it from what the Minister is saying that he will be following up Interpol reports into organised crime and the links with terrorism in Kosovo. They contain a great deal of information. We should be seen as being even handed if we want people to go to The Hague.

Mr. MacShane: In every intervention, I refer to the need to fight organised crime and the links between political forces and groups, yes, even elected politicians, and crime in every part—in Croatia, in Serbia, in Kosovo and in Macedonia. That is what I have been saying since I have been a Minister. Money, which is what that region needs more than anything else, is a coward. Money goes where it feels safe, where it feels that there is some security. As there is not yet acceptance of the need to, in effect, put into operation the recommendations of the Foreign Affairs Committee in co-operation with The Hague tribunal, much of the money that I believe could go into the region, does not arrive there.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk talked about the importance of the free media. I visited a B92 radio and television station, and I am examining ways of expanding support for free media in former Yugoslavia. Perhaps, having been a former president of the National Union of Journalists, I am indulging something that I believe to be important.

My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central asked me about Bosnia. I hope that I have given a suitable reply about the need to define a road map for the region. A road map for the region is very simple, it is called Europe. If there is engagement with European norms, we can find a solution. The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) asked about Yugoslavia's debt. It is $12.2 billion. I hope that I answered his question about the investigation of war crimes on both sides. I will write to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax about the question of the Yugoslav air force. The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling talked about Karadzic and Mladic, and I could not agree with him more. I will say it publicly and privately and face to face, at state dinners, in informal meetings, in Lancaster house, or in ministries in Zagreb, Macedonia and Belgrade—we need those gentleman and Croatian indictees in front of The Hague. I hope, in one of my future visits, to be able symbolically to paddle a canoe down the Danube, and perhaps cross one of the new bridges that the international community is helping to build.

The story is good. I think that Britain can take some credit in bringing peace and hope to this corner of Europe. I am grateful to the Foreign Affairs Committee's for its thorough report. I look forward to more reports on regions for which I have some responsibility, and I look forward to a continuing dialogue, collectively in this sort of forum, or individually with its members, whose comments, experience and contributions I value highly.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 11 December 2001

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

The Great Lakes

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

9.30 am

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): The issues relating to the region around the Great Lakes are incredibly important. A humanitarian catastrophe continues to unfold there, as it has for at least the past 10 years. In that region, it is difficult to draw the line between the end of one conflict and the beginning of another.

To put the debate into perspective, I shall explain some recent background. It is impossible to understand the conflict without considering the region as a whole. The present conflict in the Great Lakes began in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and dates back to 1998, since when 2.5 million people have died in it. That figure is staggering, but the fact that we rarely hear anything said about it is even more staggering. I am thus especially grateful to those hon. Members who have given their time and made the effort to be here this morning.

The war in the Congo is Africa's most complex war. It has been described as Africa's first world war and has dragged six foreign armies into the country. One of the biggest problems is the wealth of the Congo, which some people argue not only sustains but actively perpetuates the war. The recent history of the region shows the interplay between Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC. It is clear that the current conflict in the Congo stems from the wave of violence unleashed by the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

We need to consider how British policy has changed and could perhaps change further in the future. In 1994, when the genocide in Rwanda occurred, the British ambassador to the United Nations cautioned against using the word "genocide". He rightly pointed out that if we used that word, we might be liable under our international treaty obligations to do something. As we all know, we did nothing. The international community did nothing until it was far too late.

I am still haunted by the genocide site in Rwanda that I visited with two of my colleagues from the Select Committee on International Development who are here this morning. What haunted me most was not the 5,000 or 10,000 corpses that we saw and stepped over in the school into which people had been herded and murdered over a 36-hour period, but the fact that many of the children's bodies had only one foot. Several of us could not understand why those small children had only one foot. When we asked, we were told that when the adults were escaping, the militia cut off one of each child's feet to stop them escaping. They killed the parents and then came back to finish off the children.

The vision of that classroom full of children with only one foot writhing around on the floor has never left me. That was one of the reasons why I set up the all-party group on the Great Lakes. I am extremely grateful that more than 100 Members of Parliament have joined it.

The second thing that has always haunted me was that in those classrooms the only sign of the international community was some plastic sheeting placed over the open windows on which was printed the UN logo. When I said to someone that that looked very strange—as though all that the UN did was to put up curtains after the genocide—they said, "Yes, that is basically what happened." Is not that an allegory for our modern times? The UN is doing the window dressing.

All of us who take an interest in the region—and even all those who take no interest in it—realise, post-11 September, that window dressing in areas of disaster, conflict and genocide will eventually return to haunt us. I am not saying that the conflict and the humanitarian disaster in the Great Lakes region—however tragic and all-consuming they are—will burst into our consciousness as the attacks in New York and Washington have done. That will not happen right now, but if we do not do something about the Great Lakes in particular and Africa in general, there is no doubt that, at some point, we shall pay the price for indifference that leaves millions of people to starve or be killed. Some of them are killed in the most brutal of ways, as I described. The deaths of others are equally brutal, but not so televisual: starving to death does not trigger many peacekeeping forces. It has not done so in the past.

We hope that that might change in the future, given what is happening in Afghanistan. I very much hope that as we consider the situation in the Great Lakes region, we might see there the germs of what has happened in other parts of world, so instead of waiting for a disaster—although some might argue that one has already happened—we might try to pre-empt it.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Is not what my hon. Friend is saying exactly the message that the Prime Minister was giving in a tremendous speech to the Labour party conference in October? He pledged not to allow a Rwanda to occur again and to heal the scars of Africa. That shows a new way forward for the Government.

Ms King: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I see consternation on the faces of some Opposition Members, but I hope that we can agree with the Prime Minister's words, wherever we are on the political spectrum. I cannot imagine that anyone could say that we would not take action if a Rwanda were to happen again and 1 million people were butchered. I know for a fact that at least three of the four Opposition Members present agree with those sentiments. Indeed, they have agreed with them.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I had not planned on intervening in the debate, because I think that everyone will agree with the hon. Lady's sentiments. Opposition Members may, however, disagree with the political slant of some of the comments. As hon. Members may recall, the Prime Minister made a rather all-encompassing conference speech that included justifying early euro

[Mr. Andrew Robathan]

entry on the basis of the 11 September attacks. Perhaps that is why there were looks of disagreement on Opposition Members' faces.

Ms King: I am sure that I would be ruled out of order were I to outline the merits of early euro membership or link such membership to Britain's national security. Although I am certain that there is such a case, I shall leave it for another time.

I was trying to explain some of the background to the crisis in the Great Lakes region. Part of the background is elaborated in a truly startling and inspirational book, which I recommend that everyone read, entitled "King Leopold's Ghost". Although it traces the history of the Congo and the Great Lakes region back a couple of hundred years, it deals particularly with the 19th century. It is instructive to examine events in the Great Lakes region from 1870 until independence in the early 1960s.

I am not one of those black people who gets up and gives a speech on colonialism every five minutes regardless of the subject, and I think that my colleagues who know me will defend me on that point. However, I think that all the Select Committee members were truly startled by the extent to which the colonial era in that part of Africa has conditioned almost all subsequent events there. I shall give an example.

When the genocide began in Rwanda, everyone said, "These bloody Africans are hacking each other to death. It is a tribal conflict. It is what Africans do." I was astonished to discover that the Belgians had introduced a law that was essentially like apartheid in South Africa and made it illegal for Rwandans not to declare that they were either Hutu or Tutsi, thereby creating an ethnic construct. What do the terms Hutu and Tutsi mean? "Tutsi" simply means that one has cattle, and "Hutu" that one is an agricultural labourer working the land. Originally, the terms were not ethnic or tribal distinctions.

In that society, working with cattle was more highly valued than working the land. Those who had cattle had assets. Consequently, the Tutsis, who comprised only 15 per cent. of the population, became the more powerful group, and the Hutus, who comprised the majority and worked the land, became the less powerful. It is essentially a class structure, but the colonial power of the time found it useful to play one group off against the other, and so made it illegal for those Africans not to belong to one group or the other.

I asked some Rwandans whether they were Hutu or Tutsi. Although we may talk about political correctness in this country, in a country where a genocide has occurred, it is a deeply impolitic question. However, one Rwandan tried to explain to me that it was not really possible to answer the question. He said that his family were neither Hutu nor Tutsi as they neither had cattle nor worked the land. He said that their society was not that simplistic and that everyone could not be divided into a group that owned cattle or worked the land. However, he also said, "The Belgians just gave us a stamp on our identity card and we became an ethnic group." The distinction was, literally and figuratively, a political construct. What does that mean for us today?

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way in her fascinating speech. Will she not, however, give credit to Paul Kagame, the Rwandan leader? On taking control, he ensured that both groups were included in his Government. He also ensured that there was no reference to the two different groups in official literature. Whatever his faults, he has made great strides in that direction.

Ms King: I thank my hon. Friend—I call her that deliberately—for that intervention and could not agree more with those sentiments. President Kagame has lately come in for no little criticism. Although I certainly have some differences in respect of how the Rwandan Government are pursuing their legitimate desire to protect Rwanda's security, I believe that Paul Kagame is one of the leading inspirations in African politics. Although my greatest fear in making such a statement is that my words will come back to haunt me, if there was ever a man with integrity whom I trust not to make those words haunt me, it is President Kagame. The Select Committee and I—I have met him on several occasions—have been impressed by his dignity, resilience and thoughtfulness.

How has the Hutu-Tutsi divide affected the continuing conflict? The current conflict, dating from 1998, was unleashed by the wave of violence that followed the genocide. People in that region of Africa, which extends from eastern Congo to Rwanda and Burundi, have been on a dreadful, hellish merry-go-round whereby waves of internally displaced people are pushed from one country to the next. Such displacement occurred even before independence in the 1960s, when the first massacres occurred and Tutsis were displaced from, for example, Rwanda. Subsequently, some of them went to the Congo and Uganda, after which they returned to their own country and themselves displaced the genocidal regime. The Banyamulenge are a group of Rwandans who have been living in the Congo for hundreds of years.

Select Committee Members who visited the Congo this summer made one fascinating discovery. In 1994, Rwandans fleeing genocide arrived in the eastern DRC and helped to push the local economy past the point of no return. The economy was desperately stretched: all the remaining cattle, for example, were sold off and people were left with no means of survival. Tutsis went from one impoverished country to another to flee genocide, with catastrophic results.

Subsequently, relations between the Rwandan and Congolese Governments have deteriorated. As many hon. Members will be aware, President Kagame was initially an ally of the elder President Kabila, who turned out to be far less reliable than had been hoped and did not measure up to expectations in the west. He grievously disappointed his Rwandan and Ugandan allies, because the activities of those who committed the genocide continued in eastern DRC. The Rwandan Government continued to face attack from those who had committed the genocide and were committed to finishing it.

The all-party group's rather controversial view is that the Rwandan Government were justified in sending troops to the DRC when Interahamwe activity and that of the genocidiaires in eastern Congo was blatantly threatening Rwandan security; it continues, on occasion, to threaten it.

Then President Kabila died, and he was followed by his son, Joseph. Although many people have said that it is far too early to tell how the younger President Kabila will turn out, in my view he represents a far better hope than we had previously. I have met him twice and have been immensely impressed with his grasp of many issues, and not just those pertaining to his own region. However, the fact remains that the views of the Rwandan and Congolese Governments are light years apart.

I fully understand Rwanda's grievance—1 million Rwandans have been murdered, most of them Tutsi. Those who were responsible sought refuge in the DRC, whose Government are incapable of stopping, or unwilling to stop, their activity. The Rwandan Government therefore said that they would do it instead. I think that our Government would have done the same. Any Government who had the capacity would have done what the Rwandan Government did.

I also understand the DRC Government's point of view. They believe that they are being occupied by an invading force—the Rwandans and Ugandans—that has been in the DRC for more than three years. The DRC Government believe that if Rwanda wanted to neutralise the threat that exists, it could. That is debatable, but it is their view. They strongly believe that the Rwandans are using the threat as a pretext for mineral exploitation, and we have to consider the grave pillage of resources in the Congo.

Mr. Robathan: I spent more time abroad with the hon. Lady during the summer than I did with my wife. I found the trip to the Congo both fascinating and depressing.

The hon. Lady refers to the DRC Government, who are legally recognised. The Kabila Government have no more legitimacy than Onusumba in Goma or Bemba in the north-east. Does she agree that the three sides are not only equally illegitimate, but equally responsible for the pillage of the country and for its problems?

Ms King: It is true that in the Great Lakes region as a whole, particularly in the areas to which the hon. Gentleman referred, there is not the democratic accountability that we wish to see. In my view, there has been a failure of politics and politicians. I remember the president of the RCD, Mr. Onusumba, saying that the politicians had failed. We might think that we make a pig's ear of things in this country, but we rarely have to shoulder the burden that exists there. Until the three regions have some democratic accountability, the situation will not be resolved. That is why so much hope is pinned on the inter-Congolese dialogue, which is charged with bringing some democratic accountability, however tenuous, to the region.

The DRC Government believe that Rwanda and Uganda must withdraw before peace can be achieved. That is the nub of the problem with the Lusaka peace process. It is a bit like decommissioning in Northern Ireland. The Rwandans say that they will not leave until their security is assured and they know that the people who started the genocide will not be able to finish it. They say that the Congolese Government are aiding, abetting and even continuing to arm the Interahamwe militia. The Congolese Government say, "You have invaded our country and until you leave, there will be no peace. In the meantime, you are raping and pillaging our country."

The questions of how to deal with the Interahamwe and the UN's role in that are of great importance. The all-party group that visited the Congo felt that it would be useful if the British Government could push for an expansion of personnel and resources available to MONUC, the United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A reply—I hesitate to use the term "the standard reply"—would be that MONUC's mandate is to keep the warring factions apart, which it is able to do at present. However, the Lusaka agreement says that MONUC's role is to deal with the Interahamwe. It is MONUC's responsibility to track down and disarm the groups that threaten to continue destabilising the region and to pour oil on troubled waters. The contradiction between MONUC's mandate and the aspirations for it in the Lusaka agreement remains unresolved.

Let me put this in the context of an area with which we are more familiar—Kosovo. Had we decided to put the same ratio of troops to land density in the DRC as we did in Kosovo, it would have required 10 million UN peacekeepers. That would be absurd, but it is the truth. No one is asking for 10 million UN peacekeepers, not least because the harsh facts of realpolitik are that Kosovo will always receive more attention, time and resources than the Congo. That may or may not be fair, but it is a fact. We are not asking for 10 million UN peacekeepers, but for a more realistic UN force than the current proposed deployment of 5,000. Ten million is not a realistic or helpful figure, but nor is 5,000 for a country the size of western Europe.

The all-party group also believes that a credible study should be carried out into the threat posed by the armed groups, especially the Interahamwe, that operate in the DRC. We would like the UN to put an embargo on arms exports in the region and the troops to be demobilised and resettled more quickly. It is important to highlight how much the British Government have done so far on the issue of demobilisation and resettlement, which is known as DDRRR in the Great Lakes lingo. I will not hazard a guess at filling in those initials, but the process involves demobilising soldiers who will otherwise have an interest in perpetuating armed conflict if for no other reason than that they have no other way to eat and earn a living.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Does the hon. Lady agree that anyone interested in following this issue in detail could apply to the all-party group at the House of Commons for a copy of the useful booklet that covers the visit, which includes a glossary of the abbreviations, a map and all sorts of other useful information? A fair number of people who follow the debate will be interested in that report, and I hope that they will feel able to apply for a copy.

Ms King: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his exceptionally helpful remarks. As someone who is

[Ms King]

allergic to acronyms, I certainly recommend appendix 5, on acronyms and names, of the all-party group's report. He guides me to the back of my own report, where I find the phrase, "disarmament, demobilisation, resettlement and reintegration", although an R remains missing—I think that it might stand for reinsertion, or something like that.

The continued activity of armed groups in the region can be linked to mineral exploitation, and it is inevitably in those groups' interests for the conflict to continue. The report sets out the alleged links between the various military groups and the region's mineral resources. As someone who has the greatest sympathy and respect for the Rwandan Government and, in particular, for individuals in that Government whom I regard as my friends, I have been disturbed by many of the reports that I have heard and many of the things that I have seen with my own eyes in the Congo.

Those activities were alleged to have happened at the behest of the Rwandan military. Unfortunately, I am not one of those people who can just pretend that I did not see or hear something happen. I did, and so did other Members of Parliament. We all have slightly different views on the matter. Some of us are more sympathetic towards the Congolese; others are more sympathetic towards the Rwandans, but we are all sympathetic towards what we perceive to be the truth. The truth of the matter is that the Congo is being raped and pillaged and that local people are not benefiting from the resources that are being taken out of their area. That is fuelling the war that is displacing those people, causing so much misery in that area.

My plea is that the British Government should be sensitive to the feelings of the people in eastern DRC, as we have been rightly sensitive to the appalling distress in Rwanda—words genuinely escape me, because it is impossible to express what happened there. We are sensitive to those events, and we have to be sensitive to the fact that virtually all the ordinary Congolese people to whom we spoke and even the ordinary representatives of the RCD—the eastern DRC group that is linked to Rwanda—told us that Rwandan soldiers were involved in removing resources from that area and also in many very unpleasant things that are being done to the civilian population there. We heard that again and again, and I cannot pretend that it was not so, but many people are displeased with me for saying that.

As I have said before, I have immense respect for President Paul Kagame, and I genuinely believe that he would not sanction all that is being done in the name of the Rwandan army, but he would say that those things are not happening. I have had many conversations with the Rwandan ambassador to this country, for whom I also have great respect, and she has pleaded with me to consider the Rwandan point of view. For example, has any hon. Member heard of coltan?

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Yes.

Ms King: Even if hon. Members had not heard of coltan, everyone reading the report of this debate will have pressed it close to their ear because it is needed to make mobile phones, as well as Gameboys and Playstations. That is an astonishing glimpse of globalisation in our times. Most people would tell me that nothing links the inner reaches of the Congo to Whitechapel, for example, in my constituency, yet all those teenagers in Tower Hamlets playing on their Gameboys are linked to that region, where people are forced to mine coltan in an incredibly exploitative manner.

The local economy has been severely destabilised because coltan is a volatile commodity. A tonne of it fetched $70 last year but it fetches only 50 cents this year. Hon. Members can imagine all that that implies. I hope that other hon. Members want to speak in this debate.

Mr. Duncan: Perhaps I can take that hint and discourage the hon. Lady. In no way do I wish to be rude, but she has taken up almost half the entire time allotted to the debate, and other hon. Members want to speak. So far, I detect no disagreement across this Chamber, but we would like a chance to make a small contribution.

Ms King: I thank the hon. Gentleman sincerely. It was whispered in my ear that I might be the only Member who wished to speak and therefore that I would have to talk at length. I should like to conclude by relaying the remarks of a 16-year-old.

Peter Bottomley: It is worth mentioning the efforts of ex-President Masire of Botswana in the inter-Congolese dialogue, so that the Minister can have time to think about them. The report shows that £43,000 has been provided and the Members of Parliament on the trip recommended doubling that figure. I am not certain whether anything less than a significant increase might be useful if those talks are to help to produce a working understanding between the groups.

Ms King: I thank the hon. Gentleman. The Government have already more than doubled the money for the facilitator, and I am sure that the Minister will outline exactly what they have done.

On the visit, I met a 16-year-old called Baraka and his story outlines the complexity of the problems involved. He told me:

> "I left Rwanda in 1994. My family were moderate Hutus, but they were sympathising with the Tutsis. My aunt was a Tutsi, so we hid my aunt's family. I fled to DRC with my parents, but they died after we arrived. The Red Cross registered me and I went back to Rwanda. From an orphanage in Rwanda I was taken to Gisenyi. A member of my family was there but they chased me away, because they didn't want to look after me. So after that I went back to . . . DRC. One time I was in the market selling potatoes and the military . . . came and kidnapped me, they conscripted me. They took me to their military position, but I escaped. After that I was taken back to Rwanda, but the border-guards wouldn't let me enter because I have no family there anymore who will take me. Now I am back in DRC, but they don't want me here either. I ask you to find me a country of exile where I can live. That's all."

That is his request to us as politicians. I hope that we may be able to do something.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. David Amess (in the Chair): Order. I hope that the wind-ups will begin at 10.30. I would like to call all those hon. Members who wish to speak but it may be difficult now.

10.12 am

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) on securing the debate and on being the driving force in the House of Commons in bringing to public attention issues that are vital to those in central Africa. The so-called civilised western world has not been good at helping people in the DRC—formerly Zaire—to have disagreements over politics or to argue about the economy without the threat of death. The hon. Lady deserves credit for that, together with the aid agencies who facilitated the trip in August and the colleagues who accompanied her.

My contribution will be brief, both because I have to attend a Select Committee meeting and because of your remarks, Mr. Amess. However, no one minds the length at which the hon. Lady has spoken, because this important issue is not often a subject of debate. I was part of an all-party group visit to El Salvador, a far smaller country, some years ago and I know that progress is possible if people and their neighbours have the chance to work out their disagreements together instead of going into exile or taking up guns.

The hon. Lady rightly talked about the commercial interests that are helping to fund the different groups, and that will not stop instantly. In other parts of Africa, similar conflicts are continuing long past their sell-by date. There are some fashionable issues that get attention—rightly—but the unfashionable ones matter just as much. People from the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi who come to this country probably get much support and invigoration from people in Government and in Parliament being willing to listen to them, talk with them and maintain a continuing interest. People sometimes wonder whether all-party groups have a purpose, but they need only read the hon. Lady's report and they will understand why hon. Members choose to give some of their time to the interests of people overseas as well as those of their constituents.

10.14 am

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I wish to address the case of the smallest country in the Great Lakes region, Burundi. It is not the size of western Europe, but more the size of Wales, with 6.5 million people. My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) will recall the trip that we made to Burundi with Unicef in 1998 and some of the remarkable people we met; people who work in the most difficult circumstances, in a civil war, in a country teetering on the brink of the sort of genocide that has been seen in Rwanda. In particular, she will recall our friend Luis Zuniga, the head of Unicef in Burundi, who was tragically murdered in the most appalling circumstances while visiting an internally displaced persons camp. He was doing his job and trying to protect children.

Burundi is beautiful though impoverished. It is a densely populated and extremely dangerous country which has been involved in civil war for some eight years. Now the war is over, and it is a remarkable tribute to Nelson Mandela that, after all that he has endured and achieved in his life, he has been able to help broker the peace deal that is beginning to operate in Burundi. The situation is fragile. The transitional Government has been in place since 1 November with President Buyoya serving with Vice-President Ndatzetse, but due to hand over to a Hutu president in 18 months.

There is much more work to do to ensure that the peace agreement holds. We need to see the integration of armed forces from rebel groups into the Burundian army and continued efforts must be made to end the fighting that has continued in some areas. We need a comprehensive military and political agreement with the FDD and the other excluded armed movements that are still operating. We must support the efforts of UN special representative Berhanu Dinka and the implementation and monitoring committee to uphold the peace deal. We need to help that poor country, which is founded on subsistence agriculture—it has none of the mineral wealth of the DRC—and the export of coffee; whose vital infrastructure has been set back and undermined by war; and which has 1 million refugees outside its border and many hundreds of thousands of displaced people within. This country should respond to Nelson Mandela's call to double the $440 million of aid promised once the transitional power-sharing Government were installed. We should seize the moment to take the vital step of changing from humanitarian assistance to development aid.

Burundi is a small country in the middle of Africa, and a former Belgian colony. We might question its significance to our country, but we should recognise the integrated problems of all the Great Lakes countries and recall the statement to the Labour party conference that we need to do far more to heal the scars of Africa. This is a crucial moment for Burundi and perhaps for the Great Lakes area. I am sorry that I cannot stay past 10.30, because I have to attend a Standing Committee. I have offered my apologies to the Chair and I look forward to reading the report of the speech by my hon. Friend the Minister, which I hope will be positive.

10.19 am

Ann McKechin (Glasgow, Maryhill): As has been mentioned by my hon. Friends, the scale of death and human misery that has befallen the Great Lakes area is staggering and horrifying. Regretfully, we see no anti-war protest marches filled with indignant demonstrators outside Westminster, nor do we read angry letters in the press. Instead we have heard the deafening sound of silence and indifference to the ongoing misery from the international community in the past few years. My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) mentioned the complex and baffling history and politics of the region, but they should not deter us from seeking peace and justice in the area and giving it the global priority that it undoubtedly deserves.

Last month, I was fortunate to be on the visit of the all-party group to Brussels and to the Belgian and European Union Parliaments. Clearly, the EU has a lead role to play in the international community, but there are differences of opinion between the Dutch and the United Kingdom, who tend to be seen as supporting the Rwandan Government, and the Belgian and French Governments who tend to be seen as supporting the DRC. If a growing inertia develops because the EU cannot develop a unified approach, a danger might creep in and affect the efforts to secure peace in the region.

[Ann McKechin]

As has been said, it is valid to argue that both sides have infringed the Lusaka agreement. The ceasefire has been violated in the east of the DRC, but it is the exploitation of the area's mineral wealth that gives me particular cause for concern. The size of the international peacekeeping forces is tiny in relation to the physical geography of the area and, while there is continuing conflict, the prospects of improving the lives of the ordinary people will be severely hindered. I strongly urge the Government to support an expansion of the international peacekeeping forces to ensure that the disarmament of armed groups can be accelerated and stability restored.

It is a sad irony that the Congo has more than 8 per cent. of the world's diamond reserves as well as plentiful supplies of other precious metals while the population suffers from widespread destitution. It is conservatively estimated that at least 18.5 million people in the area have no access to even basic health care and, in the eastern areas of the DRC, the infant mortality has reached the ghastly and horrifying figure of 41 per cent.

There is evidence of mineral exploitation by the Ugandan, Zimbabwean and Rwandan forces, with large sums of money flowing through those countries. Last year, Uganda made nearly as much money from gold exports as from coffee, despite it having hardly any reserves at home. Similarly Rwanda produced 83 tonnes of coltan but exported 603 tonnes. Although those figures strictly relate to sales rather than to production, the implication is clear. Such plunder must be actively discouraged to end the suffering that has escalated in areas of the DRC. Only when there is no market for these illegally obtained resources will there be a real incentive to end the civil war.

The United Nations has set up a certification scheme for diamonds and I understand that 32 countries have endorsed it. However, it requires strengthening and, in particular, legal sanctions are needed. I urge the United Kingdom Government and the EU to develop urgently concrete measures to counter the exploitation of the mineral reserves.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) pointed out, the Prime Minister commented earlier this year that the international community has failed the people of the Great Lakes for a long time. Now there is an opportunity to find peace and to restore basic human dignity. Just as in Afghanistan, we need to commit ourselves to staying the course and providing these long-suffering people with a permanent undertaking to help them to rebuild their lives and their country.

10.23 am

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) on securing this debate. She gave a fascinating and informative speech, although it was a trifle long.

I joined the hon. Lady in a Select Committee visit to the Great Lakes region but I was unfortunately unable to go on the one last August because of family problems. She told us graphically that more than 2 million people have already died in the region as a result of the conflict and we heard of the genocide that took place there. We know that more than 30 per cent. of the children suffer from malnutrition and that there are 10,000 child soldiers.

I am a mother and a grandmother and one of the things that always slightly depresses me is people's perception that Africa is used to such problems and the view that there are always many deaths there because Africans are always killing each other. However, do people not realise that every mother, grandmother and father in Africa cares just as deeply about their family and their children as we do? That must be said, and John Donne put it succinctly many hundreds of years ago when he wrote that

> "any man's death diminishes me . . . never send to know for whom the bell tolls".

I shall refer to the bell tolling at the end of my speech, but it is important that we understand that each of the African children who die in their hundreds and thousands on a weekly basis is someone's little child who is loved. It is important that we keep telling the world that.

Some progress has been made. I understand that agreement was reached only last weekend to establish inter-Congolese talks, but I ask the Minister to deal with the question of funding. Someone once said sarcastically to me that those involved in the negotiations want extra funding so that they can stay in five-star hotels. However, what western diplomat, Minister or Secretary of State would not stay in a five-star hotel when they go to an international conference? Let us not use that argument as an excuse for not providing proper funding. The area needs huge funding and help with representation, and the same applies to the Sudan, which the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) and I know very well. More effort and more money needs to be put into the talks that are trying to resolve such crises.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned development aid. Can we get away from the notion that, if there is conflict in an area, development aid must never be provided? We have to get away from that view, because generations are growing up in Africa without receiving any basic education. That applies not just to 30 or 40 per cent. of the population, but to the entire population of the Sudan and much of the Great Lakes region. Although the countries may be in conflict, there are pockets of peace—often long-standing peace—where some form of education could be provided. It is vital to the future of the area that it should be available.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) referred to the problem of natural resources. Progress has been made on diamonds, and we have all heard about blood diamonds—we have had a debate in this Chamber on the subject—but it is strange that one of Uganda's biggest exports should be uncut diamonds when none are mined there. Clearly, at some stage, the international community must tackle the problem of the other countries in the Great Lakes region plundering the resources of the Congo. There must be agreement and that might result from the west imposing trade sanctions on illegally obtained goods.

One of the root causes of the conflict in the Congo is the exploitation of natural resources. Coltan has been mentioned, so I shall try to lighten the tone of the debate a little. An African told me last week that it was funny that coltan is needed for mobile phones and that it can be obtained in the Great Lakes region, because Africans invented the mobile phone—it is called a drum.

Although this point has not been mentioned, we should commend the Secretary of State for International Development on her efforts to bring Rwanda and Uganda together. It is now inconceivable that that band of brothers—particularly Presidents Museveni and Kagame—should contemplate making war on each other. They have been through so much and they share many of the ideals that Africa needs, so it is inconceivable that their poor countries should make war on each other.

I know that time is short, so I shall conclude my remarks. The Prime Minister's moving conference speech has been mentioned and, if the war against terrorism has taught us anything, it has taught us that we have to address poverty and conflict wherever they are in the world. It is no coincidence that the al-Qaeda terrorist network found succour in Afghanistan and Somalia, two of the poorest countries in the world. If any good is to come out of 11 September, the western nations, especially the United States of America, have to realise that poverty in Africa and Asia is connected with events on that day. We are partly responsible for those. The poor and the dispossessed have been given a means of fighting back. We must heed the warning. I return to John Donne:

> "never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

10.30 am

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) on raising the debate. Every word she said was of value. It is right that we are discussing this issue. I apologise if I was a bit rough on her earlier, but it was only because we are all eager to contribute to the debate and believe, as she does, that the subject is important. I agree with the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) that too many people say that conflict happens all the time in Africa and that we can do nothing about it. We have to combine to reject that dismissive approach, because only then will something be done.

We need to take a tough and practical approach to the continent's politics, because only through its politics will we address the humanitarian problems that cause so much agony to us all. In that, I am realist. I am coldly practical in appreciating what needs to be done. I always try to cut through the emotion, which is why I winced slightly at the intraparty congratulations on the Prime Minister's speech in May. He said:

> "I will make Africa a major personal priority"—

it is always personal—

> "and a priority for the Labour Government".

My analysis of what is happening leads me to a simple view: soundbites feed headlines; soundbites do not feed babies. We have to confront a serious practical political problem and turn words into action. If the Minister can do that, through the Foreign Office and the power that Britain and our partners have, I assure the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow that the applause will be well deserved and I, for one, will join in, no matter who it is who brings about improvement in Africa.

The hon. Lady was right to concentrate on the Democratic Republic of Congo and put it at the centre of the problem. It most clearly is. A single global statistic shows the plight of that country. The Congo can be lumped together with North Korea, Afghanistan and Iraq as the four countries with the highest percentage of undernourished people among their populations. That alone is enough to advertise the challenge that we all face in overcoming the largest problem, which is also the most ignored. Bearing in mind our history, it should be the issue of most concern.

I will do a quick canter through four major headline issues. I am sure that the Minister will join me in welcoming yesterday's report that the Government and the rebels in the Congo have achieved a major breakthrough in their meeting in Abuja. Representatives of President Joseph Kabila and the two main rebel movements have committed themselves to attend the talks in South Africa in January, and that is a sign of significant progress. We should send the message from this Chamber that we hope that President Kabila will attend. It is clear from events in Afghanistan that the principals need to be present. Representatives will never make as much progress as we need to be make at that meeting.

Zimbabwe is also a concern. Although the debate is not primarily about that country, it is part of the region. The interaction of politics and political influence is crucial to the chemistry of both. The United Nations published a report last month which accused Zimbabwe of prolonging the war in the DRC so that ruling party bosses could plunder the country's reserves of gold, diamonds, timber and coltan. It said that that was President Mugabe's policy. Mugabe rejected the report out of hand. His Foreign Minister said that it was a pack of lies invented by the British, but we had nothing to do with the report, so I do not know where he got that idea.

Will the Minister comment on Zimbabwe and its influence on the Congo? It is clear that almost everything President Mugabe is doing within his country, and to influence countries outside it, is increasingly malign. He is a pariah in and around Zimbabwe. Reports suggest that instability is being bred in Zimbabwe because of instability in the Great Lakes region. It was reported on 19 October, I think, that the DRC was assisting Zimbabwe in circumventing the international arms embargo by buying huge quantities of guns and bullets on its behalf. It will be interesting to hear whether there has there been a breach of the arms embargo.

On the Kimberley process, to what extent does the Minister think that the control of diamonds exports as a source of revenue has collapsed or is in danger of doing so? Perhaps he can comment on that process.

I want to leave as much time as possible for the Minister to respond. He is the expert on this subject and I know that he has been devoting much attention to it. Perhaps he can enlighten the House by giving us the latest information on diamonds, arms, Zimbabwe and the talks, which we hope will lead to a political resolution,

10.36 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): I join all hon. Members in sincerely congratulating my hon. Friend the

[Hilary Benn]

Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) both on securing the debate and on the manner in which she spoke. I know that those hon. Members who went on the trip take a real and close interest in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region. I also congratulate the all-party parliamentary group on producing, as the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley) generously said, an excellent report. It is a model for Members of Parliament who make such visits because it is accessible and informative and has been followed up, not least by the recent meeting that my hon. Friend and others had with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development. In addition, today's debate gives us the chance to follow up the insights and information that were gleaned during the visit. Moreover, our deliberations build on the debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy) in November last year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow spoke with insight and passion. I learned several things from the debate. I did not know about the origin of the artificial distinction between Hutus and Tutsis. It is a terrible warning to us all about the perils more generally of labelling people. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) also spoke with passion. It is important that the sense of outrage, bewilderment and the sheer incomprehensibility of what went on is clung to because it motivates all of us who have an interest in making progress. We need to hold on to that so that we continue to drive forward. At the same time, the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) is right: practical measures are required to enable that progress to be secured. We have to keep the flame of outrage alive while applying ourselves to making practical progress.

Dr. Tonge: May I correct the Minister by saying that we are talking not about what went on but about what continues to go on?

Hilary Benn: I take that correction in the spirit in which it is offered. I did not mean to imply that the problems are all in the past. They continue. But I was reflecting on the genocide in Rwanda, which was on a scale that is difficult to comprehend.

I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) that words must be turned into action. He spoke about the need to feed those in the world who go to bed hungry every night, and I am sure that he would be the first to acknowledge that on one measure, the size of the international aid budget, there has been an improvement. We inherited an annual budget of £2.2 billion when we were elected in 1997, and that figure will rise to £3.6 billion by 2003-04, which is the end of the current spending round.

A 45 per cent. increase in real terms is practical action, and although I am reluctant to bring a party political point into the discussion because the hon. Gentleman almost forswore such points in his contribution and in an intervention, I point out that it is in marked contrast to what happened previously, and the Government should be judged on their actions. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be generous enough to acknowledge the progress that we have been able to make. He mentioned Zimbabwe—which I know, Mr. Amess, is not the subject of today's debate. I am sure that all hon. Members agree that Zimbabwe has enough problems of its own making without adding those of the Great Lakes region.

As we have heard, the conflict and instability in the region is probably Africa's most serious problem, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow rightly referred to the failure of politics and of politicians. The wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, indeed, in Burundi—about which my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), who is no longer here—spoke with his characteristic knowledge, have thrown both those countries into reverse. Millions of people have died, and most of those who survived have seen their livelihoods ruined and their country's chances of development destroyed.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow rightly pointed out, the DRC is potentially a very rich country, which is partly the reason for the exploitation of mineral resources to which she referred. As she said, 60 million people live in a country as large as western Europe. As we know, a much larger area has been dragged into the conflict, resulting in the destabilisation of countries in the region.

The first thing that we all agree on is the need for peace. It is very easy to say that, but in trying to understand how we can make progress, we all recognise that peace is a precondition. As we have acknowledged in other debates, conflict makes it difficult to make progress in achieving all the other developmental objectives that we share. Only with peace can the international community begin to help with the sustained long-term support that is required to deal with poverty in the region.

The prospects for peace are good but uncertain. In the DRC, the Lusaka peace process provides the right framework. In Burundi, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre pointed out, the Arusha peace agreement is beginning to bear fruit with the establishment of the transitional Government, and I pay tribute to Nelson Mandela for his role in that process. However, we must keep up the effort, and here the involvement of the international community is crucial. The UK Government have responded by giving great priority to supporting progress towards a solution to the Great Lakes conflicts.

That is a joint endeavour. The debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham was responded to by one of my colleagues in the Foreign Office, which reflects the joint working between the Department for International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence. One of the practical expressions of that co-operation is the resources now being made available through the Africa conflict pool, which is, I say to the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton, another practical measure to join up parts of Government and set up a single funding source to address different parts of the problem.

There is a sustained political and diplomatic effort. I would not want the opportunity of this debate to pass without paying tribute to the sterling efforts of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. As all Members will acknowledge, she has made this matter a personal priority. As a relatively new Minister in the Department, I can say that she continues to devote a considerable amount of time and personal effort to enabling the peace process to advance. Members will know that she visited the area in August to urge progress in the Lusaka peace process. She has hosted and been personally involved in discussions between the participants. She plans to go to the DRC again in the new year with some of her EU ministerial colleagues. Of course, as hon. Members have mentioned, the Prime Minister has spoken of his concern about the need to find a solution to the conflict. We have also increased the resources available to tackle problems in the area, and I shall return to that.

We are trying to do three things. The first is to raise the profile of the region's problems. I was greatly struck by the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) about the earlier lack of international interest and of demonstrations and protests. That is a terrible indictment of us.

We live in an increasingly small and fragile world, in which we are more interdependent. We understand more now than at any time in our history that what happens in one country ultimately impacts on us all. The Prime Minister's speech and many other things that have taken place in the world in the past couple of months reveal that the world community is, in a stumbling and uncertain way, feeling its way towards an understanding that should such events, particularly the genocide in Rwanda, happen in future, we cannot stand on one side, and I regard that as a positive step. That does not mean that we have solved the problem or that we have a perfect mechanism for deciding when to intervene in every case. Hon. Members have mentioned realpolitik, and in some cases that will create difficulties, but at least we are having a discussion about whether we should intervene.

I have on a previous occasion made an analogy with domestic violence. Thirty years ago, the police would have been called to a household where a man was beating up his wife or partner, and they would have said that they could not intervene because the situation was domestic and internal to the family. Now, attitudes have been utterly revolutionised, and the police have a completely different approach. We can liken that to the way in which the international community regards what would in the past have been seen as civil wars within the borders of a particular country in which they could not intervene. That is progress. We have not completed the process, and it will be messy, but at least we are moving in the right direction. Raising the profile of the problem so that the world pays more attention to what is happening in the DRC is a worthy objective in itself. The work of the all-party group and this debate contribute to that process, and I congratulate all those involved.

The second priority is to work closely with our international partners, particularly, Belgium, France and the United States, because collaboration is key to ensuring that the Lusaka agreement is fully implemented. Thirdly, we must keep up pressure on the parties to keep to the Lusaka agreement to which they signed up. Again, that is simple to say, but if people have signed an agreement that requires them to do various things, we need constantly to remind them that they have accepted those obligations and must fulfil them. That means that there must be progress on the elements of the agreement, and I turn briefly to each of those.

The first is the disengagement of forces. The Lusaka accord called for the immediate withdrawal of all the foreign forces based in the DRC. There has been some progress, but not as much as we would like. It is necessary to remind all the countries involved that they should comply with the provisions of the agreement.

Hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow, have referred to the size of the MONUC force. As my hon. Friend will be aware, there is agreement in principle to increase the size of MONUC when all the foreign forces have been withdrawn. It is important to recognise that MONUC is there to oversee the peace process as it develops but not to enforce it; only the parties to the agreement can enforce the peace process on themselves. Only this week, the Secretary of State discussed this subject with a representation of the UN peacekeeping organisation. We would like MONUC to move faster into the east of the country to continue the good work that it has been doing in extremely challenging circumstances.

The second is DDRRR. I was grateful for the reminder of definitions in the useful report, which has a good index and guide to acronyms whose meaning we can easily forget because there are far too many of them, both generally and in the field of international development. The United Kingdom recognises the importance of moving forward on DDRRR. We are supportive of the establishment of all-encompassing DDRRR programmes led by the United Nations and the World Bank. We recognise the need in the interim for quick-start programmes so that, when opportunities arise, we can ensure that capacity exists to respond to combatants who, in the end, must want to disarm.

Again, it comes back to the participants in the fight; they have got to want DDRRR to happen. We can encourage and support them but, in the end, we cannot make people do things against their will: they must come from within. We have resources immediately available to commit to DDRRR in the DRC. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made a public commitment to support DDRRR in the region. Officials from the Department attended a World Bank meeting in Kampala last week to discuss setting up a regional fund for that purpose. The UN operation is effective and we are ready to help with bilateral assistance to enable forces to make further progress in the east of the country.

The inter-Congolese dialogue is clearly an essential element in securing a lasting peace in the DRC. After a promising meeting in Gaborone, there was a disappointing meeting in Addis Ababa, followed by the breakthrough to which the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton referred. We are hopeful that progress will be made when the dialogue resumes in South Africa early next year. The hon. Member for Richmond Park asked about support for the dialogue. The UK is now one of the three largest contributors. We have contributed £500,000 to date and will actively consider further requests.

The issue of humanitarian support was raised in our debate. The humanitarian consequences are desperate and our humanitarian budget is spent where there is the greatest need. As the hon. Member for Richmond Park and others have said, some of the worst development and humanitarian indicators in the world are to be found in the DRC. The humanitarian situation remains

[Hilary Benn]

dire, although there have been few ceasefire violations. Access for non-governmental organisations working in the DRC has improved, but a recent UN report estimates that 2 million people have been displaced in the DRC by the conflict, and 16 million do not have secure access to supplies of food. Additionally, 2.5 million people have lost their lives in the country since the conflict began in 1996, which is an extraordinarily high number; there has been great human suffering.

Last year, the UK gave £3.3 million in humanitarian assistance to the DRC. Words should be matched by action, and this year that figure will be doubled. In addition, the UK contributes about a fifth of the European Union's humanitarian budget which, in 2001, will be 35 million euros. In effect, therefore, the total UK contribution is about £7 million plus 7 million euros. It is worth pointing out that EU support is increasing sharply. Last year, the contribution was only 7 million euros, but it will be 35 million euros this year—evidence of words being backed by practical action.

The UK provides humanitarian assistance through well established NGOs and assistance to the facilitator of the national dialogue. Our assistance focuses on health and nutrition; work with refugees; child soldiers and other vulnerable groups; food security; prison monitoring; and human rights work. To ensure that our support is fairly distributed throughout the DRC, which is not under the control of one authority, £4 million of this year's emergency humanitarian support is going to the Red Cross. In the circumstances, it is important that we are not seen to favour one participant in the dispute and conflict in the country. We are also developing a range of peace-building initiatives, such as projects to bring together different ethnic communities, and are providing information about the peace process to the Congolese population. For example, we are providing support for a radio infrastructure in the DRC so that people can hear about what is happening. It is important that the people at whom all the activity is directed should learn more about the progress of the peace process.

In Burundi, we are supporting the Arusha process—in particular by helping to support the South African-led protection force for returning politicians. We have provided £100,000 for the latest round of talks, bringing our total to just over £0.3 million. We have also provided £50,000 for a project promoting political dialogue between the parties in Burundi. We are also supporting a major new programme in Burundi to tackle HIV/AIDS. Again, words are supported by practical action.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow spoke with generosity and understanding about the problems that Rwanda is facing, given its history. It is one of the most traumatised societies, if not the most traumatised society, in Africa. We are the leading bilateral donor in Rwanda and are committed to offering it support because we think that it needs that to make progress on poverty reduction, meeting international development targets, security, reconciliation, economic growth and inclusive government. We have provided substantial support, although I know that some people say that, in the context of the region, it appears a bit unbalanced. However, given their history, the Rwandan Government—and I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is passionate about this—need all that practical help to try to make progress on establishing a safe and secure country for their people. Progress continues to be good in Rwanda which, in some ways, is becoming a developmental model for the region. The need for humanitarian assistance has decreased partly as a result of our support, but principally because the efforts of the Rwandan Government and their people are helping the country to get back on its feet.

We have had an excellent debate. These issues need to be aired, and the fact that an hour and a half of Westminster Hall time has been given to them is a modest contribution both to raising the profile of the DRC's problems and keeping the flame of interest burning. Resolving the humanitarian crisis and the conflict in the Great Lakes is a priority for the UK Government. I hope that the steps that we are taking are evidence of that. While the conflict continues, we will provide urgent humanitarian support to the best of our ability, but only when peace comes in the region will we get the chance to assist with the development needed for a secure, stable, prosperous DRC. I have spoken about the country's enormous potential and mineral wealth, and there is no doubt that a strong and thriving DRC could emerge from the war if its potential can be tapped. It is therefore important to take the opportunity to ensure that the peace process in Burundi holds and to make further progress on securing peace for the long-term, lasting benefit of the DRC.

Individual Learning Accounts

10.59 am

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): I am pleased to have the opportunity to introduce a debate on lifelong learning, following the closure of individual learning accounts. The subject is important to many people, including the students who were able to use the scheme until the Government suddenly cancelled it. Many of them were elderly, from ethnic minorities, unemployed or people who had missed out in one way or another on the chance for an education and who were seeking to do something about it. They suddenly found that the courses that they had hoped to do were denied to them.

The subject is also important to the training providers, who had done what the Government asked and set up community-based schemes to deliver to people from all groups the benefits of access to computer technology, only to find that the Government suddenly closed down the ILA scheme. The subject is of equal importance to all taxpayers, as there are indications that tens of millions of pounds of public money may have been wasted and that there may have been widespread fraud.

I shall quickly summarise the points that have led to the present position. After two years of pilot programmes and transitional arrangements, the Government introduced the individual learning account scheme in September 2000. Under the scheme, the Government offered £150 to help adults who were seeking training. The Government awarded a £50 million contract to Capita plc to run the scheme through the ILA agency. There were warnings even before the scheme started that the scheme as proposed was flawed and would be likely to lead to abuse.

There were many such warnings, perhaps most notably from Mr. James O'Brien of Pitman Training Group, one of the UK's leading training providers, who wrote to the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment on 20 September last year, before the scheme was launched. In his letter Mr. O'Brien stated:

> "We have expressed our concern both to DfEE officials and to Capita plc that there was insufficient detail in the rules of the initiative. As a responsible training provider we worried that this lack of detail left the scheme open to abuse, which would not be helpful to either the initiative itself or the majority of the training sector."

The Government then introduced a cap on the value of the training at 80 per cent. of the first £250 of eligible training in any one year, although that did not seem to do much to stop the abuses that were going on.

There were repeated stories in the press about abuse of the scheme—in the *News of the World*, *The Mirror* and the regional press. None the less, the Government continued to trumpet the scheme as a success. At the time, according to the Government, there were signs neither of a huge fraud, nor of such a massive increase in the take-up that the scheme required a rethink.

On 20 July, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Wentworth (John Healey), issued a statement under the exciting headline "Individual Learning Accounts to continue into new era", which began:

> "Adult skills minister John Healey today confirmed details of how the successful introduction of Individual Learning Accounts over the last year will be followed up."

I see the Minister smiling; I do not know how many times he has heard that quote. It does not seem consistent with what happened next.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Does my hon. Friend know that one of my constituents was summoned to a focus group meeting at the Department on 25 July, and at that meeting told Department officials what scams were occurring? Since then, nothing seems to have been done about his specific complaints.

Mr. Bacon: I did not know about my hon. Friend's constituent, although it does not surprise me that the Government invited the constituent to a focus group meeting. We all know the Government's great fondness for focus groups. It does not surprise me that my hon. Friend's constituent explained to the Department that scams were going on. As I mentioned, people were doing that even before the launch of the scheme.

The scheme which the Minister described on 20 July as leaping and bounding towards the future, and which was described by the Secretary of State on 24 October as a "great success", was to be suspended from 7 December. The reason, she said, was that

> "the rapid growth of the programme has exceeded all expectations, causing us to think again about how best to target public funds in this area and secure value for money."

The Secretary of State also mentioned her concerns

> "about the way some ILAs have been promoted and sold."

She stated:

> "There is growing evidence that some companies are abusing the scheme by offering low value, poor quality learning."

My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) may be reassured to learn that the notion that something was amiss was starting to percolate, although the Secretary of State said no more than that some people were abusing the scheme and offering low value, poor quality learning. The possibility that they were offering no learning at all, but removing the funds from the individual learning accounts before the people whose accounts they were had the chance to use them, was not mentioned.

The Secretary of State continued by saying that in order

> "to protect the interests of individual learners"

she had

> "decided to prevent any further take-up of ILAs",

although learning begun by existing account holders would continue to be supported, provided it was booked by 7 December. The Secretary of State assured learning providers and account holders that

> "the decision to end the programme has not been made lightly"—

a fairly terminal sentence which caused many training providers who had invested in the scheme a great deal of concern.

The scheme was thus closed to new applicants. That was an astonishing turn-about, considering what the Minister had been saying only in July and compared with three months previously, when it had seemed to be all systems go. However, the scheme did not close on 7 December, as the Secretary of State had announced. Suddenly, on 23 November, the Department put out an announcement that it had called in the police to

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investigate fraud and theft involving individual learning accounts, and that the ILA programme was to be suspended immediately, two weeks earlier than had been announced.

One of the key questions which remains unanswered, to which I hope the Minister will provide an answer today, is what new evidence emerged to justify the sudden change. If the fraud was on a fairly small scale, as we had been led to believe, why did not the Government deal with it and let the rest of the scheme go on intact?

I shall examine the effect of the sequence of events that I described on the various groups involved—first, the students whom the scheme was designed to benefit. I have a letter from a constituent, Mrs. Marion Ford, of Harleston in South Norfolk. Mrs. Ford applied for and was eventually sent a card with a membership number. On receiving the card, she immediately went to a local computer training firm in Harleston, only to be told via the ILA centre in Darlington that there were no longer any funds in her account.

As Mrs. Ford wrote to me,

> "Apparently, someone had registered me on Tuesday 13th November, but I only received my card on Wednesday 14th November".

Mrs. Ford had been registered by a different computer firm for a course that she did not know about. Her letter continued:

> "How did they get my name? How did they know I wanted to do a course? How many details of me have they got, without my knowledge?"

The case of Mr. Philip Geggie, which has been brought to my attention, shows that even meeting the Government's new deadline did not necessarily help. Mr. Geggie applied for an ILA account before applications were shut down, but his ILA number took several weeks to arrive. After the number finally arrived, Mr. Geggie applied for and paid for his software on 19 November, four days before what became the new deadline, 23 November, only to find that the ILA centre was denying his training provider, Carrerra's, access to the Darlington computer; so he could not be registered, although the Department had said that it would honour only those who were registered.

In an e-mail to Mr. Nick Parry, an official in the workplace learning division of the Department for Education and Skills, Mr. Geggie wrote:

> "What you should be doing is to honour those people who are in the system and who have been in the system from prior to 7th December and penalise those who are abusing the system."

Mr. Parry replied:

> "There has been some comment that ILAs could have continued if we had taken action to remove from the scheme those learning providers who were abusing it. You can be assured that if there had been a reliable way of doing this immediately, this action would have been taken."

That prompts the question of why the Department did not listen to the advice that it was given in the first place about ensuring that learning providers had approval first, before they undertook training. We have a right to ask what will happen to the good people who have done nothing wrong and who have been denied training, simply because of the failure of the Government to promote a robust scheme.

I had another letter from a Mr. Granville Powell, a constituent of mine from Wortwell in south Norfolk. Mr. Powell signed up for a course at the Suffolk Learning and Resources centre, just over the county border in Bungay, Suffolk. He had already done two computer courses and wanted to study for the European computer driving licence, as he had decided that it would probably help him to get a job. On receiving a letter telling him about the 7 December deadline, Mr. Powell rushed to sign up quickly, only to be told that all funding had been stopped anyway by the ILA centre in Darlington. He writes that he knew about the alleged fraud from the newspapers. However, as he eloquently puts it:

> "Why should the excellent teaching people at the brilliant Bungay Resources Centre be punished because not enough checks were put in place from the start?"

That brings me to the second group of people who are affected by this fiasco: the training providers. Pitman Training Group states in its document responding to the suspension of the ILA scheme that it had expressed its concerns to Ministers and officials on several occasions, since before the launch of the programme. It states:

> "Without minimum standards, anyone has been able to set up business as a 'training provider' with the consequences that have become so apparent over the past few months".

My own view is that it is just about understandable that Ministers might seek to take a light-touch approach to potential students. That is arguable. One could also argue that the lack of any completion thresholds for students, and the tying of at least part of the payment to the learning provider to such thresholds, has made it much easier for unscrupulous operators to take the money without showing any care whatever for the individual's learning experience.

Indeed, Pitman Training Group advances precisely that argument in its response document. Whether or not one agrees with such a view, one can at least see that there is an argument to be put for a light-touch regulation for customers, especially as they may lack confidence because of negative experiences with more formal education or training, or may wrongly feel that it is too late in life for them to learn to use new technology. That is at least an argument to be advanced, but I find it utterly incomprehensible that one would apply such a light-touch regulation or criterion—perhaps the best description would be a no-touch criterion—to the providers of the learning. Such an approach has two very predictable effects, both of which are bad. First, it guarantees that the quick-buck merchants, who have absolutely no concern for the students and are interested only in taking the money, will come steaming in for the kill. At best, students will get from such people a pathetically inadequate course consisting of one booklet that they could have bought for five or 10 quid anyway. At worst, their individual learning account numbers may be stolen. Secondly, many good training providers who are genuinely working to respond to Government policy are tarred with the same brush as the bad ones, which is quite wrong.

I shall mention some of the allegations that have been flying around. I do not know whether they are true; it is for the Minister to reassure us that they are not correct or to confirm the situation if they are. It has been suggested that at least one training provider was doing business of more than £1 million a week. Under the new £200 scheme rules, a provider would have to find 5,000 students each week—the equivalent of a small university—to generate such business. If that has been happening, one wonders what the paymaster in the Department was doing when he saw £200 going out of the door in one direction, £20,000 in another direction and more than £1 million in a third. Perhaps he did not know that that was happening, because it was all done by computer and nobody did anything but press buttons until it was too late.

Another allegation has been made by a banker who spotted an account that was set up in July and into which more than £2 million had since been paid. Apparently, that money came purely from the ILA scheme and there was no other source of income—not even the 20 per cent. of funds that one would have expected from the student contribution. It is alleged that, after the £2 million had dribbled in, the account holder requested that the sum be transferred to an offshore account. I have even heard it suggested that one dubious provider alone may have been responsible for busting the Department's budget, in so far as it appeared to have any budget or limit at all. Perhaps most horrible of all, is it possible that some of these tricksters kept just within the strict letter of the law, so that no action is possible against them?

Training providers have told me that they were approached by individuals attempting to buy large numbers of completed application forms. I assume that that was against the law. God help the Department if it managed to create a scheme in which even that was permissible.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Jane Davidson of the Welsh Assembly noted that the Assembly foresaw at an early stage that ILAs would need to be closely managed to ensure that there was minimal opportunity for fraud. How can it be that the Welsh Assembly saw the potential for fraud, but the Department for Education and Skills did not?

Mr. Bacon: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. It is extraordinary that the Welsh Assembly, reputable training organisations such as Pitman Training Group, the press and even the Office of the e-Envoy, whose annual report, published a few days ago, refers to the need to look out for the potential for computer fraud and to provide safeguards against it, could see the problem and the need for safeguards, while the Department could not. Everybody—the world and its brother—could see that need. Indeed, I understand that the structuring of the scheme in Wales has been so successful that there has been no abuse and that it runs to this day. It is extraordinary that all the parties to which I have referred could recognise the threat—and where possible, as in Wales, do something about it—but that the Department could not. I share my hon. Friend's astonishment at that.

I referred to the scam in which completed application forms were being bought. It appears to have worked in the following way. Scammers—if I may call them that—sought to buy for £40 each completed application forms bearing the name and address of the student. When scammers succeeded in obtaining forms, they would copy the names and addresses on to their own database. They would then send the forms to the ILA centre at Darlington. Three days later, they would know that, all other things being equal, the ILA centre computer would have generated an ILA account number. They might then have hacked into the ILA computer—assuming that there is no truth in the rumour that someone on the inside looked at the computer because they were already inside the premises—and obtained the ILA number using the name and address. They would then have put the number through one of the companies that they had set up. At that point, the student would still be waiting for an ILA number to arrive in the post, but the funds would already have gone. That would certainly explain how the funds of my constituent, Mrs. Ford, were used up the day before she even received her ILA account number.

There have been so many examples in which funds appear to have gone before clients received their account numbers—in some cases, fake registration occurred as much as one month before—that there appears to be something in the allegations. As I said, it has even been suggested that there may have been corruption among individuals inside the ILA centre, which is run by Capita. That is a most serious charge that deserves to be examined at once, so that the position can be made clear.

I look to the Minister to refute these allegations or to tell us what has been going on if there is any truth in any of them. The point is that the genuine trainers have had their good names besmirched by a breed of rogue providers.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): On that point, does my hon. Friend agree that bona fide operators such as my constituent Stephen Good have been left in an impossible situation? Inter alia, Mr. Good writes:

> "Should we, or should we not, continue to retain our employees? If so for how long can we continue to pay them when all payment due from DfES has been indefinitely suspended and monies properly due for payment to us remain overdue and unpaid?"

Mr. Bacon: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I spoke to another training provider who asked precisely the same question about whether he should hold on to his employees. He was a computer manufacturer who had branched out into training because he saw that it was a good fit in terms of his business. His employees are relatively lucky, as there is at least a possibility that he will be able to retain them. That is not the case with all the providers. Even the business man to whom I referred said that he wanted clarity above all. He wanted clear information about what would and would not happen so that he could begin to make decisions. I am sure that the same is true of my hon. Friend's constituent in Wycombe.

Genuine providers have been besmirched by rogue traders. The real providers are varied and include big and small businesses. Mr. Neil Avery, who is part of the Hairnet computer training network, wrote to me from Taverham, near Norwich. Since January, he has trained 33 people who have opened ILAs in the Norfolk area. His success stories include a 21-year-old hospital cleaner from Norwich who wanted to improve her employment prospects, a disabled elderly lady from Norwich who can now keep in touch with her extended family through e-mails and the internet, and, I am reliably informed, a

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Norfolk county councillor who can better serve the community because she can now use computer technology.

The Internet Exchange was founded in 1994. It runs 38 stores throughout the country, from Glasgow to Southampton; from Cardiff and Bristol to Cambridge, as well as in London, where the company is concentrated. Many of the stores, especially in London, are in deprived areas. Indeed, of the 34 stores in England, 25 are located in wards that feature on the Department's list of the 2,000 most deprived English wards.

The Internet Exchange has invested in training and worked with organisations such as the British Computer Society and the Training Standards Council to ensure that its training is of the highest quality. It has a diverse customer base: 51 per cent. female, 49 per cent. male, 45 per cent. ethnic minorities, 15 per cent. lone parents, and 35 per cent. unemployed or looking for work.

Hon. Members may hear more this afternoon about Henley Community Online at a meeting in Portcullis house. It is a not-for-profit company that offers computer and internet access. Two hundred and twenty people currently participate in its courses. Like the constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman), the people who run Henley Community Online are worried about what will happen to them and their employees.

Carrerra's is part of the Digital Network group, which is based in the west midlands. Between 40 and 50 per cent. of its customers are either disabled, elderly or unable to train during the day. It has taken on an extra 40 staff and invested in training them in software at a new training centre, so that customers can have a high quality training experience.

All those people were doing the right thing; they were doing what the Government asked of them. The Government owe them tens—in some cases, hundreds—of thousands of pounds. What will happen to them? Will they go to the wall because the Government did not have the common sense to get rid of the rogue providers at the beginning? Must they put their staff on the streets and thus add to the Government's unemployment bill? Will they get the money that they are owed? Will a new Government scheme emerge? If so, when? In a nutshell, what steps are the Government planning to restore confidence in the training sector? We look to the Minister for clear, specific answers.

The Government have created an environment in which the genuine training providers distrust them, and the most vulnerable customers—those whom the Government are trying to help—are scared off by stories of rogue providers. Mr. James Golfar of the Internet Exchange wrote in his response to the closure of the ILA scheme that the Department's explanation to clients of the scheme's operation was poor. Many were unaware that the cards were issued by the Department, not learning providers. They thus wrongly blamed the learning providers for problems in their application process. Some, especially those for whom barriers to learning were high, became confused and disheartened as their applications were lost or rejected unfairly, or when unscrupulous providers took advantage of them. Yet the scheme was designed to help those people above all.

The Minister and his colleagues should not underestimate the good will and trust that have been destroyed by the debacle. I hope that the Minister realises that the Government face a crisis of confidence among legitimate, community-based training providers and that warm words will not be enough. We need specific proposals from the Minister about the steps that he plans to take. The Government should be in no doubt that there is precious little hope of helping the most vulnerable people if they do not restore confidence among those who can do the most to help, namely, the legitimate training providers.

I must mention the taxpayer's plight. I am grateful to the Minister's office for supplying me with the figures yesterday. However, as a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I cannot say that they are pleasing. I have written to Sir John Bourn, the Comptroller and Auditor General, and to the Chairman of the PAC, asking for ILAs to be examined urgently.

According to the figures that the Minister supplied me with yesterday, the Department budgeted £202.1 million for the ILA scheme over the two years 2000-01 and 2001-02. That includes the Department's budget allocations and £115.1 million which has been recycled from training and enterprise council resources. Department records show that expenditure on the programme in 2000-01 and 2001-02 to 23 November totalled £260.9 million. That is an overspend of £58.8 million up to that point.

The Minister said in his communication to me that significant payments are due for claims that learning providers have already made, and for committed expenditure for learning that providers on the ILA centre system booked before it was shut down on 23 November. He also stated that the police investigation into abuse and fraud means that access to the ILA centre system is not available and it is therefore not possible to estimate the additional financial commitment. That is a scary remark.

The Government know about an overspend of approximately £60 million so far but do not know how much more is to come. They have ignored the warnings of experienced professionals before and since the scheme was launched. They have also ignored many warnings in the press, and lost the trust of the genuine training providers without whom they have no chance of achieving their goals. They have been reckless with taxpayers' money and the people who suffer most are ironically those whom the Government most want to help.

The Government have a lot of answering to do. I look forward to the Minister's reply.

11.27 am

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): The figures that my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) presented in his excellent speech give the lie to the suggestion that we are simply considering fraud. The Government have realised late in the day that they will not be able to balance their books. Whom do they blame? As always, the answer is: the ILA holders and the genuine learning providers. Whatever scams have existed, they do not justify the Government breaking their contracts with ILA holders and providers, who have set up in business believing that they were part of a genuine scheme.

Like my hon. Friend, I have received several letters and visits to my constituency surgery from people who are adversely affected. Many people who are in genuine need have become ILA holders and find themselves in the soup. I have a letter, of which the Minister has a copy, from a lady in New Milton. It was copied to me because her tutor, Mr. Edwards, lives in my constituency. She used the ILA scheme to enable her to receive individual tuition at home on her computer. If she went on a course, she would be unable to get access to a computer with the magnification programme LunarPlus. She had the programme at home, and it meant that if Mr. Edwards or one of the other tutors went to her home, she could benefit from it.

The lady is a registered blind person, and she found the prospect of being able to get training enormously valuable. She signed up for her account and was sent a registration card. Her contribution was £50, but after she had received the first two lessons, the tutor was told that all funding had been cancelled, even though the scheme was only due to last until early December.

Will the Minister say what will happen in Mrs. Buckingham's case? Will she be given recompense for the money that she invested in the course as her contribution towards it? Will alternative provision be made available for her? What will happen to Mr. Edwards, her tutor, who took on the teaching commitment but is now being denied the funding initially promised by the Government?

I have passed on to the ombudsman another letter that I have received from a constituent. I suspect that the impact of the ILA scam, and the Government's massive maladministration of the scheme, will rival that of the Railtrack affair, and that it will make the Government even more unpopular than they are already.

With Railtrack, the Government took the view that, because matters were not working out to their satisfaction, they would penalise innocent shareholders and then say that they were fools to become shareholders in the first place. The Government seem to be applying the same principle to people who invested in becoming learning providers under the scheme, or who took out ILA accounts. The Government seem to be saying, "We can't guarantee to pay you anything now because there were a lot of fraudsters around." That cannot justify the course of action on which the Government are embarking.

My constituent Mr. Foskett wrote to me on 27 November, and his letter was copied to the chief executive of the ILA centre. He stated:

> "As an unemployed person with a small income and no subsequent support from the state, I was in the final throws of selecting an education provider to improve my skill base when I read on your web site that you have suspended all ILA accounts 2 weeks early!!"

Mr. Foskett is an unemployed person who wants to gain access to lifelong learning. What will happen to him? I hope that the Minister will tell us when he responds to the debate. Will Mr. Foskett be able to use his ILA account in some other way? Will he get compensation? He is unemployed and cannot wait a long time, as he wants to improve his skill set so that he can get a job.

About a fortnight ago, I submitted a series of written questions to the Minister. The convention is that a Minister, knowing that a debate such as this is coming up, will answer as many outstanding questions as possible. However, there seems to be a clampdown on answering questions. I suspect that it is only the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk is a member of the Public Accounts Committee that allowed him to gain access to some of the relevant information.

Mr. Bacon: I ought to make it clear that I am grateful to the Minister, as his office sent me the figures that I quoted in the debate.

Mr. Chope: I am glad that the Minister and his staff are ingratiating themselves with a distinguished member of the PAC. I am sure that those responsible for the mess will need lots of help in the future when they are cross-examined by that Committee.

The figures made available to my hon. Friend yesterday are breathtaking, but similar figures must have been available four or six weeks ago. They must have been available when the Government announced that the scheme would be ended on 7 December, and when they decided to curtail it two weeks earlier than that.

I hope that the Minister will deal also with the position of large providers of learning. The Future Open Learning college in my constituency has about 283 account holders on its books. Because the computer system has been closed down, it has been unable to find out the number of accounts for which it will be paid. Some of the people registered with the college discovered that their account numbers had already been taken by other people—a problem referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk. The college had to lay staff off, because its management was not so foolish as to believe that the Government would meet their legal commitments.

The college is entitled to be paid. The people who run it want to know when the payments that have been curtailed will be resumed. I hope that the Minister will assure all learning providers that the weekly payments to which they were entitled, and which were suspended on 23 November, will be reinstated without delay.

The Department for Education and Skills is under a legal obligation to reinstate the payments. If the Minister does not do something about it, more and more cases will be referred to the ombudsman, to whom I advise my hon. Friends and others to send the cases about which they come to know. Only when he has seen those cases will the ombudsman be able to rule on this appalling episode of maladministration.

11.35 am

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): No one would disagree that the idea of individual learning accounts was a good one, or deny that it was begun with good intentions. In May 1994, the then Conservative Government's White Paper on competitiveness contained a similar scheme, and a series of pilot schemes were introduced.

The intention was to reach people who would not normally access education beyond school age. Those people included those with low skill levels, those living

[Angela Watkinson]

in areas of skill shortage, or people in small firms who found it hard to provide staff development schemes. The scheme was also intended to reach women returners—women whose children had just started school and who were therefore able to access education for the first time in many years because they had part of the day free.

The pilot schemes showed that the scheme was administratively complex, and that it was ineffective in reaching the groups for which it was intended. In fact, it often subsidised existing educational activity and was being accessed by people who already had good qualifications. I wonder whether the Government examined the lessons to be learned from the 1994 scheme, as some of the same problems have been encountered this time. Some of the same conclusions apply, too, although fraud was not evident in 1994.

In 1999, the evaluation of the 1994 schemes found that they were resource intensive. Although those schemes could have been examined and improved, the ILA scheme unfortunately turned out to be so lacking in detail that it was open to computer fraud. It was also open to theft: people on street corners sold ILA accounts to unsuspecting and innocent people, who thereby lost their entitlement to the scheme and were therefore unable to take advantage of it. Moreover, the fact that the website was not registered left it open to other advertisers to take advantage of the scheme.

Many people who wanted to take advantage of an ILA account have been sold schemes that were of poor quality or which did not even exist. They have therefore lost their entitlement. Many genuine providers, and especially the small ones, have been left in an extremely difficult position, as we have heard. They do not know whether to keep their staff, or whether it will be possible to resurrect the scheme in some way.

The investigation is under way, and we do not know how long it will take. In the meantime, I am sure that compensation claims will be submitted by firms that in good faith set up training courses and learning schemes for people with ILA accounts. Now that the accounts have come to an abrupt end, those firms have no idea how they are going to continue. Moreover, I understand that the firms were not consulted about the closure of the programme, and that they were given no warning; they have therefore been left high and dry.

I am sure that, like me, most other hon. Members will have received letters from constituents who were offered schemes and who pursued them in good faith, even though the schemes might not always have been in the right place or at the right times for them to access them. People who took up the scheme hoped to pick up some of the higher education that they had not been able to take advantage of before. However, many found that the scheme was available only in the neighbouring town, or that they could not reach it because there was no public transport, or that it was being held at an inconvenient time of day. When they eventually found something that they could take advantage of, the scheme had been suspended.

What is to happen to existing students, who might be in the first stage of a training course or qualification? What will happen to those students, even if they are able to complete the part of the qualification in which they are currently involved? If that does not bring them to the end of their course or training, will they be able to access the next stage? Are we going to have to find new providers? Will there be a rescue scheme for those genuine providers who have been left high and dry by those who have fraudulently brought the scheme to an abrupt halt?

As yet, the total cost of the scheme to the taxpayer is unknown. Enormous costs have been incurred in contacting ILA holders, advertising the scheme and setting up the providers and in advertising in the national newspapers to announce that the scheme had come to an abrupt end.

I have been looking at some statistics on the scheme's users, and on the number of accounts opened and the number being used. The number of accounts opened appears to be double the number being operated. I may have misunderstood that, but on first examination it looks as though twice as many accounts have been opened as are being used; perhaps the Minister will clarify that.

The fact that the original target of 1 million users burgeoned to 2.5 million justifies the scheme and shows how popular it could be, if only it were run successfully. I understand, however, that targeting has been patchy, in terms of the sort of student that the scheme has attracted. Many types of account have lain dormant, while many other ILA learners already have higher education qualifications. Such people were not intended to be a target group for the scheme, or to be the beneficiaries of further subsidised schemes; the intended target group was the many people who have either no qualifications or low skills.

Employers with few staff may not be able to operate extensive staff development schemes and would be ideal participants in ILAs. Larger firms, however, may have been using the scheme as an alternative to staff development schemes that could and should be operated within their own businesses.

We should have had far tighter controls over eligibility for learners and for firms whose staff were accessing ILA schemes. There should also have been far tighter and more detailed control over those providers who have let the scheme down. As yet, we have no idea what the total cost will be, in terms of set-up costs, operating costs, closing-down costs and any compensation that might have to be paid to legitimate providers who have had to curtail their operations unexpectedly and who are uncertain whether to keep on their training staff.

If the eligibility criteria for students, the bona fides of providers and the security of computer programmes through which the public access information about ILAs were tightened up, the scheme could be resurrected. As larger numbers than anticipated wanted to take out ILAs, the total tax commitment was far higher than had been envisaged. If the total tax commitment per annum were stated so that people's expectations were not raised beyond the point at which they could be realised, the phoenix could rise from the ashes of this debacle, and we could have a successful scheme.

11.44 am

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield): Lifelong learning is about three important things: addressing the needs of those who have been failed by the school system, equipping the workers that society and the economy need and allowing individuals to enrich their personal knowledge. Lifelong learning must, above all, bring adults who lack basic skills and qualifications back into a learning environment, on which the ILA system was supposed to be targeted.

A system of individual learning accounts based on the original Liberal Democrat proposals, rather than the version launched by the Government, would have provided good foundations for lifelong learning. Our ILAs would have allowed everyone access to an account from birth. They would have allowed parents, individuals, employers and the Government to contribute to an ILA throughout a person's lifetime, and allowed that individual to access their account to pay for any of their learning requirements.

The Liberal Democrats did, and still do, support the concept of ILAs, and the Government's mismanagement and scrapping of the scheme is serious because it undermines the very credibility of the system. The rapid dissolution of the ILA scheme has left large numbers of participants and providers disillusioned, confused and concerned. While people watch their businesses collapse around them, the Government remain almost silent about what they can offer those who have been caught up in this terrible mess.

I say "almost silent" because when I asked the Minister at the Select Committee on Education and Skills on 28 November whether any compensation would be available for the legitimate businesses that had invested huge amounts of time and money to make the scheme a success—some of which now face ruin—his answer was no. I then wrote, on the afternoon of 28 November, to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, to clarify that issue and others. I am still waiting for an answer.

The Government's handling of ILAs has been a shambles. They set up a scheme with serious loopholes, allowing—it would appear—considerable fraud to take place, although Scotland and Wales appear to have managed the system better. The Government announced that they would terminate the scheme with effect from 7 December, but at 6.30 on a Friday evening they announced that they were going to close it two weeks early, with immediate effect.

On 24 October, the Secretary of State said that the ILA programme was to be suspended, as it had

"exceeded Government expectations and has quickly expanded beyond its capacity."

There was a footnote to that press release about concerns that some companies were providing poor value for money. Yet on [illegible] November the Under-Secretary of State told the Select Committee meeting that it was all to do with fraud, and not with exceeding capacity. He gave the Select Committee some figures on the cost of the scheme, and I was interested to hear the figures that the hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) had obtained from the Department yesterday, because they are considerably larger than the ones that the Select Committee was given less than two weeks ago, on 28 November.

On 28 November, the Under-Secretary of State told the Select Committee that the ILA budget, which had been £56 million, had gone up to £71 million, but that that had been exceeded, although the Government had no idea by how much. The Under-Secretary could not even tell the Select Committee when the scheme, or a replacement for it, would be reintroduced, leaving all the providers and individual learners in limbo.

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills told Parliament on 6 November that the police had charged four providers and 30 individuals with fraud. The Under-Secretary told the Select Committee on 28 November that

"sustained and serious allegations of theft"

in County Durham justified the early closure of the scheme. Yet, according to *The Times Educational Supplement* last Friday—just five days ago—Durham police, when contacted, said that no criminal investigation was being conducted on their patch. The Department for Education and Skills spokesman has also had to correct the Secretary of State's statement to Parliament on 6 November, saying that she had been mistaken in telling Parliament that charges had been brought, as none had. It seems that the Government have not had a clue what they are doing from the beginning to the end of this scheme.

Apart from the taxpayers, the people being hurt by this are the legitimate companies and the legitimate users of the ILA scheme. As a member of the Select Committee, I have received representations from individuals and companies all over the country, but one from my constituency of Chesterfield is typical of all of them. Critical Skills for Excellence is a reputable firm based in a state-of-the-art, high-tech innovation centre in Chesterfield. It wrote to me last week to say:

"As a reputable training provider, we have been totally committed to the training development and encouragement of local people to enable them to develop their full potential. Our area, as you are more than aware, has been hit hard over the past few years by the decline in the steel, mining and manufacturing industries.

We have worked hard to encourage learning and addressing the skill deficiencies in our area, offering knowledge, skills and recognised qualifications that are of the highest quality, cost effective, timely and affordable.

We are devastated and embarrassed for the loss incurred by each learner and potential learner, who has suffered as a result of the decision made by the department for Education and Skills."

The firm sent me a petition, and the details of nearly 200 individual learners who had been badly affected by the decision.

The letter went on:

"Whilst we appreciate that it is to protect individual learners who are putting their own money alongside the Government's contribution, the fact that there were substantial loop holes in the system in the first instance to allow fraud to happen is not good enough and to add insult to injury the 'plug is pulled' on reputable centres with students eager to learn and fill gaps both locally and nationally. As regular taxpayers we (the providers and the students) hold the government responsible for ensuring that our money is invested wisely and accounted for, this has not happened in this instance."

Following the collapse of the ILAs, we must ask what the Government will do to widen participation in adult education in the future—a question to which they could give no answer on 28 November. If the Government implemented the scheme that they said they would

[Paul Holmes]

investigate in the pre-Budget report, we would welcome level 2 entitlement as a step towards reducing the unacceptably high number of adults lacking basic literacy and numeracy skills. The Government should go further, however, and extend the entitlement to level 3 qualifications. The Liberal Democrats have proposed that in the past. Why the Government could not have done it previously, when it was recommended by their own national skills taskforce or when we raised the idea, is beyond us.

What was the motivation behind the Government's change of heart? The Treasury view is summed up in the title of a chapter in the pre-Budget statement: "Meeting the productivity challenge". We infer from that that the Government see lifelong learning skills purely in terms of producing an army of technocrats ready to work in whichever sector the Government deem preferable. Other aspects of lifelong learning are equally important.

We need fast and decisive action from the Government now if we are not to see progress towards lifelong learning and entitlements to adult education slip back 10 years. I call on the Minister to give answers to the questions we are asking today, about the appalling catalogue of failures and confusion relating to the Government's failed ILA scheme and about what will replace it—and, equally important, when it will be replaced.

11.52 am

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): Let me begin with two brief expressions of sympathy for the Government.

First, I am sure that many people have already received excellent training via ILAs, and will have found it very valuable. The scheme's collapse, and our criticism of that, do not detract from our support for adult learning; if anything, they enhance our worry about the poor delivery to others. Secondly, I want to express my personal sympathy for the Minister. The ILA scheme was not his creation, but he finds himself engulfed in its failure. I have had a similar experience, so I know what he is going through. I must add, however, that if he was not the cause of the original problem, he is now closely involved in the success or otherwise of the solutions. That is his role in this wretched affair.

It is clear from what has been said this morning that we are only at a staging post in the bid to unravel the policy formerly known as individual learning accounts. In an excellent summary of the origins and history of the scheme, my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon)—whom I congratulate on raising this important topic—told us what problems were evident from an early stage, how those problems grew to the incredulity of decent training providers working in the system, and what the impact of the problems has been.

I want to make five brief points, and to ask some questions. Let me go to the heart of the problem, which I see as a breach of trust on the Government's part. Individual learning accounts superseded a scheme operated by the previous Conservative Government, known as vocational training relief, with a monitoring system operated through the Inland Revenue. Many now compare that scheme favourably to the ILA scheme. Individual learning accounts were designed to take the opportunity of education to those who might have missed the chance in the past, and for whom access by way of ILAs would constitute a fresh start.

A substantial amount of trust has been engendered by the scheme, first and foremost—as a number of Members have made clear—among individuals attracted to it. Mr. Marvin Ryder took his training skills to the working men's clubs and community centres of the north-east, seeking out those whose previous experience of education had been poor in order to give them another chance. The Minister could not have found a more passionate advocate of the scheme, or anyone more determined to identify a real target for it. Mr. Ryder, however, writes:

> "Due to the decision to close it down we have had to suspend our plans and lay off two members of staff".

Mr. Ryder is far from being alone. We have heard from individual providers through my hon. Friends the Members for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) and for Upminster (Angela Watkinson); it is notable that no member of the Minister's party has felt moved to speak. The Association of Colleges has also written to me on behalf of further education colleges. It tells me that it

> "conducted a quick postal survey of member colleges on 30 November to ascertain the effects of the early closure on colleges."

Sixty-three colleges had submitted returns by 10 December.

> "Almost all were able to give figures for the number of ILA account holders for whom learning had been booked in the current academic year: The total was 28,532."

Forty-three colleges reported

> "that they had been unable to book learning for ILA account holders because of the early closure of the ILA programme. Not all were able to give figures for the numbers involved, but the total for those who were able to quantify was 4,463."

Twelve colleges reported

> "that they would suffer losses amounting to £68,245 from investment which had been made in anticipation of ILA holders becoming enrolled."

Forty-nine colleges reported

> "that they expected to suffer a loss of income amounting in total to £695,414 as a result of the early closure of the ILA programme. Colleges generally expect to have to meet this loss of income in order to honour commitments to students."

This breach of trust—in that the scheme failed to live up to the commitment of those who are learning and those who are teaching them—is compounded by the Government's astonishing insensitivity to the problem. One provider wrote to the ILA website to express concern over the loss of business, and was told by the customer complaints manager in an e-mail:

> "The Secretary of State has always had the power to withdraw the Individual Learning Accounts initiative at any stage. This was the situation all learning providers accepted when they registered for participation in the initiative. There is no contract of supply between providers and the DfES for ILAs, therefore unfortunately compensation is not available.
>
> Once again please let me apologise for the difficulties that you have experienced."

Mr. Bacon: That quotation interests me. Does it not give one pause for thought? It makes one ask why any private sector organisation of any kind would ever wish to co-operate with Government about anything, if that is the basis on which Government treat the private sector.

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend goes to the root of the matter. The breach of trust will have widespread ramifications, because the expectations built up deliberately by the Government have now been deliberately deflated.

The Minister himself recently told the Select Committee:

> "I have to say the decisions those learning providers took to use the ILAs as part of their business planning and their revenue streams was a decision entirely for them. Our principal concern has to be, first, for the public purse and, secondly, our responsibilities to the individual learning providers, and it is to them we owe the first duty. We are not a party to the business decisions any individual learning provider might make based on the ILA scheme."

In view of what the Minister has heard this morning from a variety of sources, let me ask him—before he is deluged by individuals' claims from the ombudsman, or turned over by the National Audit Office or other organisations—to reconsider.

The breach of trust leads me to my second point: that there is a complete lack of understanding of how that trust in Government was built up. The involvement—the business commitment—of so many providers was inevitable, because the introduction of the ILA system distorted the training market, leading to the creation of thousands of new companies providing training. For most existing providers, it was a question of involving themselves with ILAs or seeing their businesses disappear altogether. They had no choice. That is why the Minister cannot wash his hands of the matter at this stage.

Having become involved, providers naturally made plans based on what the Government said about the scheme. Had they read the Government publication "Education and Skills: Delivering Results A Strategy to 2006", published in early October this year, they would have seen pride of place given to the ILA scheme. Indeed, the only milestone target for the Department in 2001 is:

> "Expand Individual Learning Accounts and set up a network of 6000 IT learning centres".

The public might have been forgiven for thinking that there was some solid basis on which to build hope for the future, and that is what they did, but that is also why their businesses face devastation.

That breach of trust is most crucially at issue in respect of the premature premature closing of the scheme overnight on 23 November. The Government decided and announced on 24 October the scheme's closure, giving 7 December as the date to complete registrations for learners already taken on by providers. Providers made plans to register, assuring students that all would be well with their applications, but many were unable to get their application on the web because it seemed unaccountably clogged. I wonder who was registering what.

The Government announced on 23 November that the scheme had been closed overnight due to fear of fraud. What of those who were unable to register their students by that date? The situation is totally confused and it appears that the Government will cover only information already logged on the system by that date, so students who arranged to pay one sum for their course will be told that they must pay more, through no fault of theirs or their learning provider.

Depending on how far down the contractual road learners had travelled, they will either have their original expectation met by the provider at the provider's own cost or simply cancel if they cannot afford the new cost of training, again at the provider's cost. Can the Minister and the Government comprehend the sense of being let down and why the blame for that is being laid at their door?

Thirdly, I must draw attention to the sheer incompetence of the system. It failed to get resources to those who needed them most. In a recent Select Committee hearing, the Minister agreed with the estimate of the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) that up to £150 million may have gone in subsidy to those who did not have need of it. My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) made that point. In 1999, the Institute for Fiscal Studies examined the ILA system, saying:

> "It is unclear how much of the £150 million subsidy to account holders will result in new training which would not have happened in the absence of the scheme, rather than just being a dead-weight transfer to people who would have done the training anyway."

Why was no account taken of that likelihood?

The system, unlike vocational training relief, seems to have been incapable of detecting unfeasibly large payments. Experienced providers and hon. Members this morning have told us of the attentions of the Inland Revenue when claims for £5,000 a week were registered under the old system—that would get the tax man round—but we have heard a number of stories suggesting that some claims approached £1 million a week.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk said, that is an enrolment strike rate of 5,000 students a week. Such success in attracting people to education would normally result in an offer to run a failing school and a knighthood, but in this example all it resulted in was a large cheque with no questions asked. One is entitled to ask whether a suspicion has arisen through the payments that needs to be dispelled.

The system appears to have been wide open to fraud, from the alleged sale of ILA numbers direct from Capita—a serious matter reported in the papers at the weekend that must be addressed, one way or another—to setting up front companies for political extremists to draw down cash from the taxpayer, and virtually all points in between. The Government proudly tell us that this wonderful scheme far exceeded its targets, with 2.5 million account holders, but how on earth does the Minister know how many are genuine and how many are completely false?

Fourthly, under pressure, the Government panic and the rest of the country picks up the tab. The scheme was shut down suddenly in October, with the Government citing exceeded expectations rather than abuse. We asked if the shutdown was due to fraud, but we were told, in effect, no, because fraud allegations are such a tiny part of the picture. The scheme was then closed overnight, due to fraud.

[Alistair Burt]

Now, either the fraud was small scale, in which case why not attack it and leave the scheme alone, or the system was riddled with fraud, as providers allege, and should have been dealt with long ago. Of course, the scheme may have been running far beyond budget, so the Chancellor decided to close it down, which has become the most likely suggestion, but how can that be squared with the "expansion" mentioned in the Government's targets? Either way, the announced and then sudden closure has caused massive disruption, significant financial loss and, frankly, a horlicks of Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions proportions. Truly, this is the people's cock-up.

A constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), who apologises for being unable to attend, writes:

> "I am a local businesswoman, single with two small children who opened a commercial Internet centre in Waltham Cross. This centre opened in May 2001, using a £24k bank loan, which was guaranteed by my house.
>
> I was responding to market signals, with the provision of training grants to the individual, by creating a learning environment with internationally recognised computer courses, as well as applying for and receiving accreditation to be a recognised exam centre for the ECDL. Many of my learners are mature women returning to work or seeking to change career.
>
> The accreditation was received 1 week before the suspension of the ILAs. My investment in the necessary software, fees, accreditation fees, training for staff etc has been considerable, and on top of my initial investment.
>
> Yes, my purpose is to repay my bank loan, but the service and facilities at my learning centre are second to none. I open 7 days a week, with late nights for those who work, provide a supportive and welcoming environment . . . and genuinely care about the achievements of my learners.
>
> My investment, which was personally funded once again, is now a noose around my neck. The suspension of the ILA grants has meant no income flow for my investment, and my livelihood and my house are now in danger. I also have an obligation to my existing learners to be able to provide them with the access and facilities, as they have paid for their courses, but how do I do that with cash flow problems.
>
> I myself complained to the local council and the BSC about the shady and underhand tactics being used by third party marketing companies who were obtaining ILA forms in the hundreds in my local shopping centre, but I do not fall into that category, and had a visit to the learning provider taken place prior to being granted learning provider status much of the fraud could have been avoided.
>
> What now for me, and many centres like me, and what about my learners?"

Fifthly, the Government have not begun to understand the damage done to lifelong learning. Initiatives depend on trust and the public's willingness to get behind them, whether as individuals committing time and effort to a new future or as deliverers working in tandem with the Government to make something happen. If both lose confidence in the Government, how does the Minister expect to engage them again?

What lessons will be drawn from all this? The Government may offer a discount learning scheme to help people out, but it might be withdrawn virtually overnight. If people work with the Government to provide such schemes, the Government's overnight evacuation from responsibility may leave them high and dry, and facing substantial losses.

I have some questions. What have Scotland and Wales done that England did not do? Why is their scheme alive, well and flourishing? Why was the system so designed as to be incapable of stopping fraud and abuse? When problems were identified, no levers could be pulled to prevent the few from ruining it for the many. Having heard all that evidence, and there is much more to come, will the Minister reconsider his Department's responsibility to learning providers to ensure that future initiatives have credibility? What is the current state of criminal investigations? I tabled written parliamentary questions for answer yesterday, but I received a holding reply. How widespread is the fraud? Crucially, can he say anything about the allegations against Capita, which are most damaging of all?

Finally, who is going to pay? How much is all this costing? Following the Select Committee meeting—as my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk pointed out—the Minister has done his best to provide costings, which he currently estimates as £58 million prior to 23 November. How much more, and—crucially—where is it coming from?

In the Minister's letter of 30 November to the Chairman of the Select Committee, he tellingly used the phrase

> "The overspend will be met from within the Department's existing resources".

We all know what that means: the Treasury has been round and has said, "The cock-up is yours. You sort it out—don't come to us". Which part of the education budget is to pick up the bill for the overspend? Will it be that for primary schools, secondary schools, teachers, new buildings, transport to schools, higher education or further education? Whose pocket will be picked to sort out the mess? The sum of £58 million represents 2,500 teachers—half the Government's commitment to new teachers over the next few years.

I am sure that colleagues on both sides of the Chamber can make their own calculations of what could be done with £58 million of the education budget: or will the Minister go to Queen Anne's Gate and hand the bill to the Home Secretary and ask for a modest contribution from the author of the scheme? Where do we go from this point? What will the new scheme be and when will it kick in? We have tabled written questions and we are now asking for an answer.

In my political experience, I have rarely seen a can as large as the one that the Minister now has to carry. I am intrigued as to how he will go about it and curious to hear what he will say in answer to all our questions.

12.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (John Healey): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) on securing the debate. He gave a true reflection of his membership of the Public Accounts Committee in the forensic way that he introduced the subject. He is well placed to do so. I welcome his interest in the debate and in the Committee. It is a proper role for Parliament to examine exactly what the Government have done and what we plan to do to sort out the problems that we are uncovering.

The hon. Gentleman rightly stressed the importance of the issue to learners, to providers and also to taxpayers. However, although hindsight is a fine thing, proper scrutiny and accountability require accurate information and examination of the facts. It is not the case that the scheme was, as the hon. Gentleman maintained, riddled with scams before it started. I hope that the debate and, subsequently, the examination undertaken by the PAC will help accurately to consider the facts and set out the chronology, will look closely at the evidence for the problems and will make a judgment about the details of the action taken by me and my departmental colleagues.

Mr. Bacon: I do not recall using the phrase "riddled with scams from the outset"—the record will show whether I did. Does the Minister agree that the question is far from being merely one of hindsight and that there were people, such as Mr. James O'Brien from Pitman, who warned the Department? Warnings were issued, but they were wilfully ignored.

John Healey: The record will show that the hon. Gentleman talked about the fact that there were scams even before the start of the scheme.

As regards Mr. O'Brien's letter, he was one of several providers who took part in the design of the scheme—they participated in workshops and offered their views. It is true that Mr. O'Brien warned of possible abuse. He also pointed out that the cap to limit information and communications technology, ICT—80 per cent. discounts—was far too low; he argued that it should be set at £5,000. That would clearly have led to the use of much more public money.

In the context of the debate, I recognise how the decisions taken by my colleagues and me have left the constituents referred to by the hon. Gentleman. I hope to explain that the decisions were right and were indeed the only ones that we could have taken in the circumstances.

Ian Stewart (Eccles): I welcome the decisiveness shown by the Government. Having taken that decision, does my hon. Friend understand that my constituents—trade unions, non-governmental organisations and private training providers, whose hands are clean—want things to be moved on? They want a new scheme to be set up as soon as possible and they want the Government to consider transitional arrangements. Will the Minister refer to that during his speech?

John Healey: I shall indeed, and I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I shall cover compensation or transitional arrangements, as well as the work that we are undertaking to design and re-introduce a successor scheme.

The introduction of individual learning accounts was an important and innovative approach to getting people engaged in learning. When we introduced them, no one knew how they might work. They have far exceeded everyone's expectations. Our original aim was for 1 million ILA holders by March 2002. We beat that target by nearly a year. By July 2001, only 10 months after the national launch of the scheme, we had attracted 1.5 million account holders. At present, there are more than 2.6 million account holders in England alone.

The hon. Member for South Norfolk asked about the budget. He gave details of the information that I set out when I spent an hour and three quarters with the Select Committee on 28 November. At that stage I could not give all the information as we had not yet calculated it. However, on 30 November, I wrote to the Chairman—the letter cited by the hon. Gentleman—and shall ensure that the letter is placed in the Library.

In that letter, as the hon. Gentleman explained, I pointed out that we had spent more on the programme—and more quickly—than expected. The total budget over two years was £202.1 million, drawn from the annual budgets of the Department for Education and Skills and the resources of the training and enterprise council. By 23 November, the budget was committed to the tune of £260.9 million. That was not surprising as, in the context of a budget set to realise 1 million ILA holders by March 2002, 1.5 million accounts had been opened by the end of July 2001.

I appreciate the introductory comments made by the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), and realise that as the Minister who became responsible for the Child Support Agency he has some experience of my situation. However, the assertion that the most likely explanation is that the Chancellor closed down the scheme is an argument that beggars belief. It would be a unique event for an educational programme to be wound up for being too successful. If the point were not so serious, it would be laughable to suggest that Ministers are using the police inquiries as a cloak in which to bury a good policy.

The hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) quoted from *The Times Educational Supplement*. That paper was briefed on the latest details of the police investigations before it went to press, but chose to construct the story from which the hon. Gentleman quoted. My advice to him is straightforward: take no notice of such risible and wretched reporting; take more notice and a good look at the updated information that—as soon as I can do so—I shall regularly give the Chairman of the Select Committee on Education and Skills.

Alistair Burt: I am slightly puzzled as to where the overspend occurs in a scheme that was planned to expand. I understand the Minister's point that if the scheme is successful but forms part of future planning, there is no overspend. However, the use of the word "overspend" suggests that something has gone wrong with the budget. Will be clarify that?

John Healey: Yes, of course. The overspend is against the budget. The budget was set to achieve 1 million ILAs by March 2002. As I explained, we achieved 1.5 million by June 2001 and 2.6 million by October this year.

ILAs aimed to attract people back into learning, especially those who had a poor experience of previous learning—memories of failure, low esteem and lack of opportunity. From the outset, the decision was taken that it was vital to design a user-friendly system that avoided excessive bureaucracy and was, of course, simple to use.

Problems began to emerge this summer, however. Until July we had received 2,365 complaints—only 0.18 per cent. of the then 1.3 million account holders. At

[John Healey]

that time, one company was subject to a formal departmental investigation and no fraud was found to have taken place.

At the end of July, there was an increase in the number of complaints to 3,096. In particular, we had started to receive more complaints about misuse and mis-selling. We therefore took various steps to tighten up the operation and the rules of the programme, including new information for learners, a new provider agreement and a full re-registration process for learning providers. That resulted in 700 providers losing their ILA registration.

By the end of September, the number of complaints had increased to 6,053, which was equivalent to 0.25 per cent. of just under 2.4 million account holders. By then, we had also established a compliance unit to give us an additional resource to investigate the increasing volume of complaints; stopped the registration of new providers; withdrawn all the blank application forms distributed by learning providers; and required new ILA applicants to register themselves via the Capita website or the telephone helpline. All those moves sought to introduce a more robust procedure for people to open accounts and to control spending.

Within the terms of the programme, as it was designed, we were simply not able to stamp out the problem. By the end of October, the number of complaints had increased to 8,448, which was equivalent to 0.33 per cent. of the 2.5 million account holders.

Mr. Bacon: Will the Minister give way?

John Healey: I beg to be allowed to continue so that I can cover the points raised by the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members and deal properly with the debate.

Overall numbers of complaints have always been low, but in a very short time they almost doubled as a proportion of the number of account holders. By the end of October, the number of providers about whom we had received at least one complaint was 404, which was about 5 per cent. of those registered as learning providers for the scheme. Therefore, the trend in those late summer and early autumn months was an increase in the number of complaints, an increase in the nature of more serious complaints, and, consequently, increasing concern felt by me as a Minister and by officials in the Department.

We therefore came to the conclusion that the ILA programme was in need of a radical overhaul. That is what led to the decision to withdraw the programme, which was announced on 24 October by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. At that time she gave six weeks' notice that the programme would end in England on 7 December. The decision was difficult and not taken lightly. It was also reached bearing in mind the disappointment that it would cause to individual learners and the difficulties that it would inevitably cause to providers. I believe, however, that the decision has been vindicated by subsequent events: a continuing increase in the numbers of complaints and in the numbers of cases under investigation.

By 17 November, we had received 10,276 complaints, which was 0.39 per cent. of the number of ILA account holders. Of the 10,000-plus complaints that were logged since the start of the national scheme in the previous September, about 4,000 were about providers not complying with the rules of the scheme, mis-selling or potential fraud. The rest included complaints about the service of the ILA centre, the discount levels available for particular courses, cessation of the £150 opening offer and requests to backdate membership. There were also other complaints.

The complaints that seriously concerned us at that point related to 565 providers, which was almost 7 per cent. of the 8,500 that were registered with the ILA centre. The hon. Member for South Norfolk has cited one of the worst examples of the problems that crept into the system in recent months and with which we have had to start to deal: individuals discovering when they attempt to draw down their learning account that their account has been used already. That is a serious example of the problems encountered. It can be described at best as sharp practice and in the worst cases as outright fraud. The first suspension of an ILA provider because of that type of complaint and that type of fraud occurred on 25 June. The Department received the first letter in relation to that case on 11 June.

By 17 November, the Department had received 3,252 complaints from individuals claiming that money had been drawn from their ILA account without their knowledge or consent. The complaints were collated by the Department and the ILA-Capita centre. Those complaints are under investigation but are not yet substantiated.

We have serious concerns about 86 of the 565 providers in the system about whom we have had complaints. Sixty have already been referred for investigation, 27 are being investigated in co-operation with police, and six police forces are involved. So far there have been 39 arrests, with one charge, all of which relate to four learning providers. However, on top of all that, a new problem arose.

Mr. Chope: Will the Minister give way?

John Healey: No, I shall not. I have five minutes left to reply. I could speak to the hon. Gentleman after the debate.

Acting on new information about serious and sustained allegations of fraud and theft, the Department for Education and Skills special investigations unit confirmed those allegations. Subsequently, the Secretary of State and I took the decision to shut down the programme with immediate effect, from 6.30 pm on 23 November. That decision was taken to minimise a serious risk to public funds, and we called in the police at the same time.

Mr. Bacon: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, and I shall try to be brief. Is he aware that, on Monday, 19 November, individuals were going into training providers and saying, "You'd better buy these numbers that we're offering soon because they're closing the scheme this coming Friday", to which the training providers replied, "We know that they're closing it, but they're closing it on 7 December, as they announced", to which those selling the numbers said, "No, trust me—they'll be closing it this Friday." It turned out that the sellers were right.

John Healey: That information is very surprising.

Mr. Bacon: I was given it by a training provider.

John Healey: It is surprising.

The relevant evidence was brought to the attention of the DFES investigations unit on the Wednesday of that week. On Thursday, investigators visited the individual concerned and verified and confirmed the strength of the allegations. On Friday, the investigators informed Ministers of the position. On Friday afternoon, the Secretary of State and I held a video conference, and we closed down the operation that evening.

I hope that hon. Members will understand that I cannot give full details of the allegations as police investigations into them are continuing. I can say, however, that a significant number of ILA numbers had been stolen and were being offered for sale, with the prospect that they would then be used to claim money fraudulently from the Department. The evidence that we were able to substantiate immediately was sufficiently convincing to make us conclude that there was a serious risk to large amounts of public money. That is why we closed the programme immediately.

Our subsequent investigations have confirmed that the ILA numbers had been extracted without authority from the Capita database system. I hope that the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire will therefore accept that the decision to close down the scheme immediately was not, as he described it, premature.

In reply to the point made by the hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson), it was simply not possible to consult training providers because of the need to take immediate action. I am well aware that the closure affects training providers, and we are currently assessing that impact. However, I do not want to give the impression that we are able to put in place provision to support the business and funding streams of learning providers who made a business decision to use ILAs as an income source. Our principal concern has to be the public purse, and our principal responsibility has to be to individual learners. I therefore stand by my comments to the Select Committee.

The hon. Member for South Norfolk said that the reputation of good providers is being besmirched because of the bad ones. He is absolutely right that, so far, 60 providers are under investigation. Police are involved in 27 of those cases, and 47 providers have been suspended from the provider register. There may well be more suspensions as we work to get to the bottom of the abuse that the so-called learning providers have inflicted on the ILA system.

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): Will the Minister give way?

John Healey: I shall not.

Among those so-called learning providers are fraudsters who have burrowed their way into the learning system, acting like a cancer eating away at the opportunities that ILAs were creating for thousands of people. They are a minority seeking to milk the taxpayer with no regard to the deep harm that they were doing to individual learners and to the large number of decent learning providers who had seized on the ILA scheme to develop the support and services that they could offer to people from all walks of life in all parts of the country—

Mr. Bacon: What about the future?

John Healey: Make no mistake: where we confirm cases of fraud we shall pursue those providers for every penny that they have wrongly claimed from the public purse—[HON. MEMBERS: "What about the future?"]

As for the future, I have explained to the Select Committee the provision that we are putting in place. We are working hard on developing the design for a new scheme, and we shall re-introduce a scheme as soon as possible. The Secretary of State and I have given a cast-iron commitment that—

Mr. Peter L. Pike (in the Chair): Order. We must move on to the next debate.

Water Industry

12.30 pm

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I am very pleased to have secured this Adjournment debate. It gives me the opportunity not only to raise an issue of great interest to my constituents but to highlight a matter of importance to the public as a whole.

As well as speaking in my capacity as Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament for Plymouth, Sutton, I speak as chair of PURGe—the Public Utility Reform Group, a loose coalition of stakeholders with an interest in regulatory issues. The aim of the organisation is to ensure that regulation achieves a fair balance between stakeholders—customers, employees, shareholders and those representing the interests of communities. The latter group is particularly important in respect of environmental issues and our responsibility to pass our country on to future generations in at least as good a state as we found it.

In the short time that I have, I intend to detail some specific and urgent problems facing many people who receive water services from South West Water plc. However, those problems highlight just some of the issues that need to be dealt with in the forthcoming Water Bill. The Bill has been delayed, which is regrettable, although I believe that we now have the chance to ensure that this important piece of legislation enables us fully to address the challenges that lie ahead. As I shall argue, it is my conclusion that a new settlement is required which will take our water industry into the next decade.

However, let us start at the beginning, and in the south-west. Ofwat has just allowed South West Water to increase the bills of constituents by more than £26 in real terms over the period 2001-02 to 2004-05, rather than the original determination of a £13.79 real-terms increase. As if that were not bad enough, it must be borne in mind that our bills are already the highest in the country. A typical South West Water unmeasured household water and sewerage bill in the south-west of England is £357 per annum—before these increases are applied. That represents about 2 per cent. of income for a household with an income of £18,500, but 7.5 per cent. of the minimum income guarantee for a single pensioner on £92.15 per week.

A typical metered bill for south-west England is £218—a saving of £139. It is little wonder, therefore, that so many households have moved to having a metered supply. Such customers are estimated to number 55,011 in the period to 2004-05, which is above the November 1999 assumption of 32,698.

The problem is made worse by two Government policies—or perhaps I should say lack of policies. There is no policy that addresses the fact that the south-west has 30 per cent. of the United Kingdom's beaches but only 3 per cent. of the population. So those 3 per cent. pay for the cleaning up and improvements—very welcome and necessary—from which the whole population and many tourists benefit. These are national—some would say international—assets, and what economists call national public goods. Some mechanism that acknowledges that that is not fair would be most welcome. Arguably, the green dowry at the time of privatisation provided such a mechanism, but it grossly underestimated the value of our beaches and the costs associated with cleaning them up. Other mechanisms that come to mind are the energy efficiency and the fossil fuel levies. It has also been suggested that a mechanism that includes a cost benefit analysis of environmental improvements, similar to that required in respect of clean air standards, would help to achieve transparency.

There is another problem in the South West Water area—the growing number of people who are switching to water meters. That is not surprising, given that they can achieve savings on the scale outlined. I am pleased that our Water Industry Act 1999 removed the uncertainty of some as to whether they would benefit from a meter, by allowing them to change back at no cost. What about others such as the larger households, whose use does not allow them to benefit from a meter? Their bills are going up, not down, owing to water meters. We therefore have an iniquitous two-tier situation, with two different pricing mechanisms. While some poorer single households are benefiting and so are better-off single people, families who are far less well off are paying more.

The problem with meters in the south-west merely highlights a problem that must be addressed nationwide. The current system, under which non-metered customers pay according to the rateable value of their dwelling while metered customers pay according to usage, is inherently unstable across the country. As the take-up of metering continues, many households on low and medium incomes will lose out in terms of equity—not just the narrowly defined "vulnerable" group.

What, ultimately, are we to do? The absence of solutions and even debate, never mind policy, is alarming. I and others have serious doubts whether this problem—which is but one of a number of future or potential problems in the industry—would be containable within the current legal and regulatory framework. They are essentially political issues, and we should not lose the opportunity to answer them in the forthcoming Bill.

The Government have already made a series of significant, albeit piecemeal, changes with regard to the water industry, such as the very welcome ban on disconnections. While that was surely the right way to start, such changes, especially when combined with industry-inspired developments, eventually need to give way to a more all-embracing approach.

At the beginning of our second term, perhaps we should, with humility and caution, take heed of those who tell us that we may have responsibility for the nation's well-being for some time to come. In the case of the framework governing the water industry, this calls for a fundamental change of perspective. Whatever modifications were made during our first term to the system that we inherited, the challenge now is to create a system that will still function smoothly a decade or more hence.

Water privatisation was especially unpopular. After privatisation in 1989, prices rose by around 40 per cent. until 1999, since when they have fallen back by about 10 per cent., following the last price review. The number of employees has declined by almost a third since privatisation.

The balance of opinion seems to be that the regulatory system in water has delivered the investment to improve standards. That was, I understand, the major strategic objective at the time of privatisation. Of course, there have been some serious incidents—Camelford and the Yorkshire Water drought come to mind—and some serious criticism, over pay, for example. Nevertheless, the industry has by and large retained public confidence. It has not gone the way of Railtrack, and nor is it likely to do so. However, the structure of the industry and the way in which it operates have changed little since privatisation in 1989. On the whole, water companies continue as monopolies in their country, region or area. In most cases, they continue to own and operate the assets. The ban on taking one another over means that the biggest change has been the acquisition of the companies by foreign companies or domestic, non-water companies.

Beneath the surface, however, considerable pressures are building up, as detailed in a recent report by the New Policy Institute. I am grateful for its permission to draw at length on its report "Energy and Water: the Dangers Ahead". It identifies the following significant risks in the medium and long term. First, there is the long-term sustainability of continuing rises in environmental standards, price controls and the companies' continued reliance on borrowing to fund investment. The strains, which are significant in the south-west, are increasing and are likely to increase elsewhere, with no obvious mechanisms for resolving conflicting objectives. If the structure "gives", either the higher standards will not be achieved, or the companies will get into financial difficulties, or the price controls will have to be eased.

There need to be incentives for investment in infrastructure to maintain the current assets. Some incentives work in the opposite direction; in a short, five-year cycle of the price-setting process, within the regulatory system, investment is deferred where possible. There is an absence of immediate obvious problems if the replacement of ageing but functioning assets is postponed, but that may lead to serious and expensive problems over time. The concern here is more with the sewerage system. That is less discussed but it, rather than the clean water portion, is the larger part of the business and generates most of one's bill.

We also must factor in the balance between supply and demand. The potential for imbalances comes from changes in the climate and our use of water. In a nutshell, our use may go up—some say by as much as 75 per cent. in the next 25 years—yet there may be less rain as warmer weather continues.

The Environment Agency rightly takes a long-term view, but company actions depend on plans put forward to Ofwat within five-year planning cycles, which may be too short. Prolonged shortage—as well as, paradoxically, flooding—could become big political issues, and we must seize the day and, wherever possible, prevent and ameliorate those problems with new solutions. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made a huge contribution to getting companies and the regulator to recognise the scope and the need to tackle this issue through leakage reduction. That resulted in a commendable 27 per cent. reduction in the period to 2000, but that very success means that the further scope for that to contribute to companies' options and flexibility is limited.

The recent developments show that the industry is already trying to resolve some of its problems through various attempts—successful and unsuccessful—to restructure itself. Welsh Water, Glas Cymru, has managed to do so, and its assets and operations are now separated. Scotland is in the process of returning to one company after a brief, six-year experiment with three water boards. English companies are looking for ways to escape from the current industry structure, but there are dangers. Do we want yet more piecemeal change; or do we need an English solution, just as there are separate solutions in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, where I understand water and sewerage services are paid from general taxation?

Is it not time at least to relax the prohibition on mergers, so that companies can work together for the benefit of all stakeholders? There are also other opportunities, and we should not be afraid to think more widely. For example, we could have some element of public stakeholding in the ownership, or we could free up the companies, so that they develop as international water operators.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): My hon. Friend is making a powerful argument, but does she agree that accountability is still a great issue in the water industry? Does she envisage a role for the regional development agencies or regional assemblies in forthcoming years?

Linda Gilroy: I thank my hon. Friend for that intelligent intervention; she took the words right out of my mouth. We should also examine what roles there may be for the RDAs, regional chambers or, indeed, regional government, and we look forward to the forthcoming White Paper in the new year. If we are to face a period of higher prices to finance improved standards, a model of greater, more open and transparent accountability than we have at present will almost certainly prove necessary.

There is also the matter of the introduction of competition in water. Although the NPI report does not examine that issue in detail, it does raise the question whether competition is the right big challenge with which to present the industry when other strategic issues clearly need to be addressed. Competition would certainly seem to have the potential to produce only a limited effect on the problems that I mention.

The report suggests that there is a sense in which the future of the water industry is uncertain in a way that it was not just five years ago. There are increasing challenges and questions that suggest that the settlement made at the time of privatisation no longer serves and ought to be revisited, and that a new settlement is needed. Besides clarifying the industry's public policy objectives, such a settlement would set out an intellectual framework to guide the resolution of conflicts between environmental, social and economic goals. It would also establish an institutional framework which, while allowing the industry room to develop of its own accord, could steer it as time passes and new circumstances arise.

[Linda Gilroy]

Such a settlement could only be created following a review. The Government should take note of that analysis, and I urge them to initiate such a review in water. There is a clear opportunity, given that the new Water Bill is not due until the autumn of 2002. A water review needs to focus on the underlying conflicts now present and the intellectual framework needed to resolve them. In particular, it needs to focus on the tension between meeting environmental standards, the costs of financing the investment to achieve them and charging consumers fair and affordable prices. The instability and possible lack of sustainability in the current two-part pricing structure should also be addressed. as should the scope for new forms of ownership and organisation.

I mention the possible role for regional assemblies and the contribution that a new mutual structure for the industry might achieve, learning the lessons from Glas Cymru. On 16 November, *Utility Week* reported that efficiency savings at Welsh Water have generated savings of £41 million, which has been earmarked for extra investment. The developing technical and legal body of knowledge being amassed by the mutual sector and its new project "Communicate Mutuality", which I recommend to the Minister, will enable it to launch its new publishing arm, Mutuo, later this week. One of its first publications is entitled, "Ownership Matters—New Mutual Business Models", and has great relevance to today's debate.

A wide-ranging review would also help the Government decide whether competition is the right big issue to guide and shape the industry in the future. In addition, the review would need to address two issues: whether responsibility for driving forward the Government's social agenda for those industries could be vested in a separate institution devoted to the task; and how multiple regulators should take one another's concerns into account, as well as how conflicts between them should be resolved.

That is a lot of questions, but I conclude by reminding the Minister of the problem in the south-west. The challenge that we have faced and continue to face is perhaps a harbinger of things to come. It is clear that those questions need to be resolved by all the stakeholders, companies, unions, consumers and academics, as well as by local, regional and national government in the coming months. If in considering those questions we can perhaps find a solution to the unfairness that is the legacy of the Conservative privatisation programme with which we in the south-west in particular live, my constituents and those elsewhere would welcome it greatly.

12.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): As you know, Mr. Pike, it is traditional to congratulate hon. Members on obtaining an Adjournment debate to raise an issue of their choice. I should like to place on record the fact that I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) has made a genuinely thoughtful and intellectual contribution to a very complicated issue. She has suggested a thoughtful way forward in relation to the water and sewerage services that are provided in our country. I also very much welcome the intervention made by my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton), who also raised some important issues.

As a regular visitor to the west country, I am well aware of the concern that was felt post-privatisation. Privatisation was deeply unpopular, and a significant increase in prices took place at that time. Indeed, the people of the south-west now have to face that legacy, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton has referred. As you will know, Mr. Pike, many years ago, I served on the Committee that considered the Water Act 1989, under which the water companies were privatised. Many of the issues to which my hon. Friend refers were raised at that time, and some of the problems that have arisen since then are no surprise. The question is where we go from here. That is what my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton focused on, and I congratulate her on doing so.

The Government have made much progress in relation to water provision since 1997. Leakage has been cut by a third. Drinking water is now the safest ever, and rivers and beaches are cleaner. There are improved metering rights, including the right to a free water meter, which is of particular interest in the south-west. Compulsory metering has been ended, which was a big issue in my constituency and other parts of the country. There is a scheme to help vulnerable groups with high water use and low incomes. All that is very important.

After privatisation in 1989, average household bills increased steadily, especially in the south-west. In 1999, a review was introduced, which caused water bills to be reduced, on average, by 12 per cent. across the country and by the 12.2 per cent. in the south-west, which was very much appreciated at the time, although it did not reflect the huge increase in prices that took place in 1998. I am glad to say that, by 31 March 2005, the average household bill will still be lower in real terms than in 1999, although that suggests that the price increase at that time was very large.

Ms Atherton: The problem with average bills is that we in the south-west are at the top end of the scale. If we were taken out of the equation, the average bill would be significantly lower. We are asking for special measures for the south-west to reduce the national average.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is right. We have to be careful about averages, because the south-west is at the top end of average prices. The issue is how we can best address the particular problems that the west country faces.

My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton put forward some interesting suggestions and asked some pertinent questions, which I shall try to address. As she knows, prices are reviewed every five years. The reviews take account of quality improvements, asset maintenance, and savings made through improved efficiency. South West Water operates under the price limits that were set in 1999. Those imposed a sizeable cut in prices in 2000-01, followed by very small increases to 2004-05. The overall effect would be a decrease of £36 in the average annual household bill by 2004-05. We are back to the issue of averages.

It is important to be aware of what the bills are paying for. To be fair to South West Water, that includes modernising 5,500 km of drinking water mains and replacing old and rusting pipes which can lead to water becoming discoloured. The river quality objectives will be achieved for 93 per cent. of river length in the area by 2005, and that is good. At the same time, leakage has been reduced by 40 per cent. since 1995-96.

Water companies can apply for interim determinations to increase their price limits because of specified material changes in their circumstances. This year, South West Water appealed for an increase in price limits for four reasons. First, it had a higher than expected take-up of the free metering option. As my hon. Friend said, that was a popular option in the south-west, for understandable reasons.

Secondly, there was an increased spend to meet costs of monitoring cryptosporidium, following requirements placed on companies by the drinking water inspectorate. Thirdly, the company cited costs associated with the climate change levy and, fourthly, changes to the programmes to reduce lead in water. All those are desirable objectives, but they should all be included in the company's forward investment programme.

Ofwat scrutinises closely requests for a change in price limits. In its draft consultative response, Ofwat proposed to accept aspects of some of South West Water's points, but it has questioned and reassessed the costings made by South West Water. In the case of the costs associated with climate change levy, Ofwat proposes to reject that claim, because the costs should be neutral overall. The assessments are only preliminary, but Ofwat expects that the effect would be that the average household bill in the south-west would go up by £27 between 2001-02 and 2004-05—as my hon. Friend suggested. That is compared to the projected cost of £14 at the time of the 1999 periodic review. I accept that that is a significant increase, but the average household bill will still be less in 2004 than it was in 1999. However, I will bear in mind the point made about average costs. Having considered all the comments on its consultation, Ofwat will announce its final decision on South West Water's application by 14 December.

My hon. Friend also spoke about the more general future of the industry. As chair of the Public Utility Reform Group—PURGe—she takes a great interest in the future of water and energy utilities. She referred to the draft Water Bill, which already addresses a number of issues facing the industry, and many people look forward to its introduction.

Linda Gilroy: Will my hon. Friend acknowledge that a lot of water has gone under the bridge since the draft Bill, and that the changes taking place in the structure of the industry merit closer examination?

Mr. Morley: I agree, and I shall shortly address some of the detailed points that my hon. Friend made. One of the advantages of a major Bill such as a Water Bill, which we aim to introduce once we have parliamentary time, is the opportunity to consult on it and take into account issues such as the important ones raised by my hon. Friend. That consultation will influence the Government's thinking on the final shape of the Bill.

At the moment, the Water Bill will include measures aimed at reforming abstraction licensing and improving water management and conservation. That is important in the south-west, as it is all over the country. It will include measures to require water undertakers to prepare and maintain drought plans to address how a water undertaker might restrain demand for water in its area. Recently much of my time has been taken up with the opposite of drought, but we should not forget that parts of the country experienced severe droughts only a few years ago. We need to look ahead and take into account the rising demand for water for domestic, industrial and agricultural purposes. Those demands have to be balanced and managed thoughtfully. The Bill will also include proposals to create a consumer council for water, which will be independent of Ofwat. It will provide advice to customers and represent their interests. It will also include measures to improve accountability, including increasing the scope and availability of public information on water resources.

My hon. Friend referred to a recent report by the New Policy Institute. The report raised a number of points that are fundamental to the water and sewerage service in England and Wales. My hon. Friend mentioned the debate about the most appropriate structure for the water industry. Is it public ownership or private? Is there a role for mutual ownership? My hon. Friend gave some examples of mutual ownership, which were very interesting, and the mutual models could have a role to play in providing essential public sector infrastructure. Those areas are worthy of exploration. Other issues include the shift from equity to debt, the rising demand versus the effects of climate change, and the gradual shift from unmeasured to metered charging. That is a logical shift in relation to the most sustainable use of water resources.

I know that my hon. Friend wishes to discuss the NPI report and my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment would welcome a meeting with her—and with Ofwat—to discuss the issues and their relevance to future models. My hon. Friend will be aware that she raises fundamental questions that require some thought and discussion. I know that she will wish to be involved in that.

The Government are aware of the challenges facing the industry. We aim to produce a water industry strategy paper for consultation in the new year. Without being complacent, we must not forget the water industry's successes and the quality of drinking water and river and coastal waters that we enjoy as a result, and I know that my hon. Friend regards that as important. I have been pleased with the improvements that we have seen around our coastline, and that many of our beaches now meet the bathing water directive.

Linda Gilroy: I hope that in his consultation my hon. Friend will also address the problem that I raised of 3 per cent. of the population having to pay for the cleaning up of 30 per cent. of the coastline.

Mr. Morley: I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes. Our beaches, coastline, water quality and marine and river habitats are of national importance and interest. The Government inherited a structure that was not of our making and has those inherent weaknesses. To bring about changes in that structure,

[Mr. Morley]

we will need to address the fundamental issues that my hon. Friend raised in her thought-provoking speech. The issues will not be easy to resolve and I do not wish to give my hon. Friend a false impression. However, she has correctly identified serious issues that will face her region and her constituents. We will take seriously the issue of future structures for the water industry and I hope that the Water Bill will give us that opportunity.

Horse Racing

12.59 pm

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): I am delighted to have secured this Adjournment debate. As the Minister will appreciate, however, I did not choose its timing, so I apologise for the effect that it will have on his gastric juices.

Given the paranoia that the House has shown about the declaration of interests, I must declare my interest. I have had ponies and horses all my life and I have been fascinated by them. The financial arrangement involved has not been to my advantage; it has been a distinctly one-way trip. I have been fortunate enough to acquire a little bay colt yearling that will completely reverse all the losses of the past. Such dreams have kept owners going over the years and I look forward to a year or so of reflected glory starting in a few months' time.

I hope that the Minister will excuse me if I make a series of bullet points rather than develop my arguments. To give full justice to the financing of racing, we would need several hours.

The title of the debate is "Horse Racing", but perhaps I should have added the word "industry". Despite all the pleasure and sport involved, it is a huge industry that is much bigger than most of the industries that regularly attract the Government's collective eye. In common with many industries, horse racing will migrate if we do not get its financing right. The participants will go to where the grass is not just seen to be greener but is, in fact, greener.

I wish, for example, to draw attention to the tax regime for the stallion industry. Compared to southern Ireland, those running a stud in the UK are at a distinct financial disadvantage. Southern Ireland companies have been able to buy stallions and pay more for them. Buying better stallions means that more mares are sent to them, and revenue accrues from the travelling of those mares. If one has more mares, one has more foals; if one has more foals, one has more runners; and if one has more runners; one has more winners. It is a virtuous circle.

I am worried by the distinct decline that there has been in this country's stallion industry. This country is the birthplace of racing and I do not want that decline to continue. I do not expect the Minister to comment on the funding of the stallion regime—we can return to the subject at a later date—but I would be interested to hear his views if he has the relevant notes with him.

On the specifics, we must keep in mind the basis on which the whole industry rests—the owners. The returns forthcoming to owners in the UK show that they are among the worst treated. I will not run through the whole list, but the figures for total prize money compared with the total cost of keeping and training a horse show that, on average, a Japanese owner gets 80 per cent. of his expenses back. The second lowest return is found in Germany, with 36 per cent., but we are at the bottom, with 21 per cent. Those figures are not sustainable and will not provide our racing with a firm foundation on which to develop.

As I have said, racing is a huge leisure industry. It therefore needs money to help it to grow into the industry of the size and quality that we want it to be. The salaries paid to the staff engaged by trainers are rather low, and they should be higher. Pension rights should be improved so that those caring for and training horses can follow a distinct career.

Some race courses in this country are fine. Brand new grandstands have been built and the improvements are to be commended. However, a huge number of race courses are very old and in urgent need of replacement. We also need funding to continue the veterinary research that is so important. I know that this issue is of great concern to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

It is not all bad news. Over the past few years, we have made tremendous progress and much credit should go to those involved in the industry, to the Government and to Mr. Peter Savill, who has been a driving force in taking steps to producing a sustainable basis for racing's future. The Government are to be congratulated on introducing a gross profit arrangement, rather than a general betting duty, for the bookmaking industry. That has been welcomed by all. It is particularly appreciated by the punters, and I fondly hope and believe that greater income will accrue to the industry and to the bookmaking industry.

The Government are also to be congratulated on the review that has been carried out by Sir Alan Budd. With one hiccup—the proposal to remove slot machines from clubs, which is a retrograde move—the thrust of the review has been positive. The bookmaking and gaming industry in this country has integrity and compares well with those elsewhere in the world. I do not see why it should not be allowed to expand and to produce more revenue for the Government as well as profit for those in the industry.

I hope that the VAT registration scheme that is available for owners will continue. If it does not, the type of migration that has resulted from the stallion regime will take place. If the scheme were to be removed, the effect on horse sales in this country would be catastrophic. I have bought horses in Ireland and the UK, but I would immediately be placed under pressure to buy horses in Ireland rather than at Tattersall's. That would be a crying shame.

The industry produces £500 million in tax revenue each year for the Government; it employs 60,000 people; and it affects every walk of life. If we add the 40,000 people who work in the betting industry, we can grasp the scale of the activities with which we are dealing.

We face some difficulties, however. I welcome the announcement that will determine the future structure and ownership of the Tote. I understand why the Government wish to introduce a new funding mechanism that is based on a direct commercial arrangement between the racing and betting industries and which will replace the commercial levy. I also understand why the Government wish to introduce all that in one Bill. However, the manner of the breakdown in the negotiations on the replacement of the levy is such that I doubt that the problem will be speedily resolved by normal negotiation.

I know that the Minister is aware of the problem, so it will come as no surprise to him when I enter the plea that legislation to determine the future of the Tote should be allowed to proceed without delay. A number of parliamentary mechanisms are available to speed such legislation on its way. Not least is the private Bill procedure, and people will appreciate its use because that mechanism was responsible for the Tote's birth in the first place.

Like many in racing, I regret, although I am not surprised, that the racing and betting industries did not reach an agreement on the levy replacement. This is not the time or place to drag out a blow-by-blow account of what went wrong. I have seen the proposals, counter-proposals and counter-counter-proposals and know that the problem has swung backwards and forwards. There is no benefit in regurgitating what went on, but the two sides are in a situation that is unacceptable for the long-term benefit of racing. It cannot be allowed to continue. The dispute is not in the best interest of the sport and must be resolved.

The matter is with the Minister for determination. I understand why he desperately wanted to avoid that, and he has my sympathy. However, he has to make the decision. I do not envy him his task. Faced with the instigation of an inquiry into the sport by the Office of Fair Trading, the appeal by William Hill on data rights and the difference between the two parties on the levy, it would be sensible to take some time out. That could be purchased by continuing the existing levy scheme, which has the advantage of being easily understood by all members and so would not require explanation or selling.

The Government have to take a greater and more proactive role. I leave it up to the Minister to decide whether he sets up a small group to hear both sides of the argument and to calculate the processes and procedures. There has to be an investigation, in some shape or form, based on independent research that looks abroad to see how other racing authorities are financed. On the raw data, it appears that Britain is low down the list when it comes to finance. We have to examine the figures to see what odds the bookmaking industry offers the punters on particular races and whether the return abroad is lower than it is in the United Kingdom. We need an equity and an understanding. It might be decided that the bookmakers can maintain the same level of profitability, but must slightly shave the odds so that they help to finance racing and it continues to be successful.

I am not going to develop my thoughts on that further. The facts and figures need to be in front of us and understood by both sides of the industry so that we know where we stand. The problem must be resolved. There has to be a replacement for the levy, because racing cannot develop and expand until its financial base is secure. The Minister might have a replacement scheme for the levy which he is ready to roll. If so, this is the ideal time and place to make that announcement, and I shall be delighted to hear it. If not, in my usual calm, collected and courteous fashion, and on bended knee, I ask him to consider my comments and I look forward to hearing his response.

1.14 pm

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): I congratulate the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) on initiating the debate. It is time to take stock of the industry. The hon. Gentleman is well informed because he is joint chairman of the all-

[Mr. Richard Caborn]

party racing and bloodstock industries group. I have had the privilege of addressing that group, which has an interesting mix of members.

On Budd, it is important to see the bigger picture. It is Government policy to modernise the gambling industry, which is a multi-billion pound concern. In the light of the development of information technology and the way in which gambling is changing, we thought it right to take stock because the Act that governs the vast majority of gambling was put on the statute book in the 1960s. Electronic gambling is coming into effect and we have to decide what role the British gambling industry will play in the international field. As Budd explained, that would need primary legislation.

We instituted the Budd inquiry and it produced a good report that sets the agenda for modernisation. We put it out to a consultation that closed towards the end of October, after three months. We are reflecting on that and I hope that we will give the Government's considered reply early in the new year. I am mindful that uncertainty is not good for business. The gambling industry is an expensive commodity and we want it to know how we will manage our decisions. Of course, we need to get time on the Floor of the House, but at least the industry will have some certainty.

I will deal with gaming machines in clubs. Of 2,000 responses, about 1,500 were on gaming machines in Conservative clubs, Labour clubs, Liberal clubs and working men's clubs. The consultation created quite a hoo-hah. Nevertheless, we will cover that and other important issues. I did not realise until I took responsibility for gambling that the integrity of the industry is internationally renowned and respected. We want to keep that important ingredient if we deregulate or modernise gambling. I hope to ensure also that we have a sustainable industry.

On the specific issues, yesterday I had the privilege of cutting the first sod at the residential block of the Northern Racing college in Doncaster. It is one of only two such colleges, Newmarket being the other. When it is built, the residential block will accommodate 40 to 50 young people who attend the college to learn about the arts of riding. Hopefully, it will produce our future jockeys. I could not agree more that we have to look carefully at how we invest in the human capital of the racing industry to ensure that it is of a high professional standard and is sustainable.

Yesterday I suggested that we have a meeting with the industry, probably in late spring or early summer next year. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman's all-party group can consider that, and I shall be pleased to talk to him about it. The industry should come together to consider how best to invest in its future through the young people whom I spoke to at the college. The social inclusion agenda has had a considerable impact. Young offenders who went on a 10-week course have been placed with owners around the country. Hopefully they will realise that it is better to earn a living through racing than through crime, and that is welcome.

The taxation system as it relates to the stallion regime and the industry is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. No doubt he will consider that. He took a favourable approach to the gambling tax, which the industry welcomed.

I cannot say much about the levy because, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, the matter has been referred to the Secretary of State and me for determination. Like the hon. Gentleman, I am sorry that the industry was unable to come together to find a solution to the problem. In the wider gambling industry of which horse racing is a part, genuine opportunities will arise as a result of the removal of the levy, and we are trying to open up a dialogue about that and about privatising the Tote. The Chancellor's action on the gambling tax demonstrated our belief that the industry was ready for growth and modernisation, so it was disappointing that, in such an atmosphere, the industry was unable to respond by setting the levy. However, that is life. We will have to come to conclusions on those matters, and I hope that we will do so sooner than later.

The industry's lack of confidence was disappointing. Battle lines had been drawn which reinforced a "them and us" approach. I hope that the industry can work together to agree on the highest, rather than the lowest, common denominator—the latter sometimes bedevils its progress. I think that it has a tremendous future and that this can be a win-win situation.

There are commercial negotiations for the sale of racing's media rights, which have been assumed to be a replacement for the levy, but that implies technical links that do not exist. The negotiations are separate. The levy was established some years ago to protect the industry and off-course betting, and we believe that it has now outlived its usefulness and it is right to remove it. We will then return to the marketplace. The sale of the media rights will also take place, but that is a commercial proposition that must be negotiated properly, as it would in any marketplace.

There have been major debates about what will replace the levy when it is eventually abolished. I respect what the hon. Gentleman has said, and I will take on board his remarks about what should replace the levy, but that is a matter for future discussions.

We would like to privatise the Tote sooner rather than later, and we would like to introduce that measure in a Bill that will also abolish the levy, but the timing of that is up to those who manage Parliament's business, and like Ministers in every Department, we are at their mercy. However, the Government's intention has been established, and the introduction of the legislation is only a matter of time. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's comments about a private Member's Bill. I think he knows that measures with financial implications are not usually introduced in such Bills.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for initiating this debate on horse racing, which is an important part of the wider gambling industry. It provides many jobs, it has integrity and it is loved by many throughout the country. That situation may be unique. In France, the number of those attending race meetings is considerably smaller than it is in the UK, and England in particular. Horse racing is a part of our heritage which I hope we can continue to develop and modernise. I am sure that if the industry is prepared to form a stronger partnership, this can be a win-win situation for everybody.

1.24 pm

Sitting suspended.

Office for National Statistics (Runcorn)

1.30 pm

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale): It is customary to start by saying that is a pleasure to have an Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall, but the topic of this debate does not give me or my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) any pleasure; we are here to record our dissatisfaction and discontent at the decision to close the Runcorn office of the Office for National Statistics. My hon. Friend and I act as a partnership and have spent a great deal of time in the past four or five years trying to make sure that we secure a future for the ONS in Runcorn. We are therefore disappointed at last month's decision.

To understand that decision, we must look at the history of the Runcorn operation. Just after the 1997 election, my hon. Friend and I went to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell), who was then Economic Secretary to the Treasury, to impress on her the need to keep it running. A review of ONS operations concluded that there was no economic justification for closing the Runcorn office because the cost of redundancies at Runcorn would far outweigh savings that would be made by transferring the operation to Newport. My right hon. Friend therefore decided to keep the Runcorn office open, giving it a guaranteed future for five years. There was a proviso, however, because it was made clear to us that if the economic situation changed and the cost of redundancies went down, it might be economic to close the Runcorn office. The decision, therefore, was to be reviewed and revisited.

As we approached the end of the five-year review period, my hon. Friend the Member for Halton and I went to see the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, our hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Ruth Kelly), to talk about the future of the Runcorn office. It was obvious that the economic arguments for closing the office had not been made. We tried to impress on her the fact that the ONS had made known its wish to close the Runcorn office for managerial convenience; it is a small office, and the ONS did not think that it had a future. Its preferred option was therefore to close the office.

We were certain that in 1997 the ONS had been given two opportunities to deal with the problem—to transfer work from any other part of the organisation to the Runcorn site, thereby offering the office a viable opportunity to survive and a sustainable future, or to move staff from the Runcorn office, reducing redundancy costs and making it economic to close the office. However, it did neither of those things, which surprised me; instead, it tried to allow the Runcorn office to wither on the vine. That is not good management, and it created a bad feeling among the work force, whose morale was low, having been poorly managed for four or five years as a direct result of the ONS decision to allow the office to wither on the vine.

When my hon. Friend and I went to see our hon. Friend the Economic Secretary, we gave her a straightforward message. We told her that we were not interested in any arguments about closing the Runcorn office for the convenience of ONS management. We said that the work force were loyal, had been there a long time and were committed to the ONS; we did not want the office to be closed for the convenience of management. We wanted a comprehensive and transparent review of the whole ONS operation to take a proper look at what was going on in the ONS, recognise what it needed to do to meet the challenges of the 21st century and identify problem areas—clearly Runcorn is a problem for the ONS. We wanted the ONS to put all that together in a comprehensive review and come up with a blueprint for taking the organisation into the 21st century.

The ONS could have looked at the major problem of office space in London. It has expensive, overcrowded offices in London, where recruitment and retention are a problem; it could easily have tackled that by distributing work to Runcorn, where office accommodation is abundant and cheap. Employment costs are far lower in Runcorn than in the capital and retention and recruitment are far easier. Such a review could have taken place but, sadly, it did not. Instead, there was a review of the Runcorn office in isolation to see how the particular problem that had been found there could be tackled.

The National Statistician made an announcement on 13 November giving a number of less-than-convincing reasons for deciding to close the Runcorn office. He started by mentioning something that those of us interested in the ONS had known for some time: that integrating a small office in Runcorn with the major statistical centre at Newport was a long-term problem. In this day and age, that should not be a problem; with modern technology, we could have remote working. A range of information technology should mean that such working is not a problem for anybody—and certainly not for anybody with any imagination.

The National Statistician said the ONS wanted greater integration of statistical processes, and that its operations would be driven by new technologies. I do not see that that is a problem; if the ONS wants new technology, there is no reason whatsoever why it could not install it at Runcorn. The National Statistician also said:

> "Staff will have to be re-skilled and work processes changed".

Again, there is no barrier to re-skilling the staff at Runcorn and changing the work processes, which could be connected by a remote link to those in Newport. The National Statistician then came up with a gem:

> "Over the next 4/5 years ONS will employ fewer staff across all its sites."

Of course, in the next four or five years, the ONS will not employ fewer staff at Runcorn; it will not be employing any, but that is no reason to close the office. At the end of his statement, the National Statistician returns to an old chestnut:

> "Runcorn does not fit into these plans because it is too small".

If Runcorn is too small, it is because it has been kept that way by the ONS, and that problem could have been tackled.

Almost as a throwaway, we were told:

> "The move will make the Newport site more efficient and flexible and it will strengthen the statistical services it provides."

I do not disagree; the move may well achieve those aims. However, that is not a strong enough justification for the decision to close the Runcorn site.

[Mr. Mike Hall]

The Runcorn decision appears to have been made in isolation; there was no full and comprehensive review of ONS operations, and the process has not been transparent. The ONS has provided a feeble excuse for closing Runcorn, which it is doing for the convenience of management. There is no strategic overview to the decisions and the ONS has not taken the opportunity to tackle the problems that it faces in the 21st century. Sadly, it has not shown any vision or the will to keep the Runcorn office open. The decision will cost up to £5 million in redundancy costs; that money could be used to strengthen ONS services elsewhere.

I shall conclude with a straightforward point. We would like the decision to be put on hold; we doubt very much that that will happen but we would like to press the Economic Secretary for a response. There should be a full, comprehensive and transparent review of what the ONS wants to do in the UK to meet the challenges of the 21st century. It should look at all ONS operations, not just the Runcorn problem in isolation, and should come up with a blueprint of what can be done in future. It would benefit my local community and be in the Government's interest to move work from the capital to Runcorn. Government always bring benefits, such as an economic benefit, because they spend a lot of money, employ a lot of people and do a lot of work, and we should share those benefits throughout the regions. That would be a great benefit to the borough of Halton. My hon. Friend the Member for Halton will elaborate on the fact that Halton is the 18th most deprived borough in the UK. We need more Government investment, not less. The work force need the Government to say that they are committed to the site in Runcorn and that the work force have a future. That is a challenge. It may take five or six months to carry out a review, but it should not be difficult.

If, at the end of the day, we still cannot make a case for keeping the Runcorn site open, we might have to accept its closure, but I am not convinced that the measures that we have asked for have been taken. The work force in Runcorn, who have given dedicated service in the employment of Government over a number of years, have not been treated fairly.

Even though there are still 12 months to go, the ONS has already made a decision to take work away from the Runcorn site. That is wrong and has left the work force feeling even more demoralised. I hope that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary can give us some comfort and will undertake to reconsider the decision.

1.40 pm

Derek Twigg (Halton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall) on securing the debate, which is of great importance to us locally, and on his excellent contribution setting out the background and our concerns as local Members of Parliament. As colleagues, we work closely for the Halton borough and we have had many successes as a result of that partnership, but on the present issue we have not had the success that we hoped for. However, that does not detract from the need for a case to be made for keeping the Office for National Statistics at Runcorn and for questions to be asked about the decision that was taken.

It is worth pointing out the human aspect of the case. I have worked with a number of people who now work in the ONS. I know what a tragedy the decision is for people who previously worked in Runcorn at the Department for Education and Employment and at the ONS site. Many people have been there for well over a decade—16 years or more. The work force is well established and have given their loyalty and commitment to Government and to the need to provide a good service.

The loss of those jobs would be a loss to the local economy. They are good-quality jobs, requiring specific skills. As my hon. Friend mentioned, Halton is the 18th most disadvantaged borough in England and Wales, so any job loss is a blow. Only a few years ago, the work force numbered 120 to 140, but now only 80 to 90 people are employed at the ONS. You will know, Mr. Pike, of the various economic pressures in the north-west and the loss of jobs that is occurring. We want to avoid that.

The only positive aspect of the decision about the future of ONS Runcorn is the fact that a decision has been made. It has been outstanding for a number of years, which has had an effect on staff. Despite the decision, people who work at the site have told me that they still have not been given adequate information to justify the closure. They have suffered much frustration and stress over the years. As my hon. Friend noted, there was an argument about the business case four and a half years ago. We proved that there was no business case, and the then Minister accepted our argument. We were therefore surprised when the ONS outlined the reasons for the current decision, which in our view moves the goalposts.

One of the factors that has been mentioned in our discussions is investment in new technology and in the management systems for the ONS. Given that new technology can stretch out around countries and continents, I find it difficult to see that as an important argument for closing the office at Runcorn. On the contrary, it is probably an argument for keeping it open.

We accept that the Runcorn site is the smallest; it was part of a general Government office site in Runcorn. The efforts made by the Department for Education and Skills to ensure that exit jobs were created at the Runcorn site of its headquarters across the road from the ONS site have sustained and consolidated the Department's headquarters buildings there. ONS management did not seem to want to go down the same road, even though it has been proven that that can be done.

My hon. Friend outlined the argument for transferring jobs out of London, where there are hundreds of employees in a very expensive building. Some, if not all, of those jobs could be transferred to Runcorn, which has a higher level of unemployment, social stress and disadvantage. Not only would that be good for us in Halton, but it would be good for the Government. The cost of jobs and buildings in London is much higher, staff turnover is much greater, and keeping good-quality staff is much more difficult. None of those is a problem in Runcorn and Halton. I do not understand why ONS management did not consider that feasible.

The decision took a long time to be reached. That may be due partly to the representations made by us and others in favour of retaining the site at Runcorn. During that time, management provided little information. I know that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary has been in post for but a few months and I do not blame her or her predecessors. Management were lax about providing regular information to staff, which is part of the reason why such frustration has built up among staff, and why they would rather have even a negative decision than none at all. They have had enough of the way in which they have been treated. That illustrates how the ONS has been managed in recent times.

From speaking to members of staff and constituents at the Runcorn site, I know that they feel that they should have the opportunity to get another job locally or to take a redundancy package if that suits them. There is talk of avoiding compulsory redundancies. When managers went to the site to talk to staff on the day that the decision was made, they gave the impression that they did not expect any problem in finding jobs for staff or making available a proper redundancy package for those who wanted to take it. That is what some people want; they are keen to move on and find new careers. I want my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to be aware of what staff were promised on the day that the meeting took place.

I should be interested to know what consultation took place with personnel managers in the Department for Education and Skills prior to the announcement and since. There is a rumour going around, which may not be true but which I should make public, that personnel managers in the DFES were surprised to learn that they were so closely involved in trying to find a solution. I could be wrong, but this is probably the right forum in which to mention the rumour. What response has been forthcoming from personnel managers in the DFES about providing help in finding new jobs?

There is concern among staff—which demonstrates their commitment—about whether ONS will be able to provide the same service post-Runcorn or even in the immediate future, or whether there are moves afoot to reduce the services that the ONS supplies to its customers and users.

I cannot stress enough how loyal the staff have been at the Runcorn site, and how hard working, how committed and how skilled they are. They would clearly prefer the decision to be reversed so that they could have a future and a career there. I shall not repeat the arguments that my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale presented so coherently and succinctly about why we believe that the decision could still be reversed and the jobs saved.

I wonder whether part of the problem is the way in which the ONS has been managed. Again, I stress that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary has been in the job for only a few months, but I am sure that she is aware of some of the shortcomings that have been mentioned. I believe that ONS management have let down the staff at Runcorn, have not managed the situation well for a number of years and are still not managing it well. I believe that some of the issues that have arisen in the ONS in the past year or two indicate poor management control and involvement. I want my hon. Friend to be aware of the concerns that have been expressed about those issues. I am sure that, being new in her job, she will consider them.

Finally, the closure of the Runcorn office is a loss to Halton and to the local economy. These are the sort of skills that we can ill afford to lose. I make it clear to my hon. Friend the Minister that there is still a great deal of anger about the decision. We feel that the jobs should still be saved and that jobs should be brought to Runcorn from the London headquarters of the ONS.

1.50 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): It is a pleasure to be here under your chairmanship, Mr. Pike.

I must start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall) on securing this debate, which deals with a very important issue. The closure of the Office for National Statistics in Runcorn is a matter of significant concern for his constituents, for the north-west and for me as the Minister who has departmental responsibility for the ONS. I know about the contribution that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) have made on this subject and about their commitment to the welfare of their constituents.

Nobody likes to see offices close, and I should like to assure everyone that the decision to close Runcorn was not taken lightly. Before addressing the key matters in this debate, I should like to remind members that the Office for National Statistics operates from five sites: Newport, Titchfield and Runcorn, which deal with statistics, Southport, which deals with registration services and, of course, London. The Runcorn office is by far the smallest of those sites and employs fewer than 100 people on a permanent basis—all the other offices employ at least 600 people—and its work is very closely linked with that of Newport.

The ONS has been reviewing the future of Runcorn since 1996, as my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale pointed out. In 1997, my predecessor agreed with the ONS that, in the longer term, Runcorn was not seen as having a strategic future as part of the ONS. However, a final decision was not taken at that time. Indeed, a commitment was given to staff that the site would not be closed before October 2002, unless that could be accomplished without a significant number of redundancies. As has been pointed out, uncertainly about the future of Runcorn has caused staff considerable concerns since that time. Morale is low, career opportunities are extremely limited and, although staff perform a much-valued role in very difficult circumstances, concern about the long-term future of the site has had an unwelcome impact. Indeed, the one key point that was made during the recent consultations on the future of the site was that a final decision one way or the other was seen as being at least as important as the decision itself, if not more so.

In order finally to settle the issue, further consideration was given to the future of the site, most recently by Len Cook, the new National Statistician. On taking office, he considered the matter as part of his reappraisal of the business and the development of a longer-term business strategy for the organisation as a whole. Part of that emerging strategy is concentration of the production of statistics on the two main sites of Newport and Titchfield. The Runcorn site was considered too small to remain viable in its own right,

[Ruth Kelly]

especially as the work conducted there has very close links with that which is undertaken at Newport. Investment decisions always require priorities to be established. At a time when the ONS is facing considerable challenges in the development of the infrastructure to support national statistics, it decided that the maintenance of a small and remote site could not be justified. I shall explain why I have come to agree with that view.

Closing a site, no matter how small, is always a very difficult decision. It has become clear to me that this decision is not justified purely on the basis of financial costs in respect of redundancy and moving staff to another site. It rests fairly and squarely in the context of a much broader strategy for the ONS as a whole, which includes an accommodation strategy and a management strategy, as well as the modernisation of the ONS service itself. The ONS is implementing a challenging new business strategy agreed by Ministers earlier this year, which focuses on radically overhauling statistical infrastructure, investing in information technology to support the ONS in becoming an e-business, modernising the administrative systems and investing in staff to ensure that they have the skills, flexibility and so on that are needed under the new process.

The decision was certainly not taken in isolation from the other major strategic decisions concerning the ONS. I would never have taken a decision on that basis. In particular, as my hon. Friends the Members for Weaver Vale and for Halton know, I specifically asked the ONS to consider options such as the transferral of headquarters functions from London to the site at Runcorn. However, that option was also presented as non-viable in the context of wider strategic reforms and modernisation of ONS output. None the less, that option was explored in detail and presented to me for consideration.

Having considered the issue and asked for options to be explored, my conclusion is that the decision of the ONS and its new director on the closure of the Runcorn office is grounded in the overall business strategy of the ONS and will lead to improved efficiency for the organisation as a whole in the longer term. Maintaining the site would have required further investment in accommodation, in addition to the overheads of maintaining a fifth site, and would not have been optimal in the context of the overall business and investment strategy.

In supporting the decision of ONS management to close the Runcorn office, I have been especially mindful of the following key points. First, this is a business decision the ONS wishes to make—a fairly obvious point, but one that needs to be borne in mind. In terms of the overall business and strategy of the ONS, this consolidation offers the opportunity for all-important efficiency gains that would be difficult to achieve if its operations were more thinly spread. For example, small specialist teams are needed in Runcorn to support staff. Such support for computer systems, training or personnel will be available in Newport from bigger teams and at lower costs. Costs for infrastructure such as computer networking or building maintenance will all be considerably lower following consolidation.

Regardless of the timing of the decision, even if it had been decided to keep Runcorn open for a little longer, its future was, given its size, always going to remain uncertain. Above all, it was certainty that all the staff wanted. The ONS plans to transfer the work with minimal disruption to the timeliness and quality of the affected outputs. Finally, I took into consideration the fact that the ONS would ensure that the consequence of the closure would be managed sensitively, taking account of the staff's wishes as far as was practicable. It is, of course, important that the ONS achieves that business transition efficiently, but it is an even higher priority that it achieves it with thoughtful regard to the staff in Runcorn—the people who are most affected by the decision. I completely agree with the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale about the loyalty and commitment of the staff in Runcorn, who have been working in circumstances of considerable uncertainty for a long time.

The ONS will offer all staff the opportunity to work at other ONS sites. If they choose to do so, they will be reimbursed for any costs that they incur by transferring. Initial consultation with staff indicates that about a dozen people are considering that option. The ONS will also liaise with other Government Departments working in the region to ensure that ONS staff have maximum opportunity to continue working in the civil service. My understanding is that an agreement in principle has been reached with the Department for Education and Skills, which has said that it will consider ONS staff and try to accommodate them where possible. For those who do not continue in work, the ONS will offer full redundancy payments in accordance with the terms laid out in the civil service management code. In the meantime, it will continue to invest in its Runcorn work force in terms of training and development in the 15 months up to the final closure date. That will help not only to maintain the quality of ONS output throughout this period, but to prepare staff for new job opportunities, whether they are inside or outside the civil service.

In conclusion, this is an important issue, and as such, Len Cook, the director of the ONS, himself announced the decision to Runcorn staff. He took questions from them on the day and has supported initiatives to help in finding opportunities for alternative employment in the area. That has included the development of contacts at working level with the DFES. What is most important is that the uncertainty of the last few years is resolved and that staff know where they stand. The future of the Runcorn site has been under consideration for a long period and has been formally reviewed several times. I am convinced that the decision to close the Runcorn office is the right one for the longer-term business plan of the ONS. It is the only decision that brings the certainty that everyone wanted. The transfer of work from Runcorn to Newport will take place over a period from April 2002 to March 2003.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 12 December 2001

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Regional Government (South-West)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Kemp.*]

9.30 am

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): I am most grateful for the opportunity to introduce this debate, and I thank the Minister for being here. I want to expose the seemingly inexorable creep towards regional assemblies in general and for the south-west of England in particular, and the unwanted, unnecessary, unsustainable and illogical nonsense that they represent.

I do not subscribe to the argument that voters in the south-west are crying out for another tier of government. Indeed, I recently tabled a written parliamentary question to ask the Minister how many representations in favour of an elected regional assembly had been received from my constituents in East Devon. The answer, which will be of no surprise to my right hon. and hon. Friends, was none. They may share my suspicion that a similar exercise undertaken in other constituencies in the south-west would produce the same result.

The real purpose for calling this debate is to ask the Minister to spell out the Government's plans and timetable for elected regional assemblies in general and for the south-west in particular. I confess that the detailed plans are not at all clear to me and to many others with whom I have discussed them.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Does my hon. Friend not suspect that the Government's obfuscation on that subject is rather like that on the single currency referendum? In order to fulfil an election pledge, from two elections ago, the Government have said that a referendum would be held on the subject, but they know only too well that, at this point in time, they will not get the answer that they want.

Mr. Swire: Indeed. I agree with my hon. Friend and I shall come to that in a moment. There seems to be some confusion over the referendums, and where and when they will take place.

In another written parliamentary question on 20 November, I asked what changes to local government structures were planned as part of the introduction of regional assemblies, to which the Minster replied:

> "As previously announced by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, we intend to publish a Regional Governance White Paper, and this will set out how we plan to take forward our Manifesto commitment that:
>
> 'provision should be made for directly elected regional government to go ahead in regions where people decided in a referendum to support it and where predominantly unitary local government is established'."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 211W.]

Notwithstanding that, there is considerable evidence that plans are well advanced—both in areas that have unitary authorities and those without—and that the Government have already prejudged the outcome of local referendums.

Dr. Caroline Jackson, a Conservative Member of the European Parliament for the south-west, highlighted that in a speech on the 17 November to the Cornwall constitutional convention at Bodmin, when she pointed out, among other things, that the main task of the assembly would be to call the South West of England Regional Development Agency to account and to act as the regional planning body.

That embryonic body now has a budget of £1 million and, earlier this year, it made a successful bid for a further £500,000 from the Government; money apparently intended to strengthen regional accountability, whatever that is supposed to mean. The body has already started to send out select committees to hold hearings around the region and is apparently focusing, with Government support, on two themes; engaging social and economic partners, and sustainable development. Dr. Jackson noted that this was clearly a growth industry and that the assembly's staff complement, which is currently 11, was growing and included a full-time chief executive. It is looking for new premises in Taunton, which must come as some comfort to the citizens of Penzance, 144 miles away.

To add to the confusion immediately before the general election, the media reported that the Labour party would publish a post-election Green Paper with proposals to establish eight elected regional assemblies with the same boundaries as the regional development agencies, provided that support could be gained in a referendum. In the interests of clarity, will the Minister confirm whether that remains Government policy? If so, when is action likely?

Let us assume for the purpose of this debate that the Government intend to proceed with an assembly for south-west England and that it will have the same boundaries as the RDA for the south-west.

Mrs. Browning: I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that a petition of 50,000 Cornish signatures will be handed in at Downing street today. It states that Cornwall wants to be a region in its own right in the event of any regional division. Have the Government not failed to take account of our natural regional differences? We in Devon accept that there is a clear difference between Cornwall and Devon, and the rights of the Cornish should surely be respected.

Mr. Swire: Again, I agree with my hon. Friend, who must have had sight of my speech. Her comments no doubt find favour with the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George). Aspirations in Cornwall and in the rest of the west country are different, and I shall return to that in a minute.

A regional assembly with the same boundaries as the RDA for the south-west would cover Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Dorset, the old Avon county, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. Does the Minister understand—my hon. Friend said this more eloquently than I ever could—that the people of those counties will feel little or no sense of identity or common purpose with such an assembly?

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making such a good point. Does he

[Mr. James Gray]

realise that if one stuck a pin in the most northerly part of the county of Gloucestershire and swivelled what he describes as the south-west region on that pivot, the Scilly Isles would end up over Glasgow?

Mr. Swire: I do, and I do not imagine that people in the Scilly Isles would want that to happen in terms of government, although they would be far better rewarded under the Scottish Parliament than they are under this Parliament. I understand also that if one drew a line from Bristol, one would find that Bristol was further from Penzance than Brighton. The geographical homogeny of the Government's aspiration is questionable, to say the least.

Most of our constituents identify with their town or village, are deeply proud of their county and feel a strong sense of patriotism towards their country. However, they feel that they have little in common with someone from Bristol, Swindon or Gloucester, and I dare say that the reverse is true. The boundaries of a regional assembly would be artificial and would be logical only in the eyes of a Whitehall planner. Is it not significant that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) said, few Cornish people in the campaign for greater decentralisation are calling for an assembly for the south-west? A pressure group is, however, arguing for the creation of a Cornish senate with the same boundaries as the current county, but with greater powers.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): I am slightly confused. The gentleman who stood against me in the general election was firmly in favour of a Cornish assembly and was a member of the campaign committee.

Mr. Swire: If the hon. Lady had listened, she would have heard me suggest that there was a clarion call in Cornwall for a Cornish senate but not for inclusion in any governmental organisation in the south-west. I cannot speak for the gentleman who stood against her, and I cannot say that I agree with him, but he is entitled to his views.

Many of the advocates of elected regional assemblies—including, no doubt, the gentleman who stood against the hon. Lady—argue that their creation would be an important measure to address the growing sense of disillusionment with the political process. The behaviour of some members of the present Government does little to help to restore confidence in the honesty and integrity of politicians generally.

There was a marked decrease in turnout in south-west counties in the recent general election, as there was in the country as a whole. However, there is no concrete evidence to suggest that the lack of a regional assembly dissuaded any electors from casting their vote. How do the Government expect a regional assembly for the south-west—an artificial creation, devoid of historic or cultural ties—to foster any greater interest or enthusiasm in the electoral process? Is it not the case that the creation of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly—they at least have the advantage of being institutions with which people can identify—has not led to any increase in voter participation? The Government and campaigners for regional assemblies will claim that their creation will constitute a decentralisation of power, bringing government closer to the people. In reality, it will achieve the opposite.

We are told by Mr. Chester Long, the former Exeter city council leader, and now regional assembly chairman, that

> "People are already beginning to appreciate what the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly have done. We need to have the same clout and one voice for the whole region. We already have arts bodies, development agencies and sports bodies run along regional lines so why not an assembly?"

A certain Mary Southcott, a development consultant and secretary of something called the south-west constitutional convention—a body that, despite the Bishop of Exeter's unfortunate claims to the contrary, most decidedly does not enjoy all-party support; Conservatives will have nothing to do with it—explained that:

> "The idea of the assembly is to have a focus for the region involving the social and economic partners which included for example the trade unions, the CBI and the different faith groups."

Mrs. Browning: Is my hon. Friend aware that before the constitutional convention was set up and Ms Southcott appointed, the secretariat was provided by a trade union headquarters in the north-east of England? We owe the organisation in the south-west to the trade unions.

Mr. Swire: My hon. Friend is full of useful information this morning. The north-east of England, which is where the idea originated, feels ill-done-by after looking over the border at the Scottish Parliament. I shall be sorry if these ideas are exported from the north-east to the south-west, as that would not be appropriate.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): We do our own thing in the south-west and go at our own speed. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he would want to stop the north-east assembly, or those in the north-west, Yorkshire and Humberside?

Mr. Swire: I am talking about the south-west this morning. No doubt others will speak about their own parts of the United Kingdom. Returning to that august body, the south-west constitutional convention, its secretary, Ms Southcott, continued:

> "One of the arguments we make in favour of a regional elected assembly is that at least if it is elected people will know more about it and it will be accountable to them. It is a sort of regional government in waiting, but I believe it has not got to the point of people in the South West feeling it's their government. There is no sense of ownership out there that the assembly is working for us all. But the creation of the assembly itself is in advance of what many other regions in England have done so far, and those in it have found it a useful place to meet and are beginning to think in South West terms rather than Devon, Gloucestershire or Bristol terms. If we are all thinking that Whitehall does not know best and decisions are best taken at a local level then we need to think where they should be taken. And remember even if people in the South West do not want an elected assembly now, they will still have a Regional development Agency, a Government Office of the South West and a Regional Assembly none of which will be elected or democratically accountable to them. When people see that situation they might begin to think differently."

Or maybe not, because the truth is that either the regional assemblies will be a wholly new tier of government, sandwiched between the existing county councils and central Government—in which case the lines of democratic accountability are set to become even more blurred—or, as is more likely, county councils will be abolished and regional assemblies will become the middle tier of government between district councils and central Government.

Mr. Drew: Hear, hear.

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend may not have heard the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who apparently is strongly in favour of the abolition of Gloucestershire county council.

Mr. Swire: I thank my hon. Friend for pointing that out. No doubt the local press will take an interest in what the hon. Gentleman says about the abolition of his shire county, and all shire counties.

The Government's latest contribution to the breaking up of the constitution of this country would be the abolition of the shire counties—for which the hon. Member for Stroud argues so vigorously—and centuries of our history. If the abolition of the county council system were the intention behind the new assemblies, it is surely the case that that will amount to a centralisation rather than a decentralisation of power. That is the opposite of what the Government claim to want.

Bureaucracy is growing at regional level through organisations such as the regional development agencies. With that comes a growing amount of funding. In reply to my written parliamentary question, the Minister for Employment and the Regions, the hon. Member for Hull, West and Hessle (Alan Johnson), acknowledged that the South West regional development agency's grant had increased from £44.5 million in 1999-2000 to nearly £63 million in 2000-01. The agency has a grant in allocation of £84.5 million for 2001-02.

I have some sympathy with the Campaign for the English Regions, which argues that the elected regional assemblies are necessary to hold such bodies to democratic accountability and to address the democratic deficit. A far better idea would be to abolish the RDAs and give the money directly to the democratically elected county councils.

I sometimes wonder whether anyone has stopped to consider whether this regional bureaucracy is necessary or desirable. Voters in the United Kingdom are already well served by local elected representatives. There are, on average, 2,000 people to every council member, 67,000 people to every Member of Parliament and 510,000 electors to every Member of the European Parliament. In Scotland and Wales, people have Members of the Scottish Parliament and Assembly Members as well. The south-west regional assembly, which apparently already meets four times a year at county hall in Exeter, has 117 members, none of whom has been elected to anything by anyone—at least, not to any new legislative body.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): I have been fortunate enough to attend one of the regional assemblies. Is my hon. Friend aware that about 120 bureaucrats come from all over the area, read prepared statements and never relate to each other? The whole thing is a total waste of time and an awful waste of taxpayers' money.

Mr. Swire: I am covered in envy at the idea of my hon. Friend attending such a talking shop. I was pointing out that none of those people had been elected to anything, to my way of thinking. That body is a talking shop, and a not inexpensive one, which is my point. The next time my hon. Friend is invited, I ask that he takes me along as well, if I have a quiet morning.

How would people be elected to a regional assembly? According to the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) in a speech in June, such assemblies will have an appointed element, like the existing RDAs, from business and trade unions, as well as an elected element that uses proportional representation. He did not say what sort of proportional representation. At least some members will be elected, unlike on the RDAs, which seem to have been filled with more than their fair share of Labour cronies.

At the recent county council network conference in Scarborough, the Minister for Local Government, the right hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), suggested that a south-west assembly was likely to have 15 members: 10 directly elected and five appointed by Government. He also conceded that the number could increase to 25. Each assembly would apparently nominate a regional executive and a "first minister". The mind boggles.

The assemblies would not only oversee RDAs and regional planning, but would administer housing corporations, the national health service regional executive, regional arts boards, learning and skills councils and local Environment Agency offices. They would also oversee police and emergency services. If they went ahead, county councillors would find themselves with a lot of time on their hands.

Ought we not to be debating whether those functions could be more effectively decided and implemented by existing county and district councils? If the Government were serious about achieving a genuine decentralisation of power, should there not be a wide debate on strengthening the power of existing local government institutions?

Perhaps we have stumbled on to something else altogether. Perhaps the assemblies have nothing to do with the Government wanting to strengthen our local democracy. Perhaps the agenda is tied up with the Government's European ambitions. Could the real agenda be to create a Europe of the regions in which the national level of government is all but abolished, following the ceding of some powers upwards to a centralised European Government and others to a regional tier of government? Is it a coincidence that the boundaries for the regional development agencies, and presumably those for the regional assemblies, are coterminous with the United Kingdom regions in the European Union regional model?

It may be argued by advocates of regional assemblies that the so-called regions require a voice in Europe when it comes to lobbying for EU regional money. However, the regions may be as artificial and diverse as that proposed for the south-west, with the needs of Cornwall

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hardly the same as those of Wiltshire. Why will a regional tier of government be any more effective in the long run than individual counties lobbying independently, collectively or even through central Government?

Ms Atherton: Is the hon. Gentleman not aware that our roads and railways go through Wiltshire to Cornwall and back out again? If we do not work together, both counties suffer.

Mr. Swire: Our roads go everywhere. We could go from Penzance to John O'Groats if we wanted. The homogeny is artificial. Roads in my part of the country, Devon, have nothing to do with roads in Wiltshire or anywhere else.

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend was wondering whether the proposals were part of a wider European agenda. Is he aware that the M4 is shortly to be renamed the E27 and will run from Berlin to Cornwall?

Mr. Swire: I was aware that some roads were to be given fancy names, presumably to make up for the lack of road repairs, which would be more welcome.

There is one other possible reason for the agenda on regional assemblies. It could be a Government attempt to rebalance the United Kingdom's constitutional structure following the creation of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, which left many constitutional issues; not least the over-representation of Scottish Members at Westminster and the unanswered West Lothian question. However, the only model based on regional assemblies that would adequately address the West Lothian question is a fully federal United Kingdom, with the regional assemblies having full primary legislative powers akin to those held by the Scottish Parliament. If they have less than legislative powers, the West Lothian question will not be answered.

Do the Government intend to give elected regional assemblies such powers? What fiscal powers, if any, will the assemblies have? What will be their other sources of funding? A row is already brewing about the operation of the Barnett formula in Scotland, and there is enormous scope for arguments to escalate over funding in these assemblies. Moreover, who will pick up the cost of funding the creation of the new assemblies? The total bill will be many millions of pounds. The cost of the Scottish Parliament, which the Government assured the people of Scotland before the 1997 election would be no more than £50 million, has escalated to nearly £250 million, and the final bill has yet to be seen.

Finally, what is the envisaged relationship between those elected to the assemblies and democratically elected Members of Parliament? Are our roles to be dumbed down further?

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I am very much enjoying my hon. Friend's erudite speech. However, does he not think that the Minister should tell us one more thing? Assuming that the Government deliver on their manifesto commitment to have a referendum in various parts of the country on regional assemblies, what will happen if the north-east elects to have a regional assembly but the south-west does not? Would it represent a sustainable constitutional settlement for the country if one part had a new tier of government and other parts did not?

Mr. Swire: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I invite the Minister to address that point. What my hon. Friend describes would create enormous friction between the different regions. However, perhaps creating an assembly in the north-east is a way of softening up other regions to encourage them to get their noses in the trough.

The Government's drive for regional assemblies, and for the south-west regional assembly in particular, is illogical, unnecessary, unpopular and a distraction from the real needs affecting the counties of the south-west. Regional assemblies would be artificial creations, would foster no sense of common identity and would do nothing to re-engage voters with the political process. They would centralise rather than decentralise power, facilitate the creation of a Europe of the regions, would do little to address the constitutional imbalance of the United Kingdom and would be costly, diverting resources away from more important areas of spending.

In conclusion, if any Conservative Member believed that creating a south-west regional assembly would in any way benefit any of our constituents, we would support the idea as one. We do not believe that, because the south-west does not want or need a regional assembly.

9.58 am

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) on securing an important debate, although I cannot support his arguments. Those of us who support devolution should remember that the only reason why we are having the debate is because of the Labour Government's policies for devolving power to the regions. I support those policies.

Cornwall has been debating a range of issues, as the hon. Gentleman said, and I want to focus on them. Today is an important day for the county on two counts. One hundred years ago today, Marconi for the first time transmitted radio waves from Cornwall to Newfoundland. That is being celebrated in Cornwall. Also, the Cornish assembly petition, with 50,000 signatures, is being delivered to No. 10 Downing street today. It is a great petition, but I think that many of those who signed it wanted to show support for devolving power, rather than a desire for a purely Cornish assembly. We need to be clear; we must devolve power. The man in Whitehall is seen as out of touch. Physically, he is closer to Germany than to Cornwall. For better or worse, we should make our own decisions. If someone is going to get things wrong, we should prefer it to be ourselves. On the other hand, we want to get things right.

In Cornwall, the saying "no one listens to us" is a mantra. That used to be true under Conservative Governments.

Mr. Streeter: When the hon. Lady spoke to people on doorsteps during the general election campaign, how many expressed support for a tier of regional government involving the counties of the south-west?

Ms Atherton: Far more than expressed support for a Cornish assembly.

Mr. Streeter: How many?

Ms Atherton: Seven or eight. *[Laughter.]* I am being honest. That was far more than talked about local authorities. They debated the issue and were genuinely engaged.

Mr. Gray: If, as the hon. Lady says, there is such overwhelming enthusiasm for regional devolution among her friends in the Labour party, where are her hon. Friends who represent Bristol constituencies, Exeter or the rest of the south-west; apart from her hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew)? They ain't here.

Ms Atherton: I am delighted to say that many of my hon. Friends are in government. To return to the question asked by the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter), the seven people to whom I referred were not Labour party people. They said independently that they wanted a regional assembly. I thought that that was quite a high number of people to be mentioning the subject; many issues are not raised in the way that they used to be.

The mantra about no one listening to Cornwall used to be true. We want to solve our own problems, and it is quite easy to blame Whitehall and Westminster for all of those. No doubt sometimes Westminster and Whitehall are the problem, but sometimes they have an answer. When we wanted objective 1 funding for our county, we got together and fought for it, but it was Westminster—notably the Prime Minister and civil servants—who did the work in Europe. When we needed matched funding for our university—some £19 million—we went, again, to Westminster and the Prime Minister, and got it. The first act of the regional chamber was to support Cornwall's application for objective 1 status. All seven counties, councils and chamber together, were working to support the objective 1 bid.

I am working with colleagues, as I am sure all hon. Members are, to exert pressure on our regional airlines and train companies to improve our rail and air links. However, those do not stop at the Tamar bridge. They go to and from Cornwall and through other areas.

Mrs. Browning: Roads and railways that pass out of the hon. Lady's constituency come through mid-Devon and east Devon and through my constituency. When the Government came to office in 1997, they halted road building in the south-west. Surely to goodness the hon. Lady can see that a strategic Government overview is needed of the core transport links in this country. Her party's Government stopped that and set back the west country by decades.

Ms Atherton: There is a £180 billion transport plan. I am delighted about the plans for Gossmoor and Dobwalls, two places that were never tackled when the hon. Lady's party was in government.

Mrs. Browning: I hope that the hon. Lady will agree with me and the CBI in the south-west that the whole area needs more than just one major road route in and out of the region, namely the M5 corridor. When the Government came to office, the dualling of the relevant section of the A30 to link to the M3 and provide a second corridor was ready to go out to tender, following a public inquiry. The Government halted that and there has still been no progress. We do not want lectures from Labour about roads in the south-west. Labour has done more damage to the infrastructure there than any other body.

Ms Atherton: I do not agree on that last point. I will always work with any hon. Member from any party to improve road and transport networks in the south-west, and I will keep pushing for the dualling to which the hon. Lady referred. I was referring to the work on the A30 at Gossmoor—the critical bottleneck area in Cornwall—which the Government are to fund.

Mr. Steen: I am glad to see the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) in her place and looking so much better than she did last night.

I want to talk about the dualling of roads and railways. I hope that the hon. Lady agrees that we need not just one but two railway lines into Cornwall. As things stand, the whole of Cornwall depends on the rail track between Exeter and Plymouth not being affected by the sea coming through the barriers and destroying the railway line. Does the hon. Lady agree that the Government must ensure that there is a second way of getting to Cornwall by rail?

Ms Atherton: I should point out that when I spoke to the hon. Gentleman last night, I referred to some tablets that I was taking, which might have caused me to be absent this morning.

I agree that serious work needs to be undertaken on the Exeter line. If trains cannot pass along that line, they do not get to Cornwall. We must work on that on a cross-party basis; the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) has now been able to get his little bit in the local paper.

Businesses work and trade with one another in Cornwall. They also trade outside the county and within the seven counties. The regional supply chain is important. Boundaries are arbitrary, but opportunities in regional government are infinite. That is why I support the seven county option.

The Government have made it clear that they support regional government where there is clear local support for an assembly and where the predominant method of local government is unitary. In Cornwall today, there are three levels of local government: parish and town councils, district councils and county councils. In addition, there is the regional development agency, the Department for Education and Skills, the Government Office South West—which appears to be unaccountable—water companies and others. Further up the line, there is Westminster and, over the water, Brussels; quite a lot of government, some might say.

Some years ago, there was an opportunity for Cornwall to opt for unitary local government, but that opportunity was, sadly, not grasped. In recent weeks, the Labour party in Cornwall has widely consulted on how we want to devolve power. We held branch meetings, constituency meetings and a county

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conference. Last month, we voted, by a huge margin—more than seven or eight; the figure was nearer to 100—to devolve power to the lowest possible relevant level.

We said that we want to devolve power to the parish pump level. Parish and town councils are well placed to deliver economic regeneration and lead the renaissance of Cornish towns and the economy. Why do we need a souped-up county assembly? Surely the best route is to devolve power to the most appropriate and lowest level. Let us take power from unelected mandarins, but let us not leave ourselves isolated in the new century. I am not sure that the rest of England will welcome increased support to Cornwall, for which myself and others are asking, while we opt out of the rest of the arrangements.

I have no doubt that most of those who support an assembly are genuine in their support, but some are seeking complete self-government and to opt out of Britain. I know that that is not the majority view in my constituency. People want relevant devolved power, but not an opt-out. If hon. Members are unsure about what I say, I suggest that they trawl the websites on the subject, as I have done.

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I stood as a candidate in Torridge and West Devon in the 1997 election, and what the hon. Lady says is not the case. People in Cornwall were adamant that they wanted to break away. I remember all the flags flying on the Tamar and Launceston bridges. The hon. Lady is talking about the wish of people in Cornwall to go it alone. She should address that issue, rather than considering the matter as a regional one.

Ms Atherton: The Cornish Solidarity campaigns were powerful, but they were not representative of the majority in the county. People want devolved power, but they do not necessarily want to opt out of the rest of the country. Men and women in Cornwall are saying, "Yes, we want greater self-distinction. We celebrate our culture, but we do not necessarily want an assembly." We all want Cornwall to succeed. It is wrong for those who are campaigning for an assembly to imply that we are not for Cornwall. We are, but we see different ways in which to achieve our ambitions. I want to make it clear that we have ambitions for Cornwall.

The Labour party in Cornwall announced its view of the way forward. It welcomed the devolution of power, but not a nationalistic assembly. The story made the front page of our regional daily newspaper, the *Western Morning News*, since when I have received not one letter setting out views for or against the proposal. That is important. The majority of people in Cornwall, as in the wider south-west, want devolved power, as appropriate. I urge the Government to give us devolved power as soon as possible.

10.10 am

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I shall not detain hon. Members for long because many colleagues wish to speak. In presenting the debate so eruditely, my hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) covered much ground. He set out the worries of Conservative Members about the formation of regional government in the south-west. I wish to add to some of the matters to which he referred.

I was the only west country Member of Parliament who was present at County hall in Exeter, when the then regional development agency chairman, Sir Michael Lickiss, oversaw a debate on regional identity. Representatives attended the regional chamber to identify what each part of the region had in common, as a result of which the RDA produced a glossy brochure with a faulty CD attached to it. The purpose of the money used, and the time taken to set up such a debate, was to ask, "Who are we in the south-west? What does the development agency believe are the common denominators in respect of the old coalfields of Gloucester, the Isles of Scilly, Bournemouth and Poole?"

My hon. Friend the Member for East Devon said that few aspects of the different parts of the region have a common denominator. The representatives who attended the debate split up into workshops in the afternoon; some talked about tourism, some discussed transport and other talked about different components. When the report of the proceedings was published, it was interesting that people said, "Let us take out all those aspects that are particular to, say, Gloucester or Cornwall and look at what is left. We could be describing any region anywhere in the country." In other words, the area was so homogeneous and watered down that it did not have a regional identity.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Or a soul.

Mrs. Browning: How right my hon. Friend is. I shall come on to souls in a minute. *[Interruption.]* I shall also refer to the bishop.

Mr. Steen: My hon. Friend is always fascinating to listen to; I am already in a trance. Is it not a curious phenomenon that new Labour talks the whole time about "different-sized units" and "getting closer to the people" but, in reality, the units are becoming bigger? The region is a bigger unit that is getting further away from the individual, not a smaller unit in which people are cared for and cherished.

Mrs. Browning: That is exactly right. My hon. Friend will know that that is why, when that august body identified a regional identity, it could find nothing that we would recognise as being south-west specific. The region had things in common with other regions, such as tourism and agriculture, but nothing that was distinct to the south-west. The whole exercise was bogus and, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Devon said so clearly, the area is an artificial chunk of England, in terms of the other regions of England and the way in which the map has been drawn.

Putting aside Scotland, the Greater London area and Wales—they already have regional identities—the Government have carved up what is left of England into bite-sized chunks for their own purpose, not for the purposes of the people who live in those areas. It would be easier for a Government to see off one small region of England rather than to have to deal with the voices of England assembled in our national Parliament when we need to put the case in terms of our towns, our counties and our regions.

I will be generous to the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton). I am not a Devonian; I have lived there for only 33 years, so I cannot yet claim to be local. I am getting there, but I am not there quite yet. However, when people ask me where I live, I reply that I live in the south-west of England. By that, I mean the area on the map that is Devon and Cornwall. That is the area that, psychologically, I regard as the south-west of England. I realise that Devon and Cornwall have had their differences over many years; I have been there long enough to know that. None the less, we all have a perception of the area with which we identify. The Government are tearing that apart with the structure that they have put in place.

Mr. Drew: The hon. Lady is saying that, under the Conservative Government, it was a mistake to create Government offices for the regions. Will she explain the logic of maintaining them?

Mrs. Browning: My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who was the Minister who introduced them, will no doubt add to my comments. There is a need for Government offices for the regions. Strategic issues concerning wider areas interlock into the national picture of, for example, rail and road infrastructures. That is leading to regional government. The Government have set up regional development agencies that are totally unaccountable to the electorate and whose finances are obscure. When the regional development agency threw £1 million at Plymouth airport, it did so without any consultation on the impact that that would have on other airports in the region. It did so without having evaluated local air transport. The agency was unaccountable. It showed largesse to one airport without taking any accountability of the impact on other airports. That is not democracy.

When we flag up our concern about the agency's lack of accountability for its decisions and spending, the answer is, "Ah, well, we can now turn the RDAs into something that is democratically accountable". The Government have deliberately created a structure that is so objectionable in democratic terms that the only solution is to take it one step further and turn it into an arm of regional government. The Government have created a problem and their solution suits their own agenda. A cynical person—I am not cynical—would say that the Government have deliberately forced the hand of the public to make them think that the only way to resolve the problem of RDA accountability is to turn it into a form of elected government to solve the problem that the Government have created.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: I understand what my hon. Friend says. I have read the south-west RDA report, which suggests that the organisation is a shambles. Does she agree that, until Sir Michael Lickiss resigns and is replaced by someone who can run it properly, the RDA will continue to sail from disaster to disaster? It will fail and that will affect us all.

Mrs. Browning: My hon. Friend will not be surprised to know that, like many colleagues, I receive weekly complaints about the actions and decision-making of the RDA. Much needs to be done to sort it out.

Mr. Drew: I am delighted to know that the RDA is making such an impact, as it must be if it is receiving so many complaints. Can the hon. Lady tell me of any organisation in the south-west, business or otherwise—besides the Conservative party—that wants to abolish the RDA?

Mrs. Browning: I can give the hon. Gentleman such examples.

Mr. Drew: Business organisations?

Mrs. Browning: I do not know whether business organisations do. However, the party of big business, of which the hon. Gentleman is a member, does not represent the people. The big Government are dealing with big business organisations. They are not interested in the little person in the cottage down the Devon lane. The people no longer matter. It is all about big organisations, corporate opinion and all those big cronies who troop through Downing street for drinks a couple of times a year. We know how the game is played, because the Government have made themselves past masters at courting big corporate institutions. They are the ones who are listening to and influencing that group. They do not care about the people; the people do not matter.

Andrew George (St. Ives): Does the hon. Lady accept that her critique requires the solution that I hope the Government will introduce; democratising the quangos that the present and previous Governments created on the regional basis, and about which she is so critical? Is not the solution that to which she is most opposed: the establishment of a democratic structure to which those quangos should be accountable?

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman's party would have acted earlier, sooner and in greater measure. Under the chairmanship of the former Liberal Democrat leader of Somerset county council, Mr. Chris Clarke, the Liberal Democrats have led the charge on the matter. They wanted to move the matter along. They and their Labour friends, with whom they do deals, have worked hard. The *Express and Echo* recently showed a picture of Mr. Clarke, the Bishop of Exeter and Chester Long, Labour councillor for Exeter, with a caption saying that they wanted to create a regional assembly and be involved in running it. I do not criticise personal ambition, but the Liberal Democrats cannot pretend, as they usually do, that they are interested in democracy. They are interested not in democracy but in power. They have shown by their actions towards the local regional development agency and the chamber that they are first in the queue to sign up for such developments. They are at one with Labour on this matter in the south-west.

The Government have been softening up people in order to implement the proposal. Throughout the country, including in the south-west, they have set up committees chaired by bishops in order to provide some soul and credibility. However, we can see through that. It is a matter of great regret to my colleagues and I that those committees no longer allow people to attend if they do not sign up to the philosophy to create a regional government in the south-west and to bypass current, democratically elected representatives.

Mr. Steen: On a point of order, Mr. Griffiths. When I intervened on the hon. Member for Falmouth and

[Mr. Steen]

Camborne (Ms Atherton), I may have inadvertently implied something that I want her to know I did not intend. When I saw her last night, she was clearly unwell, but she was hoping to attend today. My intervention was intended to express pleasure that she was present, and not to suggest that there was anything untoward about her condition last night, which might have implied that she was on a busy evening out, eating and drinking. That was not my intention.

Mr. Win Griffiths (in the Chair): I am sure that we all appreciate that intervention. It would help the Chair and the Front Benches if the next speaker were to conclude at about 10.30am.

10.24 am

Andrew George (St. Ives): Thank you, Mr. Griffiths; I shall do my best to keep within the time. I would like to take interventions, but clearly I shall be constrained. I congratulate the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) on securing the debate. This important issue needs airing.

This is the beginning of a debate, not the end. I hope that the many Conservative Members who have attended today's debate—in numbers that we have never seen before on debates on other issues—will sustain their commitment and interest, as it is important that the policy develops with an injection of constructive dialogue involving all parties.

We are pushing back the frontiers with an interesting and challenging development of policy. I have absolute enthusiasm for devolution, but we must ensure that the Government introduce it with flexibility, so that it reflects people's identities. Many Conservative Members recognise that those identities exist, but not necessarily within the constraints of the boundaries created for administrative ease in some parts of the country. Those boundaries do not necessarily reflect the identities of the people in that area. The areas may be collections of shire counties and are sometimes small and sometimes large.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): Will the hon. Gentleman reflect upon the region of Wessex, the crucible of which lies in my constituency, near the village of Eddington? That is where the Wessex region was created, more than 1,000 years ago. People feel a strong Wessex identity, and that feeling extends not just through parts of the south-west, but through parts of the south-east, too. That strong feeling simply is not there in the south-west. I think that the hon. Gentleman has hit the nail on the head, because there is a great miscellany of identities. The south-west is a Government-defined one, which in the long term will not work, although something like a "Wessex region" just might.

Andrew George: If the hon. Gentleman feels that way, he and those living in what he defines as Wessex must bring forward their proposals and make it clear how they believe devolution can be delivered to a Wessex region.

Dr. Murrison: On a point of order, Mr. Griffiths. Is it in order for the hon. Gentleman to put a spin on my words? He tries to paint me as a Wessex regionalist. I am sure that Lord Bath, proprietor of Longleat and perhaps the most prominent Wessex regionalist, would be delighted to hear that, but for the record, I am not.

Mr. Win Griffiths (in the Chair): That was not a point of order, but a point of debate.

Andrew George: I am grateful for that point of order, which has further muddied the hon. Gentleman's clarification. Whether or not he is a Wessex regionalist, he is suggesting that there might be variations in the model of devolution according to different boundaries in different parts of the country. He made a proposal that might be taken as a variation on the devolution to the collections of shire counties that currently form the boundaries of the Government's south-west region.

Hon. Members have enunciated the Conservative position this morning, and we are hearing a variety of opinions. I do not want Conservative Members to hold back from debating the issue among themselves. Conservatives now strongly favour devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and that is healthy and helpful. Although Conservative Members clearly do not want to abolish those structures, many of them take a different view on devolution for England.

The hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) pointed out the significance of this day. It is significant not only because of Marconi's original transmission from my constituency to Newfoundland—in which my family was involved—but because the Cornish constitutional convention will today deliver 50,000 signed declaration sheets to No. 10 Downing street. The hon. Lady has presented a distortion of reality; the people signed a declaration that clearly indicates that they are enthusiastic about devolution and, in particular, about devolution to places with which they identify. One such place is Cornwall, which would include the Isles of Scilly, if they were to choose to join.

I am an enthusiast for devolution. However, we must devolve to places that exist in the minds of the people. If we do not do that, I fear that the Government's policy could get derailed. Some of the arguments that have been presented by Conservative Members must be taken on board. Turn-outs have been low in several recent elections. That indicates that if voters do not feel that the body to which they are electing representatives reflects the identity of the place to which they feel they belong, they will stay at home. That undermines the principle of democratic legitimacy, and all hon. Members would like that to be upheld. We want a body to be established in the south-west, and we want it to be supported; it must have democratic legitimacy.

Size is an issue that concerns many hon. Members. Cornwall is a small area, but there are many small regions in Europe, and in other parts of the world. An insular view is often taken in this country; we should lift our eyes, and take succour from the models that work in other parts of the world.

Dr. Murrison: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew George: I must conclude.

The Government should not stick to a rigid, obedient, control-freak version of devolution. Devolution must be flexible, and debate should be encouraged; those regions in the country that may seek variation, with regard to size, should express their views. Variable geometry and variable speed should be the principles that inform the way in which this important Government policy is developed in the coming years.

Mr. Win Griffiths (in the Chair): Thanks to the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss), three minutes are available, allowing me to call another Conservative Member.

10.32 am

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I was born at 1 Penlee way, Stoke Damerel, which is just up the hill from Devonport dockyard, so I understand the south-west. I grew up in the aftermath of a terrible war, in which Plymouth was flattened; bloodied but unbowed. In 1947, I moved to Salisbury, and, subsequently, my father moved to Truro. During the 56 years of my life, the region has changed dramatically, and I want nothing more than to see it succeed.

It is a region, but it does not have an identity of its own; it never has had one, and it cannot have one. Cornwall is proud of its traditions, but it is ungovernable in traditional terms. It should have an assembly, of some sort; Trelawny knew all about that, and we should take note.

Devon, like Gaul, is divided into three parts, and it should look to its county council for salvation, rather than to Bristol, a city state in the west midlands. Bristol was born out of the need to have a focus for colonial trade. If a regional assembly were to be established in Bristol, the history of the city would inform how its inhabitants would think of the rest of the south-west.

Salisbury is on the edge of the region. Historically, culturally, spiritually and economically, it looks south, and it has about as much in common with the Isles of Scilly as they do with Gloucestershire. In 1990, when I was a Minister at the Department of the Environment, we started the process of improving the delivery of Government services from Whitehall down to local level. We achieved that by bringing together national Government Departments and regional centres. There was never any intention that those regional Government offices should have a democratic dimension, because they were already accountable to the House, through the Members of Parliament and Ministers who represented their regions. It is a grand folly to think that by creating a new tier of politicians and bureaucrats in Bristol, the people of the south-west will be better served. They will not. It will be a waste of money, and will take power from the people and put it in the hands of political parties. If, perish the thought, we had proportional representation, the people would have less and less say over decisions that were taken in their name. I hope that we never reach that point and, as Member of Parliament for Salisbury, I shall do my level best to ensure that we do not.

10.35 am

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) on successfully raising the subject. The question of how we wish to be governed in the future requires the full participation of all hon. Members and our constituents. I listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's speech, which seemed to be against taking decisions closer to the people whom they affect. The speech opposed the democratic control of taxpayer's money that is spent in the region and supported the continuation of quangos that spend more in our region than all local councils combined.

Mr. Swire: The hon. Gentleman misunderstood my speech. I support giving more power to the existing democratically elected and accountable local county councillors.

Mr. Sanders: Therein lies the other point. We have heard about only county councillors. However, 38 per cent. of the south-west's population live in unitary councils. They are not the same thing, by a long chalk.

There are many quangos and organisations, such as learning and skills councils, health authorities, and the Sports Council, that contain people who are often paid to sit on boards and are appointed from London. They are not accountable to the region and spend more money than the councils combined. If the Conservative party argues that all the quangos should be devolved to local authorities, does it say that the health services in this country should be brought under accountable control and devolved down to the authorities that run social services? If so, that is a radical departure from Conservative local government policy.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the total budget for the regional development agency last year was £68 million, of which £10 million was spent on administration?

Mr. Sanders: The hon. Gentleman makes the point for me. That budget, surely, should be under democratic control.

Such local government has been a long-standing Liberal Democrat policy. We recognise that undemocratically accountable government has been exercised in the regions for decades. When the then Conservative Government created the Government office structure, they gave only a new title to administrative offices that already existed in the regions.

Mr. Key: I regret to say that the hon. Gentleman is misinformed. The whole point was that the offices did not already exist. Some Whitehall Departments had no regional presence and others had a massive regional presence, such as the Department of Transport. The policy was an attempt to bring the delivery of services together and to get Government Ministers and Whitehall Departments to talk to each other about local delivery.

Mr. Sanders: There was still top-down delivery, because the Government offices were answerable to Ministers in London, rather than to people who were elected from within the region. They delivered services

[Mr. Sanders]

that were determined by the government in the regions. That was more along colonial lines; the only thing that was lacking was a High Commissioner in the region.

Mr. Key: That is what the Liberals want.

Mr. Sanders: No, we do not. One of the models that I fear more than any other is a London-based model, with a 15 or 16-member assembly for the south-west. That would be the worst possible policy.

We have seen different models introduced in different parts of the United Kingdom. The models in Scotland, Wales, London and Northern Ireland are all different from each other. It does not necessarily follow that the same model would be adopted in every region. People have to determine what their regions are, and those regions need to decide what powers they wish to draw down. The process should be driven from the grass roots, not the centre.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): The hon. Gentleman is having the wool pulled over his eyes by his Labour allies. When the Secretary of State was asked yesterday, following the statement on the White Paper, whether he could give an assurance that the assemblies would not take any powers upwards from district and county councils, he was unable to give one. It is clear that the new assemblies will take powers upwards, away from the electors, rather than downwards from Westminster.

Mr. Sanders: That does not follow. The right hon. Gentleman's comments highlight the need for Conservatives to get involved in decisions now—to get fully involved in the partnerships emerging in the different regions, which go beyond political parties—and to influence them. The Government are responding to the agendas that they themselves are setting. If Ministers have a top-down plan, they will be vigorously opposed by those in other parties who believe in regionalism as much as they will by the Conservatives.

There are three tests for regional government. First, is it elected and accountable to the people of the area? Secondly, is it efficient, and does it save money by cutting down on bureaucracy and well-paid quango appointments? Thirdly, is it effective; not a talking shop, but a body with real power to tackle real problems? That is the agenda that we want, and those are the tests that we will apply to any regional assembly.

10.41 am

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): Offer a Liberal three minutes, and he will take six. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) on his success in achieving this debate, and on the excellent way in which he demolished the Government's ideas and proposals for regional government, especially in relation to the south-west. His debate is timely. It is unfortunate that we have only an hour and a half, because many of my colleagues were not able to speak. Clearly, this is an important issue, which needs to be debated more fully than we have had time for this morning.

The debate is timely also because the Minister announced only a few weeks ago that it should be possible to get the first regional assembly into operation within the lifetime of this Parliament. That was the first public utterance from the Government that they expected to drive the idea of regional government through during the lifetime of this Parliament. Will the Minister confirm that a timetable has been proposed, that there will be a Bill before us next November and an Act on the statute book by 2003, and that the first referendum will be held in 2004-05?

Is not this whole process driven by political pressure, largely from within the Labour party, and especially from the north-east of England? Will the Minister confirm that he expects the first regional government to be in the north-east? When the Minister made the announcement recently, he said that it was not possible to draw a line under devolution just for Scotland and Wales, in the face of

"demands for similar treatment for the English regions".

Will the Minister tell us where those demands are coming from? Clearly, they are not coming from the elected representatives of the south-west region.

Labour's plans for regional government will mean less, not more power for local communities; a point made on several occasions by my colleagues. It will lead to the abolition of at least one tier of local authority in those regions that adopt the assembly model. Conservative Members believe that the tier most likely to disappear is that of county councils. In 1996, the current Foreign Secretary said:

"Labour has consistently—for over 20 years—argued that two-tier local government could not in general co-exist alongside elected regional assemblies".

Andrew George: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Moss: No, as I have only a few minutes.

More recently, the Minister's colleague Lord Falconer said in another place:

"I do not know the precise estimate of cost in relation to expenditure on a regional assembly... As to whether there should be two-tier authorities, in some cases it is not right that there should be. That is something which needs to be looked at particularly in the context of where there is a regional assembly. If one has a regional assembly and two other tiers that looks to be too many."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 November 2001; Vol. 628, c. 368.]

It is important that the Minister confirms that he shares Lord Falconer's view and thinks it likely that a tier of local authority must be removed from regions that opt for assemblies.

Huge costs would be involved in reorganisation. Figures have been given today in terms of the present costs of RDAs. Would the Minister like to share with us whether his Department has done any work on the possible cost of reorganisation in the tiers below the regional assemblies? It cost millions to reorganise Humberside as a county council. If that were replicated across the eight regions and shire counties involved in the process, the figure would run into billions. Has the Minister's Department done any costings? Exponentially, could not the costs run into billions of pounds?

Mr. Sanders: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Moss: No, I will not, as I have only a few minutes.

Business groups remain extremely sceptical about regional government. The director general of the British Chambers of Commerce said that many businesses thought that the RDAs set up two years ago had yet to prove their worth. The CBI spokesman thought that the case for English devolution had not been made, saying:

> "Until this Government tells us what it is for, it cannot really expect us to say whether we support it or not".

That is the case that Conservative Members have made today.

10.47 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): I thank the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) for raising what is—I concur with the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss)—an important subject that needs to be discussed widely in the future, in this Chamber and elsewhere. Regional government in England is a key part of the Government's programme for constitutional reform, and I look forward to many interesting debates on the issue. It is a credit to the official Opposition that about 10 per cent. of their Members are present for the debate. They are united in doing what they do best, which is to oppose measures.

Since we took office in 1997, we have secured far-reaching and effective constitutional changes. We have devolved power to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and given London a democratically elected strategic body to promote its interests. In mentioning the Opposition's presence in numbers to oppose the measure, I was reminded of a plaque in my constituency that states:

> "Near this spot, King Canute reproved his courtiers".

That is an historically accurate version of this story.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If regional assemblies are so inevitable, will the Under-Secretary tell us about the inevitability of removing the shire, unitary, district or parish tier of government? It is easy to be in favour of new tiers of government—Labour is always in favour of over-government—but which tier will be removed? We want to know so that we can warn our councillors that the Government want to abolish them.

Dr. Whitehead: The right hon. Gentleman is reading rather too much into what I said. I aimed to underline the foolishness that King Canute felt on that occasion, rather than the wider agenda that King Canute might have had in terms of regional government. Debates on Scottish and Welsh devolution and on the Greater London Authority probably contained speeches that were very similar to those that we have heard this morning. It is significant that Conservatives now play an active role in all those assemblies. The south-east regional chamber has a very active Conservative chairman, many active Conservative committee chairs and 40 Conservative council members. On reflection, Conservative Members might feel that their united opposition could be tempered in the future.

Mr. Key: I seek to remind the Under-Secretary that the Labour party was bitterly opposed to the European Union and all that it stood for and to the European Parliament when it suited it.

Dr. Whitehead: Yes, and the political circumstances and the political considerations have changed. That is exactly the point that I was attempting to make, and I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has underlined it. As political circumstances change, so opinions and ideas change and people adopt different positions. My point, contra Canute, is that Conservatives now sit happily in these various assemblies, in precisely the way suggested by the hon. Gentleman.

Andrew George: Does the Under-Secretary accept that Conservative Members seem to be suffering from benefit of hindsight disease, the symptoms of which are a brass neck and short-term memory loss? They seem to have forgotten that during the 18 years in which they governed the country, they sucked powers away from local authorities, created networks of quangos and did not deliver the kind of policies that they now claim they would like.

Dr. Whitehead: Yes, the hon. Gentleman makes a strong point about the born-again nature of these defenders of people in thatched cottages. In terms of things that have changed, and of selective memory, we might reflect that one of the reasons put forward for the creation of Government offices for the regions under the stewardship of the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) was that most other countries in Europe had effective working regions that were able to discuss matters with Brussels, but that Britain had no such regions. The Conservative Government of the time created Government offices for the regions and made representations that those offices should be regarded as regions for the purposes of discussion with Brussels, provided that they were not elected.

Mr. Swire: I am most grateful for the revisionist historical tour that the Under-Secretary is undertaking. At some stage in the next eight minutes, will he address the question that has been asked by every one of my colleagues, namely, what tier of local government will be sacrificed if the regional assemblies go ahead?

Dr. Whitehead: I am very generous in giving way to hon. Members. If I can make some progress, perhaps I shall be able to answer some of the questions that have been asked.

Over and above the issues of devolution, there remains a missing link: the English regions. Why should what is good for Scotland, Wales and London be denied to the English regions, especially those that say that they, too, want more democratic accountability and greater influence over policy making at regional level? It should not. That is why our manifesto commits us to providing for directly elected regional assemblies in

[Dr. Whitehead]

those regions where popular support is demonstrated through referendums and where there is predominantly unitary government.

The forthcoming White Paper on regional governance will set out in detail our proposals, and I shall say more about that. People in England deserve the opportunity to choose whether to have a political body—an elected assembly—which pulls everything together at a regional level and which has the legitimacy, the critical mass and the clout to set priorities and to speak up for the region.

Elected regional assemblies will give people in the regions the chance to have a stronger political voice and will bring decision making at the strategic level closer to the people. They can improve delivery by giving the regions the freedom and flexibility to meet their own needs and priorities within the national framework and co-ordinating the many activities and strategies that exist in the regions. They can make government in the regions more accountable to people in the regions, and provide regional stakeholders with a clearer decision-making framework.

I emphasise, for the hon. Member for East Devon, that the regions will be strategic. He is concerned about the position of local government. The idea of regions is to devolve powers and functions down from the centre, not to suck up power from the services from local government. The regions will be closer to the people in terms of strategic delivery.

It was fascinating to hear the hon. Member for Salisbury making the case against regional government. I took his words down carefully; he said that it would take power away from people and put it in the hands of political parties. I ask him to reflect on the strange practice in this House of electing people to sit for political parties to exercise a democratic function.

The debate has been strange in that Opposition Members have emphasised the idea that the Government have some fiendish plan to impose regions on a reluctant public. That is not the case. The people of each region will decide in a referendum whether and when an elected regional assembly is right for them. Let us be frank; not all regions will want to have an elected regional assembly within the next few years. Although there is a demonstrable demand in the north-east, that is clearly not the case in the south-east, for example. Some regions may never opt for a regional tier of government, which is their prerogative. That is why we are enabling different regions to move at different speeds appropriate to their particular needs—what we call the asymmetric approach.

I am aware of the claims by the Cornish constitutional convention for an elected assembly for Cornwall. One of the convention's points is that the south-west is an artificial entity, but that Cornwall represents an area with which people identify. However, the south-west region has become increasingly well known and accepted since the Government office was established in the early 1990s, and especially since the creation of the RDA. A survey carried out by *The Economist* in 1999, for example, found that 86 per cent. of respondents in the south-west could identify the region in which they lived. It is true that recognition is not the same as loyalty or attachment, but experience from the development of regional government overseas demonstrates that it is not necessary to have a lengthy historical identity to create a modern political identity.

Dr. Murrison: Will the Minister give way?

Dr. Whitehead: I apologise, but I do not have the time to give way.

There is evidence from a number of countries of regions with little or no historical identity successfully developing and maintaining one. Many of the German Länder and French regions can be given as examples.

Andrew George: Will the Minister give way?

Dr. Whitehead: I want to make progress, so it is difficult to give way.

We should consider the case for Cornwall and how it might fit into a regional assembly for the south-west as we draft proposals for our White Paper. Of course, there will be a substantial debate as that White Paper is produced. Our thinking is that introducing an elected regional assembly with new powers and responsibilities to cover an area and population no greater than that of an existing county does not make a great deal of sense. Indeed, one of the main purposes of our regional arrangements should be to provide a focus for tackling problems that go beyond the existing local government units, not to duplicate the units that are already there.

Mr. Moss: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. He is conspicuously refusing to answer a question that has been put to him three times. Which tier of local government do the Government expect to remove should regional assemblies come into force?

Dr. Whitehead: The hon. Gentleman seems to have missed the point that I emphasised: it will be for people in regions to decide for themselves through a referendum whether they want a regional assembly. It may be the case that, subsequent to the creation of a regional assembly, some concern will be expressed about the reorganisation of local government. The hon. Gentleman will not expect, nor should he, a blueprint to be set out this morning, when the whole basis of the idea of regional government is that people decide what they want and how they want it in their regions. Since we came to power in 1997, much has been done to strengthen the arrangements in the English regions.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: On a point of order, Mr. Griffiths. Is it out of order for a Minister to promise to the House to do something and then fail to deliver? The Under-Secretary promised to answer our questions about which tier of Government he would abolish; he has conspicuously refused to do so.

Mr. Win Griffiths (in the Chair): That is not a point of order. In his own way the Under-Secretary has answered the question.

Landlords and Tenants

11 am

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): At the outset, I must say that I readily accept the fact that there are many landlords who act responsibly. I accept that the private rented sector has a part to play in meeting housing need. There are also many decent responsible tenants in private accommodation, and I have no wish to tar them all with the same brush.

What I am against, and what my constituents are up in arms about, is bad landlords—landlords who see their only function as collecting rent, and take no interest in the behaviour of their tenants or the condition of their property. Some, indeed, never visit their property from one year to the next. It is an unhappy fact that in Sunderland we have rather a lot of bad landlords. There is a clear correlation between the growth of the private rented sector and the crime, vandalism and general mayhem that blights the lives of all too many of my constituents.

There are parts of Sunderland—I believe this to be true of other northern cities—where the private rented sector is dragging down the entire social fabric. There are streets where my constituents live in dread of the advance of the private sector because they know that it means an influx of antisocial neighbours and a complete lack of interest on the part of absentee owners in the behaviour of their tenants. They also know that that the advance of the private rented sector means a fall in the value of their own property to the point where it can become unsaleable. In extreme cases, they know that the streets in which they live may fall into Beirut-style ruin, leading eventually to demolition. They know all this because they have already seen it happen just a few hundred yards from where they live.

What makes this especially galling is that most of those landlords tend to live in the leafier areas of the city, where they do not have to put up with the conditions that they and their tenants inflict on others. It is even more galling that much of the mayhem they see going on around them is funded out of the public purse through housing benefit, which travels directly from the local authority's bank account into the landlord's bank account without ever passing through the tenant's hands.

Nearly 90 per cent. of the 5,000 or so tenants on housing benefit in Sunderland have their rent paid in that way. When I last inquired, our top 10 landlords were receiving £1 million a year between them in housing benefit, which flowed directly from the public purse into their bank accounts. They have no incentive to take an interest either in the condition of their property or in the behaviour of their tenants. The money will continue to flow regardless. That is an incredible state of affairs. We are funding the destruction of large swathes of our inner cities—and at the same time, we are pouring money into regeneration programmes, much of which will be wasted unless we can devise some mechanism for influencing the behaviour of our most recalcitrant citizens.

For those of my constituents who have the misfortune to live in areas where the private sector is expanding, this is the single greatest issue. It blights their lives. Many are elderly, vulnerable people who have lived in or near their present homes all their lives. They can remember a time when the social fabric was intact. They worked hard to make comfortable homes for themselves and their families, and they become distraught as the value of their property falls year by year while house prices generally are rising—even a mile from where they live. The value of property in some parts of my constituency has halved during the past 10 years and that is due, in large part, to the rise of the unregulated private sector.

In some areas of Sunderland, people's only hope is to sell to a landlord at a price far below what any reasonable person would regard as fair. Indeed, there is sometimes a suspicion that landlords allow antisocial tenants to accumulate in a street as part of a deliberate tactic to force down prices. People have broken down in tears in my office as they described the mayhem around their homes. They are desperate to leave, but they are trapped because estate agents advise them that their only hope is to sell to the landlord who owns the properties on either side of theirs at a fraction of what any reasonable person would regard as a fair price.

Lately, there has been a new and ominous development. Property companies are buying up former council houses that were originally purchased under the right-to-buy scheme. They then move in antisocial tenants, whose behaviour the local authority is powerless to influence. It is not unknown for a tenant to be evicted from public housing, only to reappear in an ex-council house a few streets away. One can imagine the message that that sends to law-abiding citizens, some of whom had to pluck up the courage to give the evidence that may have led to the eviction of criminal or antisocial neighbours.

What is to be done? Various solutions have been canvassed. The Government initially proposed to license only houses in multiple occupation. Some of us said, however, that would not solve the problem because many of the houses with the worst problems were single tenancies. Indeed, there is evidence that the worst landlords are switching from multi-occupied houses to single tenancies to outwit the regulators.

It has been suggested that housing benefit regulations should be amended to give local authorities the discretion to withhold payment of housing benefit. That would cause landlords to take much more interest in those whom they put in their properties, and in their behaviour. The object of any changes would not be to remove antisocial tenants from properties, but to change their behaviour. People must live somewhere, but a mechanism is required to prompt them to live in a civilised way alongside their neighbours.

Shelter is against changing the housing benefit regulations because they would cause landlords to discriminate against tenants on housing benefit, particularly in the south.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Before the hon. Gentleman moves on, will he say how landlords can influence their tenants' behaviour?

Mr. Mullin: Yes. As I explained, I am talking about landlords who often do not visit their property, and who take no interest in its condition or the behaviour of the tenants. They do not care whether the rubbish is put out

[Mr. Mullin]

on time. They may not have a tenancy agreement with their tenants, and even if they do, they may not enforce it. Good landlords take a detailed interest in managing their property, and I seek to spread good practice so that we can make a serious attempt to alter the behaviour of the worst tenants. To be fair, I must add that many tenants who are not badly behaved live in rundown properties because the landlord takes no interest in repairs. If he had to go and collect the rent from them once a week, he would be more likely to be apprised of their immediate concerns, and do something about them.

The third option, which the Government now favour, is to give councils the discretion to license all landlords. I would be grateful if the Minister would confirm that that is his intention. Will he also confirm that the factors to be taken into account when considering whether to grant a licence include the condition of the property and the behaviour of the tenants?

Where does the Bill lie in his Department's list of priorities? I am aware that the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is bidding for rather a lot of legislation in the next round, and I do not want to see it pushed to the back of the queue and fail for lack of time, as happened last year.

What consideration, if any, has been given to introducing a planning power that would give local authorities discretion to limit the percentage of rented property in any given street? Is it not legitimate for a local authority, in consultation with residents, to consider that 10, 20 or even 30 per cent. of rented property is enough, and more would irrevocably alter the character of an area? Might that not be a legitimate reason for a local authority to turn down an application by a landlord for a licence? I do not ask for an instant opinion, as I have not given the Minister notice of my question, but I would be grateful if he would reflect on it and come back to me.

Finally, I seek a response from the Government to a suggestion about which I wrote to the Minister for the Environment on 6 July. I am still awaiting a reply. I invited my right hon. Friend to close a loophole in the Environmental Protection Act 1990 that allows absentee landlords to avoid taking responsibility for littering by their tenants. Under section 46 the occupier, rather than the landlord, is liable for ensuring that domestic waste is placed in appropriate receptacles and made available for the bin men on the appropriate day. As a result, landlords have no incentive to take an interest in the disposal of their tenants' waste.

As the law stands, the local authority [illegible]o be able to relate a particular piece of litter to a particular tenant, so successful prosecutions are almost impossible to achieve. That is especially the case in multi-occupied properties, which tend to house the worst offenders. As a result, huge quantities of litter are sometimes left by irresponsible tenants to be scattered to the four winds. The same people behave in the same way week after week, and the council is powerless to act, beyond clearing up the mess. The obvious solution is to amend the Environmental Protection Act to allow prosecution of the landlord as well as the tenant. I would be grateful to hear the Government's response to that idea.

Before I conclude, I must pay tribute to my local newspaper, the *Sunderland Echo*, which has done much to galvanise local opinion with its "Stop the Rot" campaign. My purpose in securing this debate is to try to generate a sense of urgency among Ministers about what, for Sunderland and many other local authorities in areas of low demand, is a serious problem. It is four years since I first raised it with Ministers, and I have done so repeatedly since then. Indeed, during my brief visit to Government, I arranged a little tour for my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, who was then the Minister responsible for housing, so that he could see the problem at first hand.

Such is the mayhem caused by irresponsible landlords and antisocial tenants that in parts of my constituency civilised life has broken down. The council has already had to demolish entire streets, and if help does not arrive soon, I can name the next streets to be demolished. I hope that the Minister can assure me today that help is on the way.

11.13 am

Mr. Harold Best (Leeds, North-West): I rise to speak in support of my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), with a mixture of pleasure and sadness. The sadness is due to the fact that the debate is necessary at all. I echo my hon. Friend's final comment about the continuing campaign that some of us have been running for the past five years to get some action on this troublesome problem.

It is difficult to exaggerate the stress, anxiety and damage that is being done. Growing chunks of my constituency, which were once comfortable, well-established family housing areas, have become deserts at some times of the year. Those parts of my constituency have the highest crime rates in the United Kingdom.

I live in a place well known to hon. Members who are cricket fans, and to some rugby fans—outside the gates of the Headingley cricket ground. That was considered a good place to live when I bought the house 30 years ago. All around lived families; every house was owned and occupied by families. There were children everywhere. People took care of their immediate environment and there was little, if any, antisocial behaviour.

We certainly had pubs, and we still do—more than we ever did. We have clubs, too, which we did not have then—and there are more of them now than ever. We also have take-away food places. The number of those has grown, and no matter how one tries to resist, it looks like continuing to grow. Take-away food has become the major litter-generating industry. People claim that it is a service to the community, providing cheap and easy food, but as a by-product, at great cost to the community, it produces mountains of litter in the streets, which are irregularly and infrequently cleaned up. It lowers the status of the area.

I differ slightly on one matter from my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South. Property prices in some areas have been forced up, not down. Properties have become highly desirable for conversion into houses for multiple occupation. A former family home occupied by four people with one car can now house as many as eight young people, who may each want to park a car outside. Those are the large semi-detached homes that people like me live in.

My house is on three floors. I brought up my family there. We have a small drive, which I built, and provision for two cars. We have only one, but the drive meant that a visitor's car can be parked off the street. That kind of concern for a community has gone. We must look for the motor for that change, and it is precisely what my hon. Friend described.

The principle of cause and effect is well understood. Things happen because something causes them to happen. A strange thing about the cause of what is happening in my constituency is that everyone I know, including me, supports the cause—the phenomenal growth in the number of young people entering higher education. I cannot find anyone who opposes that continuing growth. However, it was not planned for. No provision was made to accommodate the phenomenally increased numbers of students. Approximately 30,000 students live within half a mile of where I live. To say that they are densely packed is putting it mildly. The effect on housing stock is as my hon. Friend described.

Litter, filth and the irresponsibility of landlords—and, sad to say, some of their tenants—must be understood and tackled. The phenomenon is not unique to the UK. In 1997 the town of Waterloo, in Canada, was drawn to my attention. It had the same problems and eventually, by empowering local government, it introduced byelaws that did precisely what my hon. Friend has asked for. Landlords were made responsible for everything that took place in or around their property. They were even made responsible for clearing snow—and it really snows in Waterloo. Handing such direct responsibility to landlords has transformed things there, and got rid of most of the problems.

I have drawn that example repeatedly to the attention of Ministers in relevant Departments in the past few years. We are looking for ways of managing the problem. We have to learn the obvious lessons. Six or eight people might live in a multi-occupied house, with a third of them changing every year, so there is a constantly rotating population. To find among all those people someone who takes responsibility is a bit like looking for rocking-horse droppings. It is rare because each resident comes from a background in which somebody else in the house—perhaps their mother—made sure that the bin was filled and put out at the right time, and other such normal events were organised. Now, nobody in a household of eight picks up that responsibility, let alone locking the door at night or closing the windows. That is how we have become the crime capital for burglary, street robbery and armed robbery on a horrendous scale—I cannot exaggerate it.

Making people responsible is going to take time and legislative action. We need the willing and enthusiastic co-operation not only of central Government but of local government. We need sensitive, intelligent interventions by local government to meet particular and peculiar differences in sets of circumstances, and to address particular, peculiar issues. We are not all the same, so blanket legislation will not work. We have to be intelligent and sensitive.

As I have said, it is impossible to exaggerate the despair in my constituency. People have nervous breakdowns and come to my surgery in tears. I live in the area, and I cannot walk in the streets without people asking me what I am going to do about one issue, when something is going to be done about another issue, or telling me that the Joneses and the Smiths have sold up, and others are moving out. There is panic in the community.

That has threatened the future of three primary schools, because with no families around there are fewer children, so there are no new pupils. The whole social structure is coming apart, and the argument that landlords are doing us a service by providing accommodation is not laughable, but tragic. Landlords do not build new houses or blocks of flats. They take existing housing stock and corrupt it for a use for which it was never intended. That is the problem that we face; that is the harsh reality.

11.22 am

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I suspect that all right hon. and hon. Members will find that housing is either top or near the top of the list in their postbags, and it is the issue raised most often by people who come to their surgeries. It is therefore particularly welcome that the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) has secured this debate, which touches on the important issues that are daily raised with us by our constituents. He was right to draw attention to his concern about bad landlords and the problems that they create. For example, he described them as people who do not care about their properties and rarely visit them, and who, by their actions, drag down the social fabric in an area as has been so graphically illustrated by the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best). There was some disagreement between the two hon. Gentlemen as to whether that had the effect of raising or lowering the prices of neighbouring properties.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South made some interesting suggestions about the way forward, and I should like to comment on them. I was slightly disappointed—although I do not mean that in a critical way—that he did not focus more on the other half of the title of today's debate: antisocial tenants. It would be appropriate for those people to be mentioned in the remaining contributions. I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman that it is now vital that the Government get on with plans to license houses in multiple occupation.

The Minister may recall that the Labour Government, in their 1997 general election manifesto, made a clear commitment to tackling the issue, but we are still awaiting details of proposed legislation. I hope that the Minister will bring us up to date with the Government's plans in that respect.

I also hope that the Minister will answer the questions asked by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South about the Government's plans for licensing other privately rented properties, which I think is vital. At one point, we were led to believe that the measure might be introduced in certain areas selected by the Government. Now we are being told that local authorities might have the power to decide whether they wish to do that.

It is important to consider some of the other measures that local authorities could, perhaps, adopt to provide some assistance—rent deposits, for example. One of the difficulties faced by many of my constituents—and, I suspect, the constituents of other right hon. and hon.

[Mr. Don Foster]

Members—is that far too often, when a tenant wishes to move on, a bad landlord makes it unnecessarily difficult to get back the rent or a portion of it, and disagreements then occur. Local authorities might be given the power to set up a central rent deposit system, whereby they hold the deposit on behalf of the tenant, and can arbitrate between the tenant and the landlord as to whether the entire deposit, or an agreed portion of it, can be returned.

It would also be interesting to look at some wider issues. I wonder whether the Minister has had the opportunity to reflect on the role of registered social landlords and their activities in support of regeneration. We have already touched on that subject tangentially, but I am concerned about the areas in which registered social landlords know that they are absolutely certain to be able to fill all their properties, so there is little incentive for them to get involved in regeneration activities.

In other parts of the countries, notably in the north, registered social landlords think it beneficial to be involved in regeneration as a way of making the area more acceptable, and thereby making it more likely that tenants will come into it. There is a disparity between the north, where on the whole registered social landlords are willing to get involved in regeneration, and the south, where that is not the case.

Surely we want a system in which all registered social landlords want to get involved in regeneration. To a large extent, that will depend on their arrangements with the Housing Corporation. Has the Minister held discussions with the Housing Corporation about that aspect of its contractual arrangements with registered social landlords?

Out-of-date legislation on the condition of properties—governing factors such as overcrowding, safety arrangements and so on—makes it easy for bad landlords to continue to be bad. Will the Minister update us on the Government's plans for bringing some of the out-of-date legislation in respect of such matters more up to date?

I shall now talk about antisocial tenants. Many of us find housing high on the list of issues raised by constituents, and within that subject, two categories are the most common cause for complaint. The first is the fact that some constituents do not have access to good housing, and the second is the problem of antisocial behaviour by tenants in neighbouring properties. In the summer recess, the people in my office checked through my case work and discovered that during the past two and a half years, there have been more than 90 cases concerning constituents who have suffered from the neighbours from hell. It is important that we continue to debate that issue.

There has already been much discussion about legislation on homelessness. I welcome some of the developments in that respect, but the wider issue at stake is the action that we must take against neighbours from hell. The Minister will say that the antisocial behaviour order is one of the tools for tackling the problem, but can he tell us how many times such orders have been used? They may be a useful tool in the armoury of defence, but they are not proving particularly satisfactory, because of the legal complexities and the time required to obtain them.

It is important to consider what other strategies may also be available. The Government are becoming increasingly interested in schemes such as the introductory tenancy scheme, but several worries have been raised about that, and rightly so. An alternative scheme that is well worth examining is the acceptable behaviour contract, which is drawn up between the incoming tenant and the landlord. Such schemes have been working well in several areas. For example, a scheme for teenagers was drawn up in Islington, and it has been working successfully. The amount of vandalism and difficulties created by young people has been significantly reduced as a result of such contracts. I should be interested to hear the Minister's reaction to the idea of such a scheme.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South referred to housing benefit, and said that the fact that the payment is made directly to landlords has meant that they have not had to take any action in respect of their properties. As he said, that means that the Government, on behalf of taxpayers, are funding the destruction of large swathes of the housing stock. He was absolutely right to draw attention to the need to re-examine housing benefit, how it is paid and how it is decided who is eligible to receive it.

There is another side of the coin, of which we should also be well aware. One of the problems for many of my constituents who are on benefit is that many landlords are unwilling to accept as tenants people who are in receipt of housing benefit. We are in danger of labelling people who are on housing benefit as likely to be bad tenants. That is not true, and it is important that we get that message across to people. There must be action at Government level to find ways to stop private landlords preventing people on housing benefit from becoming tenants.

Mr. Mullin: The hon. Gentleman is right that we should not tar all people on housing benefit with the same brush. As he will acknowledge, I made that point during my opening remarks.

The situation at the hon. Gentleman's end of the country is different from that at my end of the country. In the south, there is often a shortage of property of all types, whereas Sunderland has a surplus. Landlords need housing benefit, but we do not need them. We have vacant properties. Landlords would change their attitude if councils had the power to change the method of payment. The way round the differences at each end of the country is to give discretion to local authorities according to circumstances in local areas, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) suggested.

Mr. Foster: I agree. We could solve several problems by giving local authorities greater powers and wider discretion, including powers with regard to antisocial tenants and bad landlords.

The hon. Member for Leeds, North-West made a valuable point about the difficulty that some towns and cities face because of the increase in the student population. Greater thought is required about how we find suitable accommodation for the large numbers of students that we already have, and the increase that we expect.

Mr. Best: Does my friend opposite—I shall call him that as I am not allowed to call him my hon. Friend—agree that we should consider the way in which universities recruit their students? If students were recruited from the area where they already live, that could reduce the pressure that we experience. It may also be more beneficial to the environment, because of a reduction in travelling and other socially damaging effects.

Mr. Foster: I partially agree with the hon. Gentleman. We should not interfere with the university experience by requiring students to attend their local university. However, that is an increasingly an attractive option, given the financial consequences of doing otherwise. Greater responsibility must be given to universities to ensure that they have adequate arrangements to accommodate the students that they recruit. In my constituency, the university of Bath has worked hard with the local council to find interesting and attractive solutions to the problems in the city. Many students may live in one road of houses in multiple occupation. Each student may bring a car, and problems may be created for other property owners and tenants in the road. I am aware of the problem, but I pay tribute to the university of Bath for its development of imaginative solutions.

There are many other issues that hon. Members would raise if we had sufficient time. I want to hear what the Minister will tell us about licensing houses in multiple occupation and other rented property, and his response to what the hon. Member for Sunderland, South said about requiring landlords to take greater responsibility for activities that occur in properties that they own but rent out to other people.

11.39 am

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) on securing the debate. When I saw the full title of the debate—"Government plans for dealing with irresponsible landlords and antisocial tenants"—I though that the hon. Gentleman had brought forward a challenging issue. It behoves all of us to try to think of satisfactory solutions to intractable problems. We all recognise that; we have all have received constituency correspondence about bad landlords and bad tenants.

Despite the hon. Gentleman's general caveat that he was not having a go at all landlords, some of his remarks suggested that he had forgotten that landlords are involved in business, and if we make the entire private rented sector too regulated and burdensome, they will disappear. In an intervention, he said that the area that he represented did not need the private rented sector—but it would be much worse off without that sector. We must take care not to expect landlords to put right all society's ills.

Mr. Mullin: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's general point; it is not my intention to blame landlords for all the ills of society. None the less, I repeat my point: people's experiences are different in different parts of the country. In Sunderland and the other old industrial cities there is a surplus of property, which makes it possible to engage the attention of even the most stubborn landlord, because landlords need tenants for their properties—and they need those tenants to be paid for by housing benefit.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I agree. An area such as the hon. Gentleman's constituency, where there is a surplus of low-quality, low-value housing, is the converse of an area such as my constituency, where there is a shortage of housing, property is very expensive, and key workers have difficulty finding a home.

All hon. Members know, from the contents of their postbags, that every constituency in the country has problems with bad landlords, and in particular with antisocial tenants. Therefore, it behoves us to work with all the relevant agencies to try to come up with satisfactory solutions to recommend to the Government—and we hope that they will enact them. The purpose of such debates is to try to come up with constructive solutions.

I shall talk about antisocial tenants first, and then move on to the subject of landlords.

Mr. Best: I have a point to make about landlords, before the hon. Gentleman discusses antisocial tenants. I agree that good landlords exist; anyone would agree with that, if they had been in the presence of a landlord with tears rolling down his cheeks because his family had run the business for generations and the other properties in his area were decaying, with catastrophic consequences for his company. Landlords have a valid point of view, and good landlords should be supported.

I have suggested to such landlords—I will make the same suggestions to landlords organisations—that they might seek to establish certain standards of accommodation, and of behaviour, with regard to their tenants. That might in turn lead to the creation of a kind of joint industry board of landlords, tenants and local authorities—a joint venture to stabilise and improve matters.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I will refer later to some of the ideas that the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) proposed. I spent three weeks in Leeds, Central, which contains the university ward, during a by-election campaign, so I, too, have some ideas about how to deal with bad landlords. However, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will deal with the tenants first.

Antisocial tenants blight many innocent people's lives, and Conservative Members say that it should be easier to obtain antisocial behaviour orders. Although they are a good mechanism, they are too cumbersome, and too difficult to obtain. Current powers to deal with antisocial behaviour usually require evidence from neighbours, which is often difficult to obtain. It takes time to gather evidence and prepare a case, yet the sanctions imposed by the courts do not necessarily protect the local community from future problems. Landlords are frequently unable, or unwilling, to take action against antisocial tenants, and at present, local councils cannot legally require a landlord to take responsibility for the actions of a tenant.

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

I want to draw the House's attention to Newham borough council's action against anti-social residents. It has been the subject of a press release, which I shall quote. It concerns the case of Belinda Baron, which came to court. The press release states:

> "It was alleged in court that Belinda Baron had allowed her boyfriend, Christopher Gittings, to threaten the lives of neighbours on more than occasion. Police were called to several incidents. It was also stated in court that Belinda Baron had allowed her son, who is now nine, to abuse, spit at, and throw stones at local people whilst making no attempt to restrain him. Local children had also had their lives threatened and had been subjected to abuse and intimidation."

That is the sort of "neighbours from hell" case that all hon. Members present have encountered in constituency correspondence.

The press release continues:

> "Using the Professional Witness Scheme, Newham gathered sufficient evidence, including statements from six local residents, to satisfy the Court that the possession order was justified. The scheme provides support to witnesses who are in fear of further intimidation and reprisal if they give evidence. These proceedings are part of Newham's continuing action to make the borough a safer place to live. The successful court action sends out a clear message that Newham will carry out its duty to protect local people from tenants and residents who are intimidating, abusive and violent."

I praise Newham for taking that action. We need to extend anti-social behaviour orders, and not only to allow the local authority to issue them, but to consider allowing housing associations and registered social landlords, and perhaps residents associations, to have an input.

When we say that we wish to use anti-social behaviour orders, we must think about what will happen, how we will enforce them, and how we will try to rehabilitate people. That is a real difficulty, which strikes at the root of the problem of anti-social behaviour. What will we do when we have issued an anti-social behaviour order? How will we try to rehabilitate people so that their behaviour is compatible with the norms in society? Community service orders may have a part to play, but what does one do with a really awkward customer who refuses to co-operate with a community service order?

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) mentioned conditional tenancies, which were part of our policy at the last election. I spoke to the Fosseway housing association this morning, to ascertain its view on antisocial behaviour orders and hear how it deals with the problems. I was told that conditional tenancies would provide one of the best armouries to deal with the problem. A tenant who had a past record of antisocial behaviour would be given a limited tenancy for three months. If he did not behave well during that period, the tenancy could rapidly be removed from him. A fast-track procedure would be necessary to make sure that he could be evicted.

As I said during debate on the Homelessness Bill, the Opposition welcome the idea of licensing houses in multiple occupation. Will the Minister say when he expects that legislation to be introduced?

Mr. Don Foster: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, although we rather glibly—I may be guilty of this, too—use the phrases "licensing houses in multiple occupation" and "licensing other rented properties", it is important to have a serious debate about the nature of the conditions attached to the licence? Ultimately, it is not the licensing that matters but the nature of the licence.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Of course. It is self-evident that the purpose of licensing would be to eliminate houses in multiple occupation that are in really bad condition, and to try to root out rogue landlords who are not reaching a reasonable standard. The hon. Gentleman and I will no doubt be on the Committee charged with considering the proposed legislation when the Government bring it forward. No doubt we will have many hours in Committee discussing that precise subject, and I would welcome that debate.

Mr. Foster: Does the hon. Gentleman further agree that the licence should not relate only to the nature of the property but to the responsibilities of the landlord, as the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) said.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I said in my reply to the hon. Gentleman's previous intervention that the licence should also root out some of the bad landlords, so I would certainly include the behaviour of landlords.

At this stage, it would be appropriate to deal with the issue of litter, which was mentioned by the hon. Members for Sunderland, South and for Leeds, North-West. Litter is a difficult and intractable problem, and one would need to think carefully about changing the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to take away the responsibility entirely from the tenant and put it on the landlord. I am not sure whether the hon. Member for Sunderland, South was advocating that. I may have misunderstood him. Perhaps he thinks that there should be a joint responsibility. Will he explain, within the confines of a brief intervention, how that would work?

Mr. Mullin: I have thought carefully about the matter. I am talking about not the odd piece of paper but piles of litter as tall as the hon. Gentleman and me, which stand in back lanes for weeks, and are cast to the four winds. The answer is to make litter a joint responsibility, and to give the landlord—because he, as well as the tenant, can be prosecuted—an incentive to cause the tenant to observe the conditions of his tenancy agreement, which should solve the problem. It is not necessarily the landlord who must clear it up, but someone must—if not the tenant, the landlord, as he is profiting from the business

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says. Landlords could take tougher action within the confines of a reasonable tenancy agreement. Perhaps I should have declared my interest in the debate as a chartered surveyor, although a non-fee-earning one. I have had to deal with such matters in a professional capacity, which is not easy. Within the confines of what is reasonable to put in a tenancy agreement, that should always be a requirement. In the past, I have very strongly advised both landlords and tenants to have a written tenancy agreement so that both parties to the agreement have a clear understanding of their obligations under the agreement.

Perhaps we could insist that landlords put pressure on their tenants to conform to the responsibilities in their tenancy agreements. I would certainly expect disposing of litter to be one of the responsibilities in the tenancy agreement, and local authorities should be able to take action against landlords who do not fulfil their obligations under the tenancy agreement.

Mr. Best: I made a passing reference to the litter industry—or should I say the take-away food industry. Unfortunately, where I live, it is possible on any night of the week to follow the litter trails. They begin at the take-away food shops, and at various points along the way we find half-eaten food and abandoned packaging. To say that that is unsightly the next morning is to put it mildly.

There is a serious health hazard, too. There has been an enormous growth in the numbers of foxes scavenging, and of rats. Does the hon. Gentleman share my view that we might impose a levy on the take-away food business, which manufactures not only food but vast quantities of litter? As my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) said, that litter does not come in small stacks. There are cubic metres of the stuff all over the area. If an additional levy were imposed on them, we might be able to hire cleaners to follow the daily litter trails.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. One need only go half a mile from here late at night to see some of the appalling litter left behind from fast food outlets. We cannot entirely blame the outlets, because it is their customers who are responsible—but the litter bins are crammed full, so it is difficult for people who have been to a fast food outlet to find anywhere else to put the litter, so they drop it in the street. We need to ensure that the local authority licence for a fast food outlet provides for proper litter receptacles that are emptied at regular intervals so that there is always a litter receptacle on or near premises where fast food is served and waste is generated. The hon. Gentleman also makes an interesting point about vermin. Not only rats and foxes but all sorts of other inner-city vermin that can be a health hazard are attracted. I entirely agree with him, and the Minister might like to discuss the matter.

I will move on, because time is short. Licensing for the whole private rented sector, which several hon. Members have called for, would place a large additional obligation on local authorities and would have a huge cost. One would need to examine carefully the national cost versus the benefit. I suggest that we consider a code of practice, perhaps even a star rating system for landlords' properties that house tenants on benefit. After all, the taxpayer pays that benefit, and if he does not get good value because of the poor quality of the property being offered, that is of interest to him.

The idea of somehow restricting benefit to either landlords or tenants, subject to good behaviour, requires careful consideration. Restricting benefits to antisocial tenants would only encourage them to enter other areas of crime such as burglary, stealing to fund their drugs habits, and prostitution. To link reductions in benefits to antisocial behaviour requires careful consideration.

Mr. Mullin: Fortunately, there has been careful thinking about that. The suggestion, which I believe the Government accept in principle—the Minister can tell us whether I am right—is that if a local authority in an area such as my constituency, which has a surplus of properties, has the discretion to license landlords, only landlords with sufficiently high standards to attract a licence will be able to take tenants who are paid for by housing benefit. That would provide those landlords with a powerful incentive to get their act together.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: There is scope for further guidelines—I put it no stronger than that—to cover landlords housing people on benefits. However, I do not know whether we should go as far as licensing all houses where tenants receive housing benefit. One would need to conduct a careful cost-benefit analysis to discover whether it would be worth while.

Mr. Mullin: No. We are talking about giving local authorities the discretion. I appreciate that circumstances vary in different parts of the country. However, in my part of the country—this applies to lots of big industrial cities where there is a surplus of property—the measure would undoubtedly have a powerful impact. The council is begging to be given that discretion, and the sooner we get on with it the better. No more careful thought, please.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I would still like to hear what the Government have to say, and find out how much the measure would cost and what the actual benefit would be.

I shall now return to the serious problem raised by the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West, which is shared by other university towns. Large numbers of young people are often housed in substandard housing. I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman—the Government might like to take notice of this—that the university authorities should take more interest in the housing of their students. I do not know what the arrangements are at the university of Bath, to which the hon. Member for Bath referred, but I suspect that that university takes a fairly close interest.

I see no reason at all, particularly given modern IT, why a university should not maintain a register of all housing available to students. Irresponsible landlords could be struck off that register, or at least a warning could be placed on the register that a particular property was expensive or of poor quality. I see no reason why that could not be done. To be candid, in many cases students do not treat property with proper respect either. If the university authorities took a greater interest in cases of student misbehaviour, there would be an easy mechanism for the landlord to come to the university and say, "Your student has caused so much damage and he has disappeared. I don't know where he is, but I want to recover the money. Will you help me?"

Mr. Don Foster: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. As he asked, I would like to tell him that the

[Mr. Don Foster]

university of Bath has agreed with the local council to regenerate some parts of the city with new buildings specifically for students. That avoids the problem of the multiple use of properties. The university has been very imaginative and has introduced requirements not only that students should agree to behaviour codes, but that they should not bring a motor car anywhere near the city of Bath. That is an important measure, which links in with issues of proper public transport. There are some imaginative schemes.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: That is admirable and commendable. The Minister will have heard what the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West have said. The problem is serious and it is growing. We rightly encourage more youngsters to stay in further and higher education, but they will require housing in concentrated areas. We must deal with that problem.

Mr. Best: I welcome what the hon. Members for Cotswold and for Bath (Mr. Foster) have said. I would like to be able to say that the university of Leeds had matched, in performance and intent, the good things that have happened in Bath. However, I regret to say—I am picking my words as carefully as I can—that its behaviour in recent years has reflected the other forms of antisocial behaviour that hon. Members have described.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I have no doubt that that is correct. University authorities must take a closer interest if they are to keep landlords and their students up to scratch.

This has been an interesting and constructive debate. We have not got to the bottom of how we shall rehabilitate those who are antisocial or a nuisance to the rest of society. I have called for mechanisms that make it easier to issue antisocial behaviour orders, but I am under no illusion but that we also need mechanisms to rehabilitate people. I know the problems that exist and I sympathise with social workers and probations officers, who are extensively involved in issuing orders, because by and large, they must make them work. We shall have to find mechanisms to rehabilitate people.

We must never forget that the antisocial behaviour of a small number of people causes a nuisance to a much larger number of innocent people. The Government and the law should always protect the innocent person, and if there is any doubt, the person responsible for the antisocial behaviour should be penalised.

12.2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): I am pleased to respond to a debate that deals with such a wide range of issues, including housing, regeneration, and law and order.

The debate is opportune. We recently issued our consultation paper on the selective licensing of landlords in areas of low housing demand, to which I shall return. First, however, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) on raising the issue before us. He has a strong constituency interest and, as a former housing Minister, a first-rate knowledge of the development of Government policy on the subject. I do not, however, want to single him out for praise, because all hon. Members have made helpful and constructive contributions to this thoughtful debate.

I hope—this is perhaps a wish rather than a hope—that the issue is not of substantial concern to too many hon. Members and their constituents. Plans for regeneration are in hand in several areas where economic and social decline is furthered by the activities of antisocial tenants and what can only be described as the villainous activities of landlords. Such people act directly against the regeneration activities that are in hand.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: May I clarify what the Minister is saying? If antisocial tenants are a problem in an area like mine, which is relatively well off and law abiding, then it must be a problem in every part of the country. The Minister should be under no illusion about that.

Dr. Whitehead: Of course I accept what the hon. Gentleman says. One hopes that, in all parts of the country, people on housing estates in the rented and private sectors will live in harmony. The problems that have been mentioned this morning do not occur throughout the country, but it is certainly true that in many parts of the country but not necessarily in all local authority areas the problems are real, and we need seriously to think about them.

I know of the work that my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) has undertaken on housing in multiple occupation, particularly the problems and pressures that houses in multiple occupation occupied by students can bring to an area. The debate has been informed by those who know a great deal about the matter, and they have made solid points.

In the housing Green Paper published on 4 April 2000, we noted that in areas of declining housing demand, particularly in parts of our northern cities, the large-scale operations of a minority of unscrupulous landlords have caused problems. Those problems were often linked to criminal activities such as housing benefit fraud, drug dealing and prostitution. I have already said that those activities can destabilise local communities, and my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South has told us how that can happen. That can create social and economic problems that seriously hamper efforts at regeneration, and that makes life difficult for respectable tenants and responsible landlords—and for owner-occupiers, who may come under pressure to sell up and move away.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South pointed out, unscrupulous landlords increasingly offer homes to anti-social households, not least those who have been excluded from nearby social housing because of their misbehaviour. My hon. Friend also spoke of the suggestion in the Green Paper that local authorities could be given discretionary powers to license privately rented dwellings or landlords in particularly problematic neighbourhoods. Licensing under those circumstances would deal with a possible surplus of housing in areas where bad landlords and tenants are likely to do the most damage. The Green Paper suggests that a local authority could be given discretionary powers to license an area, perhaps where stress is a particularly difficult problem, but it would not have to use them.

The Government's housing policy statement published a year ago said that we would consult on proposals for the selective licensing of private landlords in areas of low demand. Each scheme would be subject to approval by the Secretary of State. The power would not be exercised willy-nilly; a local authority would have to apply to the Secretary of State to be given that discretion. We would countenance such schemes only in areas where tenants could find readily available alternative accommodation should the landlord fail to obtain or lose a licence or withdraw from the market.

Our plans to consult on proposals for legislation were somewhat delayed by the election in June, but the Secretary of State announced on 20 October the start of consultation on our proposed licensing scheme. It is clearly our intention to try to legislate when parliamentary time permits, which I hope will be at an early stage.

We believe that licensing could be one of the range of tools available to local authorities, alongside other measures. The aim would be to enable local authorities to ensure that all landlords played their part in a comprehensive local strategy to tackle the consequences of low housing demand.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the Minister clarify when he is likely to introduce legislation for licensing of houses in multiple occupation, and for the new discretionary licensing scheme? Is it likely that both schemes will be part of one Bill?

Dr. Whitehead: I fear that I cannot give the hon. Gentleman complete satisfaction at the moment, although I will shortly tackle the issue of legislation that is now proceeding through the House. That legislation is not a complete answer to the questions raised today, but the Government intend to legislate on the issues at an early stage.

The Government think that additional regulation is justified for the pervasive and acute problems in several low-demand areas, but that could stifle the supply of private property for renting elsewhere. That is why we propose discretionary powers for local authorities to license private landlords in all or part of their areas. Landlords would need a licence, which would be issued only if they met standards of personal fitness—basically, no criminal record—and management fitness, including safety checks on the operation of their houses.

To keep the focus on better management and the exclusion of criminal landlords, the problem of unfit housing would be tackled separately through the existing or future housing condition regimes.

Mr. Don Foster: The Minister rightly refers to future housing condition regimes. Before he moves on, will he bring us up to date on the Government's plans for the introduction of such regimes?

Dr. Whitehead: The hon. Gentleman has anticipated my next remarks. I was about to underline the Government's view that a selective licensing regime will complement measures to provide for, among other things, the licensing of houses in multiple occupation. That future housing regime will run alongside the selective licensing of landlords in specific areas. The hon. Gentleman will be interested in further complementary measures to replace the current housing fitness standard and related enforcement machinery with a new regime based on a housing health and safety rating system. That will apply to all properties, and I will say more about it in a moment.

The selective licensing of landlords will focus on localised problems that relate to landlords in areas of low housing demand. It will not be concerned with housing fitness as such. HMO licensing will cover the types of accommodation that consistently pose the highest risks across the country, so that selective landlord licensing should ensure that HMO licensing could be properly targeted.

We seek to fulfil as soon as possible some of our commitments on the licensing of HMOs, through our support for a private Member's Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner). Part 3 of that Bill contains specific provisions for the registration of HMOs and new definitions stating what the occupants of HMOs may be regarded as, so that a wider definition can be secured and some related problems can be overcome. The Bill would also give further discretion to local authorities to license blocks of flats or houses with two storeys under certain circumstances. Several elements of legislation that the Government would like to introduce are contained in that Bill, so we have given it considerable support.

Mr. Mullin: I presume that selective licensing will apply not only to multi-occupied houses but to single tenancies, where most of the problems arise in my constituency. Will the management of tenants, the behaviour of tenants and the number of complaints attracted be taken into account when deciding whether to grant a landlord a further licence?

Dr. Whitehead: My hon. Friend is right to draw the distinction between the licensing of HMOs, which is a licensing regime relating to the fitness of properties, and the licensing of landlords in an area of low housing demand, which deals with the landlord's fitness to be a landlord of any sort of housing tenure. Part of the process of granting a licence includes providing evidence to be taken into account, either prospectively or after the licence has been issued, in determining whether it should be continued. One example might be a continuing licence for a pub landlord. If such a landlord has behaved inappropriately in managing properties in an area, the licence would not be renewed.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) mentioned antisocial behaviour and neighbours from hell. I have always expressed considerable sorrow for a town near Gdansk in Poland called Hel, where presumably all the neighbours are from Hel. However, we are talking specifically about antisocial behaviour, which can poison tenancy relations in an entire neighbourhood.

In the Green Paper, we recognise that there are, on occasions, unholy alliances between bad landlords and bad tenants. That can create intractable problems,

[Dr. Whitehead]

which require a multi-agency approach. That was and is a key theme of the policy action team, led by the Home Office, which looked into antisocial behaviour.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires local authorities and the police to develop local crime and disorder reduction partnerships and to implement strategies for reducing crime at local level. It also allows local authorities and the police, working together, to seek antisocial behaviour orders against anyone who causes harassment, alarm and distress to others.

Antisocial behaviour is a cross-tenure problem. It does not occur only in one form of housing tenure. It can occur in owner-occupied property as well as in rented property. Many antisocial tenants may move into private rented accommodation from the social housing sector and back again, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South said.

In developing a co-ordinated approach, local authorities can make use of Home Office guidance to local authorities and to the police in dealing with antisocial behaviour, especially by issuing antisocial behaviour orders. The Government are also considering measures to speed up the eviction of antisocial tenants in the social sector. The hon. Member for Bath asked how many ASBOs have been issued so far. The answer is 466, although there is evidence that local authorities are beginning to make greater use of them.

I remind the Chamber that part of the problem of obtaining court action against so-called neighbours from hell is that the more that people in the neighbourhood are intimidated, the less likely they are to keep logs and appear in court as witnesses. The introduction of professional witnesses is a great step forward towards ensuring that people need not suffer additional intimidation as a result of appearing in court while ASBOs are procured.

The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) raised the issue of conditional tenancies. He may be aware of the emergence of introductory tenancies, which are similar to the tenancy to which he referred. They can play an important role in ensuring that the local authority tackles nuisance and antisocial behaviour on estates. The recent Court of Appeal judgment is welcome. It ruled that introductory tenancies are compatible with the European convention on human rights. That provides reassurance and clarification for authorities that already operate those tenancies and to those local authorities that considered them but were concerned about compatibility.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: People from my local housing association told me this morning that even if a housing association had conditional tenancies and evicted a tenant from such a tenancy, the local authority would have a requirement to rehouse that tenant. As the housing association is the agent of the local authority, it would have a requirement to rehouse those tenants, so it would simply evict the tenants from one place and rehouse them in another. We need to consider mechanisms for dealing with antisocial behaviour and rehabilitating people into society.

Dr. Whitehead: The hon. Gentleman is right, and I am not making the case that introductory tenancies are a panacea for the wider problems that he mentions. However, I draw attention to them because they are a method for ensuring that tenants behave in a socially acceptable way when they take up their tenancies, especially if they have a previous history of antisocial activities.

Mr. Mullin: May I have my hon. Friend's assurance that he will address my point about amending section 46 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in relation to littering? I gave him notice of that point and wrote to the Environment Minister on 6 July. I hope that my hon. Friend has had better luck than I had in getting a reply from that Minister.

Dr. Whitehead: As appears to be the custom this morning, my hon. Friend has anticipated me. I was about to turn to that point.

In our Green Paper, we noted that the problem in declining areas with bad landlords and antisocial tenants was compounded by the fact that such antisocial tenants were often dependent on housing benefit. My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South referred to that. Housing benefit is paid directly to the landlord, which provides landlords with no incentive to enforce tenancy agreements or manage their property effectively. I recognise the concerns expressed on that matter.

The selective licensing of landlords should ensure that bad landlords are given a chance to get their act together and that, if they do not do so, they are unable to continue to operate unlicensed. It would not be right for unlicensed landlords to continue to be supported with housing benefit payments. With such safeguards as may be needed to protect innocent tenants, we shall need to ensure that legislation on selective licensing closes the door on such payments. We also need to recognise that housing benefit is the right of the tenant and is paid directly to the landlord only when tenants cannot manage their own affairs.

My hon. Friend referred to littering—an issue on which he wrote to the Minister for the Environment. The problem of littering in housing in multiple occupation is often severe, but it is sometimes difficult to prove precisely who is responsible for it. Section 46 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 is not exactly associated with litter provisions, but it requires the householder to place household waste in the receptacle specified by the waste collection authority for normal weekly collection.

There is a power under the Environmental Protection Act to force the householder to take responsibility for putting the waste out. The problem that might arise in implementing my hon. Friend's suggestion would be that it would give an additional and overlapping power to the landlord. That could cause confusion. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has a litter legislation review in hand, and it will shortly publish proposals for consultation. I imagine that that will be one of the issues on which consultation will take place, but as my hon. Friend says, that is not my departmental responsibility.

Mr. Mullin: I sympathise. I once had responsibilities similar to those of my hon. Friend and I know that they are vast. I am seeking to address the problem that occurs when a great quantity of litter comes out of what is often, but not always, a multi-occupied house, and no one will accept responsibility for it. The local authorities cannot prosecute, because they cannot identify which individual in the house put out which bit of litter, and that is what they are required to know at the moment. They therefore want the power to prosecute the landlord, in order to prompt him to require the tenant to put things in order.

Dr. Whitehead: Yes, indeed. I understand my hon. Friend's point. I hope that DEFRA's consultation will address his concerns, although I must emphasise that there is a potential problem of confusion in law.

Where poor condition housing—in all tenures—coincides with declining demand for housing and with social problems, we have a serious problem. A vicious spiral can ensue in which problem landlords and tenants play a part. When people start to leave areas and houses are boarded up, crime moves in, conditions deteriorate, and whole neighbourhoods head rapidly down a steep slope. In those situations the licensing of landlords is but one tool available to local authorities to address anti-social behaviour and declining property values. Local strategic partnerships can help to co-ordinate measures and improved public services can help to revitalise an area, as can addressing the quality and quantity of the housing stock.

The Regulatory Reform Act 2001 should enable the Government, by order, to sweep away the constraints surrounding local authorities' support for private sector renewal. That will give local authorities much greater freedom within their housing strategies to use their resources to improve conditions in the private sector.

My hon. Friends the Members for Leeds, North-West and for Sunderland, South raised the issue of the power to limit the number of houses in multiple occupation in a particular street. It is best that I write to them on that matter, and I shall certainly do so. I am sure that they appreciate that there might be problems in planning law if a property were allowed to be developed for multiple occupation if somebody had moved out, but not in other circumstances.

The Government want a private rented sector that is better and bigger. That sector provides essential housing to the young and mobile, and also to many of the most vulnerable people in our communities. We want to encourage good landlords through best practice initiatives. We are also conscious that the private rented sector is very sensitive to regulation and to movements in the market for properties for owner-occupation. The hon. Member for Cotswold made the point that in the main it might not be a good idea to regulate all landlords and all rented properties in all areas. Apart from stifling the supply of a much needed resource, that would impose on local authorities the major task of policing the regulation.

In our resolution to press forward with the selective licensing of landlords and HMOs, the Government are focusing on problems relating to the worst landlords in the private rented sector, the most vulnerable of communities and the most vulnerable of tenants.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): We can now move on to the next debate. Meanwhile, I congratulate the Minister on his double innings this morning.

Children's Services (Hertfordshire)

12.30 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): I called this debate for three reasons. I wanted to make Ministers aware of the intense local feeling about the intended closure of maternity services at Hemel Hempstead and their move to Watford, to place on record our reasoned concerns on the subject, and to spell out our short, medium and long-term aims.

On 26 September, the local health trust announced that the special care baby unit at Hemel Hempstead was no longer considered safe. It was therefore to be closed and moved to Watford, along with all maternity, women's and related children's services. The move is set to be completed by 4 February 2002. Although there had been some consultation with the primary care trust since July about the safety of the SCBU, as the unit is known, no discussion had taken place with it about the simultaneous closure of maternity and women's units at the hospital. However, we have now been told that the problem had been apparent at Hemel for up to 18 months. Why was it not discussed publicly earlier? Why was it not known about at the general election?

The first explanation of the changes was given at a hastily arranged meeting at Watford general hospital on Monday 8 October. I attended it, along with representatives of the primary care trust and local councillors. The chairman, chief executive and medical director responsible for clinical governance in the West Herts community health NHS trust gave us several reasons for the planned closure and transfer. The main ones were the difficulty in recruitment and retention of skilled nursing staff at the Hemel unit, the difficulty in maintaining duplicate cover as required following the inquiry into the Bristol Royal infirmary, and the case of the nurse who suffered from Munchausen's syndrome by proxy. There had been instances of misprescription and misdiagnoses, and a higher than average proportion of nursing staff at the Hemel unit are nursery nurses. They are dedicated staff, but are not trained to fulfil some roles.

The decision comes on top of other issues that have undermined confidence in the West Herts community health NHS trust, and especially in Hemel hospital. The reputation of the hospital was affected by figures that showed that it had one of the highest mortality rates for neck of the femur operations—hip transplants—with one in six patients dying within 30 days of an operation. Action has been taken to respond to that. More relevant to the closure of the maternity unit is that two of the four consultants in the gynaecology and obstetrics team are suspended and under investigation following complaints from hundreds of local women.

An inquiry is due to be published soon, and I do not want to pre-empt its findings. Suffice it to say that, even though they have been replaced, the events have hit public confidence and are probably a much more important factor in putting the skids under maternity and women's services in Hemel than anyone publicly admits. Hemel was already at a disadvantage compared to Luton and Dunstable, which has twice as many consultants in the relevant specialties but handles only 40 per cent. more births. I would like to know the reason for that disadvantage.

[Mr. Peter Lilley]

Following the announcement of the proposed changes, all three parties on St. Albans district council unanimously passed a motion of no confidence in the management of West Herts community health NHS trust. However, my constituents are overwhelmingly grateful to and confident in the doctors and nurses at Hemel for the care and treatment that they have provided over the years.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that no fewer than 51,281 local people have signed a petition opposing the disposition made by the local health authority? That clearly demonstrates the general fantastic local confidence in the service.

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that point. Similar petitions have been signed in my constituency and in St. Albans to express opposition to the proposed change, and determination that the services should be restored as rapidly as possible.

I accept that safety must be paramount. If there is a clinical risk to mothers and babies, action must be taken to remedy that. If the only option is a temporary move to Watford—that remains to be proved—it will be painful and difficult for mothers during that period, but so be it. My main worry is that the move will not be temporary, but permanent. That is unacceptable. The chairman of the local hospital trust admitted that even outside rush hour, it takes 27 minutes to get from Hemel Hempstead to Watford. For my constituents in Harpenden, Redbourn, Sandridge and Wheathampstead, journey times can be considerably longer.

Watford rush-hour traffic is notorious. It took me longer to get from the junction of the M1 to the hospital in Watford than it took to get from the House to that junction. On top of that, the hospital is next door to the football stadium. Mothers who must go to the hospital during a home match face intolerable delays.

Ultimately, distance undermines safety and I cannot accept the idea that those services should be so far from my constituents. My constituents in Sandridge and Wheathampstead, who currently have the option of going to the Queen Elizabeth II hospital in Welwyn Garden City instead, are worried that there are rumours of those services moving up north to the Lister hospital. Will the Minister tell us whether that is likely?

The fear that the closure of Hemel Hempstead general hospital will be permanent is exacerbated by the Government's plans for maternity spending, which were announced on 16 October. They show that there are plans to spend more on maternity services in virtually every other hospital in Hertfordshire, but no money is set aside for Hemel Hempstead general hospital. If the Government planned to improve that hospital and ensure that we could return maternity services there, surely the hospital would receive a large chunk of the spending. The fact that that will not happen clearly suggests that there are long-term plans to close Hemel Hempstead general hospital's maternity services permanently.

Mr. McWalter: What the right hon. Gentleman says is absolutely correct. The result of that is that £750,000 of the £1 million given by the Government for maternity services is going to West Hertfordshire. If these plans go ahead, the result of that investment will be a decrease in maternity beds jointly held in Watford and Hemel Hempstead from 63 to 45. That investment would mean a massive slashing of services.

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for spelling out how the word "investment" in new Labour speak is a substitute for spending, and often means spending less than under the Conservative Government.

The announcement by the Under-Secretary of State for Health, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, in November of an independent review of the decision gave local people some hope that the move to Watford could be averted. Plans were made for meetings with the review panel at the beginning of December and the end of November. However, the meetings were cancelled. It emerged that the team would not start work until 7 January. It will publish its report on 18 January, but that will be only a fortnight before the movement is to be completed. The planning will certainly be under way by then, so effectively, there is a fait accompli and the review has the appearance of a cosmetic job to endorse that.

The name of the chairman of the review team has been released, but the rest of the panel remain anonymous. We are told that that is because the panel is independent. However, how can we know that if we do not know who is on it? Will the Minister tell us who the people are, why the review will start so late, and its terms of reference? I sincerely hope that my scepticism about the review will be unfounded and that it will serve a useful purpose. If it is too late to stop the transfer, the panel could set down a programme to restore accessible services to Hemel Hempstead or St. Albans within a firm timetable.

There is even more serious concern in my constituency that the move of the women's and children's services may not only prove permanent, but be a prelude to the downgrading of Hemel Hempstead General hospital and the loss of its accident and emergency services. We fear that because we have been here before; in the mid-1980s, the maternity unit at St. Albans City hospital was merged with, and moved to, Hemel Hempstead because, we were told, it had a high risk of perinatal mortality. The subsequently published figures did not demonstrate that, but by then it was too late.

We were told that the move was a one-off. Not so: it was a precursor to the merging of the accident and emergency units and acute services, which also moved to Hemel Hempstead from St. Albans. I strongly opposed the merger, as did most local people and all parties, but it was unanimously supported by the consultants, who argued that the merger would lead to an improved service.

The merger went ahead. Ever since then, I have challenged the health authority to publish figures showing whether the service has improved. It has refused. I have asked Ministers to carry out a study of similar mergers across the country to demonstrate whether they have raised clinical standards. They, too, have refused.

We fear remorseless centralisation in the national health service. We could accept it more readily if it were based on evidence, but if that evidence exists, it has not been published. The real reasons for the merger are the supposed cost savings, which rarely materialise, and bureaucratic empire-building, which materialises all too often. We fear that the change will be permanent, not temporary. It will lead ultimately to the loss of all major acute and accident and emergency services at Hemel Hempstead, and their transfer to Watford General hospital.

Let us consider the short, medium and long-term. In the short term, we must be sure that the move is truly necessary. We must be assured that all options have been properly considered, including transferring qualified staff, increasing the unit's budget and staff complement, and making more strenuous efforts to recruit staff. We have little faith in the proposed review, which purports to be independent although it was set up by a Minister. The review is mostly anonymous and started work too late. It looks more like a whitewash than an objective inquiry. None the less, we hope that the review will be of some use, but if it is not, we must look to the medium term.

Our medium-term objective is to receive a firm commitment to restoring maternity and related services accessible to people in Harpenden, Redbourn, Sandridge, Wheathampstead and St. Albans. That means bringing those services back either to Hemel Hempstead or to St. Albans. That is the least that we will accept from the review.

If there is a proven case for specialisation and larger hospitals, the only satisfactory long-term solution is a super hospital accessible from Harpenden, St. Albans, Hemel Hempstead, Watford, and the area between those four places. None of the existing hospital sites are large enough or accessible enough to fulfil that role and house a first-class specialist hospital covering West Hertfordshire.

We must not let services implode into one of the existing sites, like a black hole absorbing stars into a minute space of infinite density. It is all the more essential to avoid that, given the current review of hospital services in Hertfordshire. At present, there are no hospitals with specialist standing in Hertfordshire that serve the whole region, so a new super hospital in Hertfordshire would help us to prevent the county from being downgraded to an auxiliary of London and Cambridge.

I wait to hear the Minister's response, and ask her to give me assurances about the short, medium and long term. That would be the best Christmas present that my constituents, particularly future mothers, could receive, and I hope that they do.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) for raising such an important issue and for the way in which he has approached the matter on behalf of his constituents. Clearly, almost nothing is more important to people than the future of their hospital services, in particular those that relate to maternity, obstetrics, gynaecology and other services for women and their families. I understand the local worry that will have been caused by the speed with which such decisions have been taken.

I am also aware that the right hon. Gentleman has raised the issue previously. He has asked a parliamentary question of a ministerial colleague about the urgent transfer of the service. I know that the way in which the decision became known has caused great worry to hon. Members, health service staff, community health councils in the area and local action groups. The residents of St. Albans and Harpenden became aware of the information by way of their local press. I emphasise that the decision to transfer the special care baby unit from Hemel Hempstead to Watford General hospital is clinical. It is not financially driven, but is a response to several adverse clinical incidents combined with acute difficulties in recruiting specialist paediatric nurses to the special care baby unit. That position led Hertfordshire Partnership NHS trust to declare the special care baby unit service at Hemel Hempstead hospital unsafe.

As the right hon. Gentleman said, clinical safety must be of the utmost importance when providing services to families in his area.The decision was made in the best interests of patient care and safety. Given the circumstances, the option to transfer the service to Watford general hospital was felt to be the most appropriate.

Mr. McWalter: My hon. Friend's briefing may be a little out of date in that the Hunt inquiry was established to find out whether such claims—some of which may be founded on misinformation—are true. The Hunt inquiry was due to meet in January but, as the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) said, there has now been a fourth postponement until March of the movement of the special care baby unit. Perhaps those developments have not reached my hon. Friend's office, but she must not talk as if that action is a fait accompli—as the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden described it. On the contrary, the decision is still very much under investigation.

Ms Blears: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but it is important to say that the decision came about as a result of clinical safety issues and concern about adverse incidents, together with difficulties in recruiting paediatric nurses. Those difficulties are a matter of fact. The trust has set up several recruitment drives, but has been unable to recruit nurses to the unit. I understand that the cover required is about 16 whole-time equivalent paediatric nurses to sustain the number of beds that were in the special care baby unit, but at the moment it has about 6.45 equivalents. Clearly, there is a real problem. It is a fact that recruiting paediatric nurses to a place such as Hemel Hempstead is difficult, given housing costs and the salaries that are paid. Most people in the area would recognise that that has been a problem for a considerable time. Whether or not that issue is sufficient in respect of the decision to relocate the special care baby unit will be examined by the review. Recruitment problems have been an issue for the trust for some time.

Mr. McWalter: My hon. Friend may be aware of the plan to have a 135-unit nurses home on site, so there will be no problem in the medium and long term.

Ms Blears: I am aware of that. Negotiations are continuing with English Partnerships to look into setting up a multi-storey residential development of 135 single cluster units to attract young nurses to the area. However, such developments will occur in 2003 and, as my hon. Friend said, we are talking about the medium term. I am explaining the reasons for the immediate decision that was taken, which will be the subject of review. I wish again to put it on the record that the decision was not financially driven. It is about safety, clinical issues and ensuring that, in the interim, the situation is managed safely so that we can reassure the people in the area that their families and babies are not at risk, and that the situation will continue to be managed as safely as possible.

I also want to set the issue in the context of the various reviews that are taking place. The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden talked about the need to ensure that the decision is temporary and not a fait accompli or a permanent decision. It is important that the matter is considered in the context of the review of services generally. Too often—I have personal experience of this—decisions have been taken that, as a result of subsequent events, almost inevitably become permanent. It is important, therefore, that the temporary decision is based on clinical safety and is not embedded by subsequent actions, from which it is extremely difficult to retreat. I am acutely conscious of the need to do that.

In Hertfordshire and south Bedfordshire, the need for strategic change in relation to acute services is recognised. The right hon. Gentleman's suggestion about the possibility of a new super hospital is not on my agenda. We recognise the need for a review of services, but it is important that all such reviews are linked together. For example, any proposed permanent changes to acute children's services must be subject to formal public consultation with all its implications. People must be involved in the consultation and their views must be taken properly into account. It is important that decisions are made at local level to ensure that maternity provisions, in particular, and provisions for new-born babies are the most effective in terms of local needs. The proposals for maternity services in Hertfordshire also need to be considered in the context of two important developments in the national health service as a whole.

I am not sure whether the right hon. Gentleman is aware of the current national review of links between maternity, gynaecology and other related services. The long-accepted view has been that, once a special care baby unit is moved, the maternity provision has to move. The obstetrics and gynaecology units also then have to move. I understand the right hon. Gentleman's concern that it is a salami-slicing process and that an initial decision can have many knock-on effects. A substantial number of services could be dramatically changed. It is important to mention that the national review is looking at the links between those various services. It aims to establish whether the accepted view that such services are inextricably linked—and cannot under any circumstances be considered differently—is the right approach. In the context of that range of services, that would be a significant change.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about the move toward centralisation and bigger services. Within the NHS generally, there is a view that some of those issues should now be reconsidered, that they are not automatically given and there may be different ways of organising services. As a result, more services could be provided safely, closer to people's homes and communities. It is difficult to strike a balance between safety and excellence, clinical quality and local access. However, it is important that we examine those issues and do not accept the idea that because they have been carried out in a certain way in the past, they must continue in that way indefinitely. We must therefore look at the long term and the national picture as well as the local picture.

We must also be aware that there is a large commitment from the Government to increase the number of midwives in maternity services in many local areas. Midwife-led units are extremely popular. They have had excellent outcomes, especially with low-risk births without complications. Local women certainly appreciate midwife services. We are on target to recruit a further 500 midwives by the end of next year, and an extra 2,000 midwives by the end of 2005. It is important to ensure that we not only recruit new midwives, but retain the existing midwives.

I want to deal with the issues raised by the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden and my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) about funding for maternity care. The funding was recently announced as a result of the £100 million of capital investment nationally, but Hemel Hempstead did not receive its allocation. I understand how my hon. Friend could feel that that reinforced the permanent nature of the removal of maternity care services from Hemel Hempstead.

I firmly refute that position and say that West Herts community health NHS trust received £622,000 for Watford General hospital. There was an allocation of £240,000 for Hemel Hempstead general hospital. That allocation still exists; it has been deferred until 2002. That decision was made immediately before the decision to relocate the special care baby unit, so it would have been inappropriate to allocate the money to Hemel Hempstead. However, I am assured that that allocation has not been set aside. The money is still available, and has not been used elsewhere. Hemel Hempstead has not lost out with regard to those allocations—but any capital allocation will need to be supported by a robust revenue situation in the broader health economy.

As a period of change is under way, the allocation has been deferred until 2002-03.

Mr. Lilley: Will the Minister elaborate on that? One of her colleagues published a list of all of the sums, hospital by hospital. Hemel Hempstead received nothing, so it is interesting to learn of that £750,000. Has it been plucked out of thin air? If the hon. Lady possesses the power to magic money out of thin air, we would like her to exercise it more frequently.

Ms Blears: I do not have a magic wand, and I do not cast spells.

I am assured that the eastern region has had its allocation, and the figures are as I have stated—£622,000 for Watford, and £240,000 for Hemel Hempstead. However, because the decisions to institute the changes were made at the same time, the allocation of those sums has been deferred to 2002. This morning, I sought an assurance that that money is still provided for, and I received it. However, I understand that hon. Members might have seen that their hospital had no allocation, and that they might therefore have assumed that that was confirmation that the decision to move services was permanent, rather than temporary. The situation is still fluid; there is still an allocation for Hemel Hempstead general hospital.

The right hon. Gentleman also referred to his constituents' concerns that there might be a proposal to move the maternity service from the QE2 to the Lister hospital. There are no plans to do that, at present—although a general strategic review of acute services is being conducted. I wish to reassure people who live in the area that there will be sufficient capacity for mothers-to-be and families to have access to high quality maternity services in the future.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned transport problems such as congestion, and the time that it takes for patients to travel to the site of the alternative provision. I am aware of those problems. Discussions have taken place with the ambulance services in the area, and the midwifery service, to try to ensure that patients are informed of the preparations that they will have to make, should they need to travel those distances. They should be told how long the journey is likely to take, so that undue distress is not caused to people who are going into labour, who need swift access to a hospital.

There have been other discussions, in particular with the ambulance services, about what to do about the possibility of increased 999 calls from women who are going into labour, to ensure that the best possible service is provided.

The Dacoram primary care trust, and Harpenden and St. Albans primary care trust, are undertaking a feasibility study of the possibility of establishing low-risk maternity services provision in north-west Hertfordshire. That study is separate from the acute review that is also being conducted, and if it finds that it is possible to provide a midwife-led service in the area, that would benefit local people.

Concerns have been raised in the local media about the cost of the proposed transfer, and about whether resources might be wasted if the independent review panel were to change its decision after improvements had been made at Watford. I assure local people—and hon. Members—that the vast majority of those improvements would have been carried out in any event. We are not in the business of spending money unnecessarily: we are focussing on certain necessary safety improvements. If there are to be any permanent changes that affect maternity services and services for families in this area, they will be the subject of proper public consultation, so that all the people in the community who have raised proper concerns about those issues will have a full chance to get involved and make sure that they have their say on shaping services for the future. I hope that the independent review will be able to look at the proposals that have been made, and ensure that they are robust and properly reflect the clinical and safety concerns in that community. Those concerns must be given the highest priority, but must always be balanced with trying to ensure that services are as close to home and as accessible for local people as possible.

Children's Society

1 pm

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): I am pleased to have secured this short debate today, but I am sorry about the circumstances that have brought it about. My purpose in asking for the debate is to raise concerns about the Children's Society's decision to withdraw from Wales, and the deep feelings of anger and disappointment that that has produced, not only in Wales but in Westminster.

Early-day motion 443 has been signed by 74 Members of Parliament: only 26 of them are from Wales, and the rest are mainly from England. That shows the depth of concern about the work of the Children's Society in Wales and England. I am pleased that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears) is replying to the debate today. The Children's Society's reputation is on the line, and it is therefore important that a Minister who has responsibilities in England should reply to the debate, as the issue affects England as well as Wales.

Before I became a Member of Parliament I worked in the voluntary sector. I was an assistant director of Barnado's. I worked with the Children's Society, with which we collaborated on different projects. I was a member of many multi-agency groups in which the Children's Society was involved.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): My hon. Friend mentioned that the Children's Society is involved in multi-agency work. There is one such project in my constituency, which is working with children who desperately need help. Will she make an appeal for the Children's Society to reverse its decision on Friday, and get down to the difficult job of serving children in Wales?

Julie Morgan: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is essential that the Children's Society reconsider its decision at its emergency trustees meeting on Friday. We know the importance of its work in Wales, and I am appealing to the society to change its decision.

The Children's Society has a long history in Wales. It began its work in 1887, initially to save children who could fall into moral danger from prostitution or crime. It has always worked closely with the Church in Wales. For many years, the Children's Society in Wales worked with disabled children, and found foster parents for vulnerable children. Subsequently, it moved into community work, and in the 1990s it stepped into a child-centred role running advocacy projects, which has been its main work.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): I am sure that my hon. Friend will be aware that, in the 2002-03 portfolio, more than £100,000 was allocated for work in Gwynedd and Ynys Môn. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) would wish to associate himself with my remarks. Such advocacy work is desperately needed in Bangor and parts of Ynys Môn. I am sure that my hon. Friend will make that point on behalf of north-west Wales, as well as the rest of Wales, when she makes her case to try to persuade the board to reverse its decision when it meets on Friday.

Julie Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution. I will put the case for all the projects throughout Wales. I am very pleased that so many Members of Parliament are here to support me today.

There are 13 projects all over Wales. The eight advocacy projects were set up as a result of the Waterhouse report, and act as independent voices for some of the most vulnerable children in Wales. I am sure that we all remember the horrors described in the report. It is essential that the advocacy projects continue to be run by an independent body, such as a charity. Such a body should not be linked to the social services or the Assembly, and should give an independent view. The Children's Society runs the projects and provides an independent voice, but it is helped financially by local authorities and the National Assembly.

The charity is pulling the plug on the children it was set up to serve. Many of the advocacy partnerships still had years to run. No one is criticising the society's good work.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): My hon. Friend will know of the project in the Caerphilly county borough area. I used to work in the youth service and know full well the excellent work that it does. Does she agree that it is highly regarded and is seen as an example of very good practice?

Julie Morgan: My hon. Friend is right. I know that the project is of a high standard. Indeed, at an event held by Community Care at the Hilton hotel last Thursday, the society's work in Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent won an award for innovation. There is no question about the quality of its work.

The community development projects are located in the valleys and west Wales, both of which are objective 1 areas, and in Powys, which was savaged by foot and mouth disease. Compared with England, Wales is a poor country. Does the charity intend to work only in areas where people are wealthy enough to give donations? It is inexplicable that it should withdraw from a poor area such as Wales.

We all understand that the society has financial problems.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): To what extent does my hon. Friend think that responsibility for this dire situation and for the society's potential withdrawal from Wales rests with decisions taken by the board of trustees and the management? They went on a £12 million spending spree, but failed to appoint a fundraiser for two and a half years. How muoh responsibility should they shoulder?

Julie Morgan: There are problems with the financial management of the Children's Society, and I hope that the Welsh Affairs Committee will have an opportunity to go into that when it summons the managers to its meeting.

One of our greatest concerns is that the society reached its decision without consulting children, staff, partner agencies, local authorities, the Church or the

National Assembly. The society has pulled the plug with no warning and without attempting to ensure that provision continues. Jane Hutt, who is the Minister for Health and Social Services in the National Assembly, has made a statement that is worth repeating. She said:

> "When the news that the society was pulling out of Wales broke, no application for grants was made by the Society to the National Assembly. We have not turned down funding for them, as no request was ever made. Before making the announcement that they were pulling out of Wales they should have come to the Assembly and discussed their concerns".

The society made no attempt to sort out the issue.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing time for this important debate. Does the behaviour that she has aptly described befit a charitable organisation?

Julie Morgan: Certainly not. Many of us respect the society's work, but we are concerned about its actions on this issue. It did not try to sort matters out before the crisis arose. It announced that it would withdraw, but made no attempt to secure services, yet it is supposed to be listening to children. Taking up the point made by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), the society is supposed to be concerned about children, yet it was prepared to end services in Wales without trying to obtain more money. It did not even approach the Assembly, which was the obvious place to go. The chief executive, Ian Sparks, was given a column in *Community Care* magazine to explain the society's reasons. He said:

> "We had no alternative but to withdraw from Wales".

It is a matter of great concern that he could say that when he did not ask for help to remain in Wales.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that the decision to amputate Wales from its work will damage the society's reputation beyond Wales, especially in its work in England? That will seriously affect its credibility when making representations in places such as this.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. Before I call Julie Morgan to continue her speech, I apologise to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) for not identifying him when he made his intervention. I say that for *Hansard*'s sake.

Mr. David: Apology accepted, Mr. Winterton.

Julie Morgan: I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan). One of the reasons for having this debate in Westminster Hall is to highlight the fact that the Children's Society sets great store by its ability to influence Governments, and to point out that its actions in Wales will damage that influence in its work in England and Wales.

I applaud the efforts of the staff in trying to create a package that could enable services to continue. I am pleased that the Children's Society will hear from a small group of children and staff from Wales at an emergency meeting that the trustees are holding on Friday, which shows that they are finally being forced to listen. The voices from Wales were not heard when the society made its decision. Only one Welsh representative was present when the decision was made. Three young people were there also, but none of them were from Wales.

I am concerned about a report in *The Guardian* this morning, which has been confirmed by the Children's Society. It says that the society will listen to two children and two members of staff on Friday on condition that there are no demonstrations or banners outside the society's London office.

Dr. Hywel Francis (Aberavon): Does my hon. Friend agree that the volunteers should be able to make representations, as they work hard to assist the society in Wales, especially in my constituency? I know that both Church and community organisations assist the society in its work.

Julie Morgan: Yes, and they do not have a voice. Two young people and two members of staff is the smallest number that could be asked to make representations. The society does not want people to demonstrate and is not prepared to let young people show their feelings. That reflects badly on the society, which seems to be stifling democratic debate.

The most objectionable aspect of the society's decision is that Wales seems to be dispensable. How is it possible, when a funding crisis hits a charity that covers England and Wales, for one arm of the organisation to be chopped off? I know that savings have been planned in England, but to penalise a whole country is objectionable. Why should Welsh children be discriminated against?

There are many issues related to the current situation in Wales. For instance, how can the Society's fundraising continue? I know that Ann Jones, Assembly Member for the Vale of Clwyd and Chair of the Assembly's Health and Social Services Committee, has written to the Charity Commission querying the legality of the society's fundraising in Wales. The situation is distressing and a mess, and I am interested to hear the Minister's views on it.

The Children's Society has the opportunity to change its mind on Friday. I hope that it will consider its reputation in respect of its operations in England as well as in Wales, and its influence on Government. I hope that it will reconsider its decision. I know that it has received many representations from all sectors of Welsh society and from people in England asking it to change its mind. I am appealing to the Children's Society to change its mind on Friday. I hope that it will do that and restore its credibility. It can then continue to influence Government policy and the Welsh Assembly's policy, as it has done in the past, and its valuable work can continue without this stain.

1.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) for raising the issue. I am also very impressed by the number of hon. Members in attendance. That signifies to me the depth of their concern and the importance of these issues not just to hon. Members but to their constituents throughout Wales. The House is sending a powerful message.

[Ms Hazel Blears]

There can be no bigger priority for any of us than to try to improve services for children in need in general, and for looked-after children in particular, who comprise one of the most vulnerable groups of children in our society. In the past there has been poor management, inconsistent quality and a wide variation in the services available. My hon. Friend mentioned the Utting report of the review of the safeguards for children living away from home, the Waterhouse report and the risks that children were exposed to when living away from home in the 1970s and 1980s. Those risks were seriously underestimated, and it is only in recent years that the experiences of thousands of children have come to light.

The Government seek to ensure that all children have the love, care and support that they need for the whole of their childhood, and that they are protected from abuse and neglect. We seek to ensure that the children for whom social services are responsible gain maximum life chances from education and other opportunities so that they manage to reach their potential. All my hon. Friends share those goals for children.

The voluntary sector, including the Children's Society, has for many years been a key partner in what the Government are trying to achieve. The quality protects programme in England and the children first programme in Wales, which have been very important, are examples of that. The Government have not sought to abrogate their responsibilities and push them on to the voluntary sector.

Working in partnership involves recognising that in many communities the voluntary sector is a more appropriate agency to deliver the priorities of Government. Working with local authorities, the voluntary sector can deliver innovation on the ground, which the Government are not in a position to do. We seek to gain the maximum added value from involving the voluntary sector, and that has been vital. That is why a large part of the programme under the £450 million children's fund is to be delivered deliberately through voluntary sector agencies, and why the role of organisations such as the Children's Society is so important in the delivery of Government priorities as a whole—not simply in Wales, but throughout all areas for which we are responsible.

In the review of the position of vulnerable children we highlighted the need to listen to children themselves. That has been at the heart of all the policies that we have developed. The Waterhouse report recommended that

> "recourse to an independent advocacy service is available to any complainant or affected child who wishes to have it".

That was a fundamental decision. The Utting report made similar recommendations. As well as listening to children about what they want to happen, we should allow them to influence the development of policy itself. Sometimes the best and most creative solutions come from children's ideas, because they are at the sharp end and they know what works and what does not, and how services could be better organised. We all learn from children's input.

Kevin Brennan: Does my hon. Friend agree with the view I have formed from listening to evidence, in sittings of the Special Standing Committee on the Adoption and Children Bill, that the credibility of the Children's Society in purporting to speak for children in Wales will be seriously undermined if it goes ahead and withdraws from its work in Wales?

Ms Blears: I understand my hon. Friend's view on that matter, and I am sure that it will be reflected by other hon. Members, showing the depth of their concern for their communities, and particularly children. It is crucial that organisations not only speak for children but find out their views before doing so. Organisations should not be a proxy for children's views, but should be in touch with children so that the views they communicate are a true reflection of the situation in communities. That is a priority for us.

Advocacy is important; local authorities plan to spend £9 million this year on advocacy schemes. I think that £750,000 is being spent in Wales this year on schemes such as those outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams). The voluntary sector has shown that it has the capacity and experience to provide the services in question. The my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North was keen to stress that the quality of the Children's Society's services is not at issue, but that there is a need to ensure that those services continue to support young people.

In the past few years, the Children's Society has been a key partner, with the Government and local authorities in England and Wales, in making progress with some of our programmes. For example, last year it worked with more than 40,000 children and young people through 100 projects in England and Wales. The Government are currently funding, through section 64 project grants, three Children's Society projects in England, helping to improve children's participation. Those totalled £120,000 this year. I understand that there is also Youth Justice Board project funding of approximately £100,000. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North was right to say that the Children's Society is very much involved in influencing Government policy and the development of projects. We would clearly want that to continue, but I certainly recognise the concerns expressed by hon. Members from Wales about the continuation of the society's role in the present circumstances.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): The Minister has expressed the concern of people in Wales and their representatives about the society's decision. Does she believe that the Children's Society is wrong to decide to cut Wales off from its work?

Ms Blears: Decisions made by charities are matters for their trustees. We have a concordat on work with the voluntary sector and charitable organisations, which makes it clear that charities and voluntary organisations are independent bodies. Sometimes the added value that they bring to Government programmes is due to that independence and to responsiveness to certain factors, which national statutory organisations may not have. Their independent status and diversity are valuable.

Although the matter is for the trustees, I can record my concern at the decision. The Prime Minister has also said that it was disappointing. He is aware that discussions are going on and hopes that they will be satisfactorily concluded. It is important that hon. Members have raised the matter before the meeting due to take place shortly, at which the matters will be considered. Trustees are legally an independent body and must arrive at decisions in the appropriate legal framework, but they are also partners in Government policy and projects and must be aware of the atmosphere in which they carry out their partnership work on projects that are important to the Government.

Mrs. Betty Williams: Given my hon. Friend's long experience and the way in which she has responded to the debate, does she agree that, as the Children's Society did not approach the National Assembly for Wales for additional funding, maybe—I emphasise the word "maybe"—it had been planning the amputation for a long time?

Ms Blears: I am not in a position to comment on what was in the mind of the Children's Society. I know that it has had a financial deficit for some time, and that it needs to take steps to address that, which it is doing.

The policy responsibility for children's services in Wales rests with the National Assembly, and Jane Hutt, the Minister responsible, expressed her disappointment with the Children's Society's decision. She wrote jointly with the Archbishop of Wales to the society seeking an assurance that it would support the efforts of staff in establishing a new charity in Wales to ensure that the services continue.

The National Assembly has also asked Children in Wales, the umbrella organisation responsible for voluntary and statutory sector interests in Wales, to establish a taskforce to secure practical arrangements to ensure that the services provided by the Children's Society continue to be provided. That taskforce will report early in the new year. The Children's Society has decided to consider its services from July next year, so some interim arrangement is needed to ensure that all services are not withdrawn immediately, as that would mean that the taskforce had nothing to continue with until July. That is an important consideration.

The taskforce is chaired by Christine Walby, who is a trustee of Children in Wales and an honorary research fellow at the university. The taskforce includes representatives of service user interests, the Children's Society staff group, local authorities that sponsor projects, the Assembly and the Church in Wales. It is also vital that children are heard in the process of drawing up the taskforce and making sure that it gets its priorties right.

I hope that the Children's Society's trustees give careful consideration to all the representations made by hon. Members. I am sure that communities are also making representations, along with those who have been involved in the society's services over the past few years. The Children's Society must hear from a wide range of people who are concerned and have been involved in projects on the ground, and I urge the society to ensure that its decision making is as open and transparent as possible. I understand that the society faces difficult financial circumstances in ensuring that projects continue.

Mr. Martin Caton (Gower): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a sad irony that the Children's Society recognises that it has two roles? First, it provides projects in Wales and England and, secondly, it has an advocacy or influence role. Everyone accepts the value of the projects, but the society's ability to communicate and influence is in question.

Ms Blears: It is my experience that the most effective lobbyists of Government, who influence the development of policy, are often also involved in projects. The best and strongest cases are made from the evidence that people find on the ground in communities. That combination of issues is, in my experience, the most powerful base from which change can come. Simply lobbying in isolation, without the links and routes to project work in communities, can be far less powerful than the combination of lobbying and project work.

The Children's Society has combined those things in the past. Doing so puts organisations in a strong position because, although both roles are valuable in themselves, they give added value when they are linked. Organisations can suggest to policy makers that they consider an idea, because they know from their real-life experience that it works, and that it enables people to have a voice and services to be developed in a direct and focused way. That link is important.

I hope that when the Children's Society trustees consider those matters they will listen to all the representations that have been made. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, we hope for a satisfactory outcome from those discussions, one that ensures that children in England and throughout the United Kingdom are properly protected. Those children should be heard, and they should be able to influence and shape the services that we provide for their future.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): I congratulate the Minister on her reply and congratulate so many Members from Wales on attending such an important debate. It has been a learning curve for the Chair as well.

Railtrack

1.30 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I am delighted to have secured this debate on the implications for the railway system of Railtrack being put into administration. I take this opportunity to declare my interest. I hold minor shares in Railtrack, First Group and Eurotunnel, and am a frequent user of the Great North Eastern Railway service on the east coast route.

The shock waves felt when Railtrack was forced into administration are still reverberating around the railway industry. At a time when the Government are inviting private companies to bid for the public-private partnership contracts to run the London underground, the implications of forcing a solvent public limited company into administration are still being assessed. Under the new management and leadership of Steve Marshall as chief executive and John Robinson as chairman, Railtrack would have undertaken a number of savings this autumn, such as a redundancy programme. Those savings were made impossible by the administration procedure and, regrettably, delays on the railways have increased by 45 per cent. since 1 October 2001. It is worth noting that morale has collapsed among the management and employees, many of whom were shareholders.

I welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) and look forward to his reply on why the Government have stopped publishing monthly punctuality figures. The Minister could not admit that they had stopped publishing those figures and simply said that they would publish quarterly figures. That will not be sufficient to enable parliamentarians and others to monitor the huge and regrettable increase in delays.

The net effect of the Secretary of State's decision to force Railtrack into administration is a cost to the taxpayer of £2 million in administration fees and £3.5 billion in the loan facility that was drawn down. That has dented investors' confidence in investing in the railways in future, and has increased the public sector borrowing requirement well into 2002.

The future of the railways will depend heavily on the injection of private capital, especially through the 10-year transport plan. Of the total spending of £63 billion envisaged under that plan, £33 billion—over half—was due to come from the private sector. It will be more difficult, expensive and risky to raise that capital in future in view of the increased risk.

I welcome the opportunity to debate those issues and draw the Minister's attention to what appears to be a climbdown by the Secretary of State in Select Committee evidence given last week. He seemed to say that public-private partnership management contracts with London Underground to run three of the lines would not go ahead if the value for money and safety criteria were not met. Perhaps the Minister could confirm that the Government have taken that on board, and that those lines may stay in the public sector.

I regret the huge uncertainty about the future of the son of Railtrack, Railtrack's successor, which remains in the balance. Even today, we do not know what shape it will take.

I turn to a regrettable episode from which we must draw experience, while asking the Minister how the Government will learn their lesson. Many of us prize the role of the independent regulator, which has implications for transport, the health provisions that the House is considering and the Ofcom Bill, which it will consider. Do the Government intend to wave a magic wand to remove the rail regulator's independence and bring him under the Secretary of State's powers of direction?

I regret that the Strategic Rail Authority's strategic plan will be further delayed because the new chairman wants to put his mark on it. Regrettably, the main result will be a deterioration in the railway system, a collapse in staff morale and a dip in performance. As I said, delays have increased since Railtrack went into administration, and the Government have used a regrettable procedure to prevent the SRA from publishing monthly figures.

In preparing for the debate, I consulted two train-operating companies that run services to and from North Yorkshire and have a connection with my constituency. I asked Virgin Trains whether the passenger timetable had been changed since Railtrack went into administration. Their representative confirmed that there had been no changes, but that completion of phase one of the west coast main line development, which will provide a 125-mph service, will slip from September 2002 to May 2003. He said:

> "Talks continue on the future of Phase 2 which would have provided 140 mph in 2005."

Railtrack will have to pay considerable penalties as a result. I am sure that the Minister agrees that that is deeply regrettable, and he may care to tell us what the penalties are. He might also like to comment on whether the delay would have happened if Railtrack had continued as a company in its own right rather than going into administration.

The representative of Virgin Trains concluded:

> "Punctuality remains a problem and Railtrack is currently responsible for about 75 per cent. of our delays, against a norm of about 50 per cent.
>
> Having said all this, Railtrack has now completed 68 per cent. of the Phase 1 work, our first new trains have been delivered and I am confident that passengers will soon be riding on the pilot services."

I was fortunate enough to receive a reply from the chief executive of GNER, who also says that the timetable has not been altered as a result of the administration process. However, I have travelled north by train for the past four weekends and I have suffered an average delay of 40 minutes, which was not the case when the system was recovering after the events of Hatfield and, most recently, Great Heck.

GNER's chief executive says that all the train-operating companies are worried about Railtrack's morale, and about how we can ensure senior management's continuing involvement and support. He says that Railtrack and its administrators, Ernst and Young, plan

> "to bring forward some sort of incentive arrangement ensuring that the senior management and others in Railtrack stay totally committed to the business during this very busy period."

He concludes:

> "Clearly there is a difficult balance to be struck between wanting to get the right solution for Railtrack and not rushing into a fudge. On the other hand, if it drags on for ages it would be disastrous for the railway industry in terms of falling morale."

Everyone—this is an apolitical point—hoped and expected the Government to aim for an 80 per cent. increase in rail freight by 2010, and they did. However, they will not achieve that, because Railtrack has gone into administration and because of the new security arrangements at the Channel tunnel. I urge the Minister to tell us how the Government expect to meet that target.

The Minister may also want to comment on today's news that the Government, who are having difficulty finding a replacement management team, have now approached John Prideaux, an ex-senior manager of British Rail, to act as interim chairman. He joined Angel Trains and made a sizeable sum out of privatisation, for which I am sure the Minister would applaud him. The press has suggested today that the approach shows the Government to be duplicitous, as they have said that they do not want fat cats to operate companies such as Railtrack, but have turned to someone who is much more of a fat cat than the existing executives.

The cost of administration has run to £1.2 billion in the past two months, which has been largely composed of £450 an hour for the senior administrator and £350 an hour for the others. One wonders why we are Members of Parliament and not administrators. One or two years could be taken up with administration, which was surely not the Secretary of State's expectation. Ernst and Young now says that £3.5 billion will be required by the end of March, and the Railtrack group has said that that sum includes several costs that would not have been incurred if the Secretary of State had not forced its subsidiary into administration. That £3.5 billion includes £118 million of losses on the close-out of interest rate swaps, £79 million provided for utility companies such as electricity firms, and £50 million on professional fees. Those figures are worrying, and the Minister needs to tackle them.

Another worrying development in today's reports in the press relates to safety. Will the Minister explain why on earth the Secretary of State insisted that a new provision be added to the Cullen declaration before he was minded to sign it yesterday? It will push back the date of entry of the automatic braking system beyond the 2010 date originally intended by Lord Cullen. That development is highly regrettable, and we all deplore it. Why did Ministers refuse to guarantee to meet Lord Cullen's 2010 deadline for high-speed trains to have automatic train protection when they have made a commitment to do so on many occasions in the House?

There appears to be some confusion about the status of Railtrack. In reply to a written question, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury reported:

> "Railtrack is a private sector company. During administration it will continue to be classified to the private sector in national accounts. Its debts will be recorded as a financial liability in the balance sheet of the private corporations sector."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 694W.]

The Minister will be aware that a written question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), who is the official Opposition's spokesman on such issues, drew the following reply from the Government:

> "On 5 October 2001 provisional advice was given, based on the provisional information provided, that borrowing by RenewCo...would be classified as public sector borrowing".—[*Official Report*, 4 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 207W.]

Will the Minister confirm that that is why his Department failed to bring Renewco into being? That sole omission—that failure to act—was probably the decisive reason why Railtrack went into administration.

There was an important exchange of letters between Sir Alistair Morton, chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, who wrote on 1 October, and Sir Richard Mottram, permanent secretary in the Department, which exonerated the SRA of any responsibility for failing to bring Renewco into effect. Will the Minister confirm that that was a regrettable decision, and could be one reason why the Secretary of State brought Railtrack into administration?

I deplore the uncertainty for the rail industry, all the parties involved and the railway system caused by the Secretary of State's actions, but we must be positive and move forward. Will the Minister say what shape the successor body—son of Railtrack—will have? How long will Railtrack be left in administration? Will its successor be a company limited by guarantee, or will the Secretary of State confirm that private bidders will be eligible?

Shareholders and parliamentarians have a common interest in holding the Secretary of State to account for his actions. I deplore the fact that we were unable to receive many of the documents needed to throw light on how Railtrack was brought into administration. I refer to the recent legal action brought by the Railtrack shareholders' action group, whose lawyers asked the Secretary of State for documents relating to legal claims over his decision to force Railtrack into administration. They say that they have been hampered in their attempts to obtain all relevant facts, most notably by the Secretary of State's inconsistent account of events.

I look forward to the Minister's response. I hope that he will give a positive, forward-looking account and say that Railtrack's period in administration was deeply regrettable and will not last longer than six months. I hope that we will today find out the shape of Railtrack's successor.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) on securing the debate. It allows us once again to run through the issues, and I am always pleased to do that. It is your imperative, Mr. Winterton, to ensure that Ministers give full and clear answers to questions, and I shall endeavour to do that.

I was perusing the *Yorkshire Evening Press* of 28 November, in which the hon. Lady complained that a written answer that I had sent to her was not clear enough. She said:

> "I asked a simple question about what is a very important subject. What I expected in return was a simple answer."

[Mr. David Jamieson]

It appears that the hon. Lady did not understand the answer. If at any time today she does not understand what I am saying—if she wants me to slow down or stop—I should be happy to assist her.

Miss McIntosh: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: If the hon. Lady does not understand what I am saying, I shall certainly give way.

Miss McIntosh: As the Minister has referred to the written answer, perhaps he would explain the difference between sections 26 and 26(c) of the Railways Act 1993.

Mr. Jamieson: If one of the hon. Lady's bright young advisers—provided with the help of the Short money that a Labour Government generously voted through—cannot help her with her query, I should be happy to refer her to my officials, who could talk through those important matters with her.

The hon. Lady asked a few important questions. I shall give a generic view of Railtrack and the future of the railways. She said that Railtrack was forced into administration. Railtrack attended the hearing, but did not oppose the order. Perhaps the hon. Lady—a shareholder herself—would like to reflect on why the order was not opposed.

Miss McIntosh: I am surprised that I am not on the Government Benches and the Minister is not on the Opposition Benches, as I am answering all the questions.

It is clear that Railtrack did not oppose the petition because the Secretary of State had prepared orders that would have prevented the rail regulator from applying for an interim review. It is complete nonsense to suggest that Railtrack could petition the court; it could not.

Mr. Jamieson: I am grateful that one of the shareholders of the company has put on record why Railtrack did not oppose the order. I understood that the company could have opposed it.

The hon. Lady said that morale has collapsed and that there has been a dip in performance. For many years—both before Railtrack existed and recently—we have tracked a dip in performance at this time of year. The quarterly figures give a better guide than monthly or daily performance figures.

The hon. Lady mentioned the Secretary of State's recent comments about PPP and London Underground. She said that the Secretary of State told the Committee on which the hon. Lady sits that PPP would not go ahead if it were not shown to provide value for money. I should have thought that the hon. Lady would question me if the Secretary of State had said the opposite—that PPP would go ahead regardless of whether it gave value for money.

The hon. Lady asked further questions on issues such as investor confidence. It is nonsense to suggest that what happened to Railtrack will deter future investment in private finance initiatives or public-private partnership initiatives. It may disappoint her to know that a dozen or more leading banks are working with bidders to support our plans on a number of schemes. That may be bad news for her, but it is the case, so she can change her script from now on.

The hon. Lady asked about the regulator. As she knows, in other utility sectors, regulators have the dual role of balancing shareholder and consumer interests. That would not be the case if the company were under the limited guarantee model. The Government intend to introduce legislation to streamline the regulatory regime by creating a single strategic and economic regulatory body. I hope that that helps the hon. Lady. I assure her that any new body would be a non-departmental government agency and would be charged with developing and executing an industry strategy that was derived from our 10-year plan. The powers and responsibilities will be set out in legislation.

There has been considerable debate on Railtrack in recent weeks, but the railway is important to the general public and to frequent and regular users, such as me. I passed through the hon. Lady's constituency on a Great North Eastern Railway train yesterday—I did not stop because I was on my way elsewhere—and I am familiar with issues involved in railway use.

Let me make this clear from the outset: the Government are committed to the rail system. We pledged funding of more than £30 billion over the next 10 years to maintain and improve the network. That pledge stands, and nothing that has happened during the past few weeks changes that pledge in any way.

The decision to take Railtrack into administration was right and proper. I assure the hon. Lady that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State took no pleasure in submitting the petition to the High Court in October. I remind her of the judge's comments at the time. He made it clear in granting the petition that he considered the administration order to be

> "not only appropriate, but absolutely essential."

That is probably why the order was not opposed at the time, contrary to the hon. Lady's comments.

We should not be in any doubt: Railtrack was a company that had failed totally to control its costs and deliver the service that was demanded by its customers, despite billions of pounds of extra investment from the Government. I thought that the hon. Lady shook her head when I suggested that Railtrack had not delivered the service demanded by its customers. If she is suggesting that Railtrack was delivering such a service before October this year, I will be interested to hear that because there has not been a substantial change over recent weeks.

Railtrack's proposal for additional assistance was for an open-ended funding commitment from the Government with no guarantee of improved performance. Without such assistance, the company was clearly insolvent, contrary to what the hon. Lady said. At that point, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that enough was enough. He was not prepared to make such a commitment from the public purse.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was clear about his duty to rail users and the taxpayer. He had to act. If he had not petitioned for a railway administration order, there was a real danger that the operation of the whole network would have been placed in jeopardy. Rightly, he was not prepared for that to happen.

It is vital that we use this opportunity to ensure that the future of the rail network is properly secured. In the meantime, the administrator's responsibility is to ensure that the company's railway-related activities are carried out on a business-as-usual basis, while preparing recommendations for the Government on how best to transfer Railtrack out of administration. We stressed our wish to the administrator that, during administration, safety and services for passengers and the position of employees should not be affected. Under section 59 of the Railways Act 1993, the administrator has a duty to manage the affairs, business and property of Railtrack plc for the achievement of the purposes of the railway administration order in a manner that protects the interests of the members and creditors of the company in railway administration. The Government are doing their bit by providing adequate funding to enable the administrator to discharge his responsibilities. In those circumstances, it is extraordinary that the hon. Member for Vale of York suggested that, not only should we not have applied for the administration order, but now that the administrator is in charge of the company, he should not have sufficient funds to carry out the work. The railway system would collapse if the Government did not step in and provide the administrator with the funding that he needs.

The hon. Lady asked about the timetable for administration. Ultimately, that is a matter for the administrator. We share his hope that the process can be completed as quickly as possible. His initial estimate was that it could take up to six months to transfer Railtrack plc out of administration. It has become clear that the state of the company, combined with the time needed for bids to be formulated and considered and for a transport scheme to be approved, makes a six-month timetable practically impossible. I assure the hon. Lady that we share her worries that such matters should come out of administration at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: I shall not give way. We have little time left and it is only proper that I should answer the hon. Lady's questions. I am sure that I will be talking to the hon. Gentleman at another time.

The hon. Lady expressed her concerns about safety. I assure her that we remain committed to keeping safety paramount and at the heart of our policies for revitalising the railways. Railtrack plc, in administration, remains responsible for the safety of the rail network. The Health and Safety Executive is working closely with both Railtrack plc and the administrator to ensure that safety is maintained. Alan Cooksey, the Health and Safety Executive's former deputy chief inspector of railways, has been recruited by the administrator to ensure that technical issues are given proper and expert consideration while the company remains in administration. Furthermore, no train operating company has raised safety concerns with the HSE since Railtrack was taken into administration.

It is true, as the hon. Lady said, that performance has worsened recently. Obviously, I am disappointed to see any increase in delays on the rail network, but I totally refute her suggestion that they are a result of Railtrack being taken into administration. I assure her that any dip in performance is a replication of what has happened in previous years. It is not due to the administration of Railtrack, but probably to more seasonal matters.

When the SRA publishes its passenger performance measure—the standard measure of rail performance—we will have a clearer understanding of the issue. The PPM will be published in due course, and I expect that any dip in performance will be no greater than that of recent years. The matter will be examined carefully, but the hon. Lady's allegations are premature in the extreme. That is not to say that we are complacent. We are working with the administrator, and will continue to discuss with him the best way in which to ensure that Railtrack delivers an improved performance while it remains in administration. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is in regular contact with the train operators and discusses such matters with them.

The hon. Lady referred to staff morale. Since the company went into administration, it is hardly surprising that the uncertainty has affected Railtrack staff. However, it would not be right or accurate to lay the blame on the staff for any delays, as she was suggesting. There are many dedicated, efficient and effective people in Railtrack and, while administration will no doubt have come as a shock to many of them, I am sure that they will work hard with the administrator to stabilise the company, will continue with its daily business and will keep its programmes moving forward. The railway business will continue. The country needs a rail network and good people to run it. The staff—both current and potential—can be sure that they have a secure future.

This has been another opportunity to set out many of the important issues that were raised by the hon. Lady. If she considers that some matters have not been covered today, perhaps she will jot me a note. I shall certainly respond to her expeditiously, clearly and in plain English. I cannot guarantee that it will be the Janet and John version of matters as they stand, but I shall give her a clear explanation.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 13 December 2001

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Public Health

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Caplin.*]

2.30 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the matter of the Health Committee's report on public health, which was issued in the previous parliamentary Session. Today's debate is timely. Hon. Members may have seen press reports of the latest confidential inquiry into maternal deaths, which stated that women in the most disadvantaged groups in the United Kingdom are 20 times more likely to die in childbirth than women in the two highest social categories. Those are worrying figures and it is right to spend some time on the subject of health inequalities.

The debate takes place against the background of several public health worries. I have expressed concern in recent weeks about the narrowness of political debate on health, in the Palace of Westminster and elsewhere. We have tended to tie the debate down to waiting lists, waiting times, targets, pledges and the number of doctors, nurses and beds. We have compared the proportions of GDP spent by different European countries and the UK. Our view has been specific and narrow, and I welcome the opportunity to look at the bigger picture today.

It struck me that the anti-poverty measures announced in the autumn statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer would probably have more of an impact on health than the health measures that he announced amounting to £1 billion. Public transport improvements, and this week's announcement on transport funding, are also relevant. Reducing vehicle emissions and enabling more people to use public transport makes more sense than employing more specialists in chest disease to treat childhood asthma, which has increased to a worrying level. In the Committee's view, a wide perspective is better in evaluating health issues than the narrow confines to which debates in this place usually adhere.

The second factor that is relevant to today's debate is the impact on public health strategies of the current major structural change in the national health service. I find the pace of change phenomenal. Four separate formal consultation processes on changes in the national health service are under way or about to begin in my constituency. I broadly support the direction in which matters are being taken, but we must accept that the pace of change creates questions and problems. One matter of concern is the location of the public health function. I welcome the creation of strategic health authorities and primary care trusts, but the location of public health in the new framework is a cause for concern.

We began the inquiry in May 2000 and our report was published on 28 March 2001, with a Government reply in July. Our inquiry was undertaken in response to several factors, including Government initiatives on public health: health action zones, employment action zones, the Health Development Agency, health improvement programmes, the Acheson inquiry on health inequalities and, of course, the first appointment of a Minister for Public Health. We wanted to assess whether the Secretary of State's rhetoric that the time had come to take public health out of the ghetto was substantiated by the Government's action on public health. We wanted to consider the subject so that we could respond to feelings expressed by many that public health had been marginalised and lacked any strategic direction. People were concerned about the fact that the strategy of the Department of Health was still dominated by the medical model rather than the social model. The Health Development Agency stated in the evidence that

> "over 70 per cent. of what determines people's health lies outside the domain of health services and in their demographic, social, economic and environmental conditions".

We all accept that, and it is important to see how the Government develop their wider strategy to take account of those arguments.

I want to express the Committee's thanks to several individuals, including the many who submitted the written evidence that formed the basis for many of our discussions and oral hearings. I also want to thank our witnesses, many of whom gave extremely relevant evidence that helped the inquiry. I express my appreciation to all those who were involved in arranging our visits. We made several illuminating visits in the United Kingdom, including to Cornwall and Scotland.

We also went to Cuba. The Opposition are currently travelling around Europe in consideration of their health policy. If they have a chance to board a plane for Cuba, I recommend it, as I left Cuba impressed by its health system and, to be honest, every aspect of the system there, which surprised me. Many lessons can be learned from the Cuban model. Despite a background of third-world poverty, it has health outcomes that are comparable to those in western countries such as our own. I thank the Government of Cuba and the colleagues there who made our visit so successful and useful.

I thank our specialist advisers and first-class staff, who serve us well. We do not have many staff, but they are of the highest quality, and I appreciate their support.

Perhaps I will be forgiven for paying tribute to three Committee members who were involved in the inquiry but who are no longer in Parliament. Our good friend and colleague John Gunnell, the former Member for Morley and Rothwell, was not in the best of health and struggled on occasion. Despite that, he was a consistent hard worker on the Committee and went on the visits to Cuba and elsewhere. I and all other members of the Committee appreciated his advice and wise counsel. I miss the advice of Dr. Peter Brand, who was the Member for Isle of Wight and lost his seat at the election. We did not always agree, but he was the best of company and had a detailed knowledge of the health service. We have missed that knowledge in Parliament since he left. Eileen Gordon also lost her seat. She worked hard on the inquiry and contributed a great deal to the success of the Committee's work.

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

I come now to the detail of the report, and specifically to health inequalities. Research by a range of experts shows that health inequalities have increased during the past 20 years. The Acheson independent inquiry into inequalities in health stated:

> "In the early 1970s, the mortality rate among men of working age was almost twice as high for those in class V as those in class I. By the early 1990s, it was almost 3 times higher".

That is an indictment of the policies—not health policy directly, but policies overall—that have led to those worrying changes.

Sir Michael Marmot, a public health expert, gave evidence during the inquiry. He told us that different causes explained the changes. Some will be determined by health status in childhood, but less tangible factors such as the amount of control that one feels over one's environment, which in turn relates to one's position in society, affect physical and mental health. Our report states that he explained:

> "it is...true that social and economic inequalities have increased over the last twenty years, and it would be hard not to see a causal link of some kind between the increase in these inequalities and the increase in health inequalities".

We should take close note of his strong evidence. We recommended the incorporation of health inequality targets into the health improvement programme and the community plan, to give it bite and clout. We are pleased that the Government have accepted our suggestion that what we term baskets of intermediate targets should be created for each of the headline targets. We also recommended that each Government Department should have a public service agreement to conduct health audits. We note the Government's more cautious acceptance of that, but feel that it is a good initiative that could be taken further.

The Government seem to have introduced a plethora of initiatives somewhat unsystematically and with no clear strategy as to how they might inter-operate. The theme of initiative overload arose frequently in both oral and written evidence to the inquiry. We wrote that

> "ironically, the very energy and zeal which the Government brought to bear in their battle against health inequalities has... undermined their policy goals."

That lack of coherent strategy reflected more profound systemic and structural problems caused by a lack of co-ordination between Government Departments, strategy agencies, elected authorities and the voluntary sector. We also noted an apparent cooling of the Government's enthusiasm for structural reform. We argued that the NHS plan apparently marginalised public health and we were dismayed by the repeated delays in publishing Sir Kenneth Calman's report on the public health function.

We felt that there was much merit in Professor Sally McIntyre's suggestion that area-based interventions should be subject to more rigorous analysis and we are pleased that the Government are following up that initiative. We remain unconvinced that area-based initiatives engage the communities that they serve, and nothing in the Government's response convinces us that they have a clear strategic role in mind for Health Promotion England and the health promotion function. We were impressed by the Health Development Agency, which we should like to see resourced more appropriately. We were also persuaded by the evidence from Sandwell and Hillingdon health authorities that the health improvement programme and community plan should be more closely integrated. We are delighted that the Government accepted that that would be advantageous.

We urged the Government to establish new partnerships in the form of local strategic partnerships and were delighted to see that they accepted that recommendation also.

In part of my constituency, the two primary care groups are considering the establishment of either one or two primary care trusts. I am concerned as to whether the two PCTs could fulfil the public health function separately in my constituency or elsewhere. We voiced our grave concern in the report that primary care providers lacked the capacity to take on the public health function. Nothing has occurred since our report was published to mitigate that concern. It is a crucial problem. There is a danger that the combined effects of the culture in which health professionals work—the "fix and cure" and "beds, doctors and hospitals" models—a lack of proper career opportunities in public health medicine and a general pressure on health professionals will submerge public health.

We talked in the report about shifting local emphasis to empower a professional whom we saw to be underused—the health visitor. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) is not present, because she thinks that I am obsessed with health visitors. However, when I was a social worker in the early 1970s, before the Heath Government removed the health function from local authorities, I worked extremely closely with health visitors and observed the extremely valuable role that they played in dealing with child protection issues and other problems in the community. The Committee shared my view that we should press for better use of those professionals, who have achieved a lot in the past and have tremendous potential for the future.

We also argued in the report for greater co-ordination between health visitors and school and community nurses. We suggested that PCGs and PCTs should be required to have an additional designated local authority officer with a broader public health remit. That is not the first time that the Committee has called for closer links between local authority and health authority functions, and we are heartened that the Department of Health

> "recognizes that relationships between local authorities and health services are critical to the ability of both to contribute to service development."

We hope that the growth of care trusts will foster a culture of greater co-operation, although there are clearly great uncertainties at present.

The Committee also recognised that the shift from 100 health authorities to 300 PCTs would challenge public health capacity and raise questions about collaborative work between PCTs across their patches. I received a copy of a letter dated 4 December that the Association of Directors of Public Health sent to the NHS chief executive, Mr. Crisp. It welcomed Lord Hunt's endorsement of a strengthened public health function in a speech on 13 November. However, it continued:

"If the NHS is not performance-managed for health improvement it will not deliver health improvement."

That important point reinforces our concern about the role of the strategic health authorities and the position of PCTs. Interestingly, the association proposes that a director of public health at strategic health authority level should lead a small team that is responsible for performance management. I raised the issue with the Secretary of State when he came before the Committee a few weeks ago, and he recognised health inequalities as a key issue for the new strategic health authorities. I cannot say whether the Committee would endorse the call for a director with a small team, but I think that it makes a good deal of sense in terms of ensuring that PCTs across the board take that important issue seriously in their patch.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point about the system's inability to deal with public health. The report was written when there was no sign of the structural change that would abolish health authorities. The NHS plan has been published, the Committee has done excellent work and everyone has set out to tackle the problem, but we now find that half the organisations involved will be abolished and their staff will have to spend much of their time finding a new job. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is unfortunate?

Mr. Hinchliffe: The hon. Gentleman was not here when I referred to the pace of change and to my concerns about the issue that he raises. I have had discussions with the Secretary of State, and I am encouraged that he and the Minister recognise that it is crucial for the strategic function to be appropriately located.

It might help if hon. Members consider what is happening in their areas. This week, knowing that this debate was coming up, I asked the director of public health in my area for his views on the role of the strategic body. I think that he would endorse the concern expressed by the Association of Directors of Public Health that there should be a clear handle on public health at that level and that PCTs' work should be properly monitored. Those that do not perform appropriately—I worry that that may be true in parts of Yorkshire—should be reminded, assisted and, indeed, made to perform appropriately on such an important issue.

To return to the role of local authorities, it is fairly common knowledge that my agenda includes a much stronger role for local government in health issues. So far, I have been unable to persuade the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister of my views, but I am working on it.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): There is time yet.

Mr. Hinchliffe: There is time yet, as my hon. Friend says. As a young social worker before 1974, I worked in a local authority that had a health department. It had a more obvious organisational framework than we have now. I worked in child protection, care of the elderly and mental health, and that framework made much more sense. As a young councillor, I also served on a public health committee. I worked with the local medical officer, who used to attend our committee meetings. He had clear targets and challenges on issues such as smokeless zones, slum clearance and inoculation of children. This might sound old hat, but the old Ministry of Health created a much healthier society than would otherwise have been the case. I favour a stronger role for local authorities. The Committee debated long and hard whether we should retain the current arrangements or move the public health function back to local government lock, stock and barrel.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): I am following closely what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Does he agree that the Government's reply on coterminosity and joint appointments for directors of public health makes it hard to see exactly what model they favour? Some of those issues need to be resolved if we are to have a clear and understandable framework for public health.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Yes, I agree. Our difficulty was recognising the lack of coterminosity. I do not want to be partisan, but the Conservative Government have a great responsibility for that lack. I wish that the present Government would turn the wheel the other way, but the latest changes do not take us back in that direction. The Minister may respond to that point, because she may have a better idea of what the Government meant by their response.

Local authorities have as important a role as they did in the past. They are still responsible for air quality, environmental health, food hygiene, leisure services, education, planning, safety and transport; all those policies are directly related to public health. We welcome the recognition, widely expressed in evidence to the Committee, that public health should be at the heart of local government, and we have recommended that health should be a key element in the local authority community plans. We were pleased that the Government were considering ways in which the health improvement programme and the community plan could be more closely aligned. I hope that the Minister may have something to say on that.

Somewhat reluctantly, however, we concluded that major structural upheaval in the location of the public health function was not the answer, but that incentives needed to be created to ensure that the function delivered across the entire health system, wherever it was positioned.

I turn to development in the community. One or two hon. Members who were not members of the Committee may know that we were impressed by a scheme that we visited in Cornwall. The Minister—not my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), but the then Minister for Public Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper)—visited the Penwerris estate in Falmouth in Cornwall to see the remarkable achievements there.

For those who are not aware of the scheme, it is a beacon project based at a housing estate in Falmouth, the poorest ward in Cornwall. It had serious social problems and vandalism, joy-riding, drugs and teenage pregnancy were all rife. A scheme emerged that was fronted by Hazel Stutely, a health visitor who I gather now works for the Department; I commend the

[Mr. Hinchliffe]

Department on making use of her expertise. She managed to combine the commitment and collaboration of all local agencies to tackle those problems collectively. We saw listening forums engaging with the local community, bringing people on board who were alienated and who thought of the authorities and agencies as enemies rather than friends.

That group achieved a remarkable turn-round on that estate. Post-natal depression decreased by 80 per cent. and a 60 per cent. reduction was achieved in the number of children on the child protection register. The child accident rate halved, as did the crime rate. Boys' results in standard assessment tests improved by 100 per cent. Generally, we saw a happier environment where previously there were many serious problems.

We were impressed by that scheme, not least because it illustrated that such initiatives must engage with local communities and that they should derive their energy from the bottom up rather than from the top down. We learned a big lesson. We can go in with all sorts of schemes at the top, but unless we get people at the bottom—the key people—working well we may be wasting our time. I welcome the fact that Mrs. Stutely passed on her ideas to other areas, and I hope that they use them.

In order to assist local authorities, the Government should review the bidding system to ensure that it is more equitable and efficient. We have looked at this question before and considered the work of voluntary organisations and local groups. It has been difficult, but we appreciate the Government's positive response to our recommendation.

A critical part of our inquiry was into the role of directors of public health. We gained the strong impression that the role had diminished in authority over the years. Strong supporting evidence—which frankly surprised us—came in the disclosure that some directors of public health did not attend the annual review of their health authority. That is an increasing trend. Some 56 per cent. of those surveyed attended meetings in 1998, but only 43 per cent. did so in 2000. Moreover, at half those meetings, the key annual report on public health was not even discussed. Some excellent information is contained in those reports, as hon. Members will see if they read them, and it worries me that while dust gathers on them, not much is done. One of our tasks is to ensure that they are taken seriously.

Overall, we concluded that directors of public health were not currently providing the necessary leadership on public health. To strengthen his role, we recommended that the annual report should form a key part of a combined community and health improvement programme. It should form a consistent format to allow a comparison between areas, and it should include contributions from other stakeholders in statutory local and voluntary organisations. We felt that more effort needed to be made to promote joint health authority and local authority appointments, even in those areas where coterminosity did not apply. We especially endorsed a suggestion from Ken Jarrell that, as well as being jointly appointed, directors of public health should be jointly accountable, thereby creating a link that is frequently lacking at the moment.

The Committee spent some time considering the issue of physical activity and sport. Hon. Members may have noted the recent National Audit Office report on overweight youngsters. The number of obese 15-year-olds has more than trebled in the past decade. We found that fewer than a third of schoolchildren devoted two or more hours a week to physical activity—well below the levels found elsewhere in Europe. There is probably a connection with the fact that our national sports teams do not do very well. Sport has fallen off the agenda in schools.

I congratulate the *Yorkshire Post* on running a campaign called "A sporting chance", which highlighted the fact that schools were not ensuring that youngsters received basic opportunities to play sport. We were impressed by the way in which sport is linked to health in Cuba. That is such an obvious connection, but one that we fail to make. The former Minister for Sport my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), gave evidence to the Select Committee, and we were surprised to hear that there was no formal connection between local initiatives on public health and on sport. Healthy living centres are an obvious example of how that connection can be achieved. In my constituency, one rugby league club hopes to have a healthy living centre based at its clubhouse.

We gave the Government the benefit of the doubt in agreeing that responsibility for sport should remain with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, but we are heartened that the Secretary of State now sits on the ministerial committees that consider home and social affairs and health strategy, which accords with one of our recommendations. I was delighted to see in the press a few weeks ago an interview given by the current Minister for Sport, in which he emphasised his role in the health of the nation and the connection between sport and health. To be fair to the Government, they have taken up some of our recommendations.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): Does the hon. Gentleman also accept that another crucial area of work for the Health Development Agency relates to anorexia and eating disorders? Sport is relevant to that issue, but a more holistic approach is required, perhaps with more funding and a higher profile, which the HDA might be able to help solve.

Mr. Hinchliffe: That is an important point. My hon. Friend is probably unaware that when the Health Committee considered mental health, we identified eating disorders, which are not a direct mental health consideration, as one area in which the organisation left a great deal to be desired. The hon. Gentleman's point is valid.

Before I conclude, I would like to focus for a moment on the location of the public health function. Having recognised that public health was about far more than just the health service, we spent considerable time considering whether public health policy should remain with the Department of Health. We considered many alternative locations, including the Cabinet Office.

We did not accept the view expressed by some that the status of the Minister in charge of public health had been downgraded simply because my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford now holds the more junior title of Under-Secretary, whereas my right hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Tessa Jowell) was a Minister of State. Bearing in mind that the accountability structures in the Department mean that Ministers are directly accountable to the Secretary of State for Health, we did not feel that that represented a downgrading.

We heard strong arguments on all sides for and against shifting the public health function out of the Department of Health altogether, to free it from the domination of the medical model, which some consider to be inevitable. We concluded that, rather than implementing change for its own sake, it would be better to promote greater cross-departmental working. We are pleased that the Government are making some progress on that, but unless public health achieves the priority in Government that we believe it deserves, calls for the function to be taken out of the Department of Health will inevitably grow.

In terms of the priority given to public health, I am sure that I reflect the Committee's view in expressing my deep disappointment that, despite many welcome policy initiatives to reduce smoking, legislation to ban tobacco advertising did not appear in this year's Queen's Speech. I hope that that measure, probably the most fundamental public health measure of all, will be brought before the House soon.

I have gone on for some time, and I am pleased to see that so many other hon.Members want to contribute. We still need to learn the lessons of the great advances of the 19th century. I recall years ago studying the work of Edwin Chadwick and his remarkable achievements in public health. I recall that he argued for a key role to be given to the district medical officer—as he was then called—to supervise improvements in sanitation, the workplace and the physical environment. I would argue that the zeal, energy and authority of district medical officers must be recreated. That will happen if local government and the health service co-operate more closely.

To end on a more positive note, the Government deserve some praise. Sir Michael Marmot and Sir Donald Acheson drew attention to the aggravating effects of relative poverty on public health. I am heartened by the recent report of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation that, for the first time in four years, the number of indicators of poverty that have improved has exceeded those that have got worse. As I said at the beginning of my speech, tackling issues such as relative poverty, education, housing and social services will have more impact on public health than changes in the health care system.

3.2 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): I am very impressed by the turnout of hon. Members. They have shown great interest in our report. The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and I are the only two survivors who participated in the report able to be present today, but it is gratifying that so many Members are interested.

As one who is not entirely content with the way in which Parliament has moved, I think that our Select Committee structure is splendid. All members of Select Committees say this, but the Health Committee is a particularly strong one. It comprises 11 different characters. We do not always agree, but we spend our time well, and the fact that we produce such good reports is in no small measure due to the excellent leadership of our Chairman.

The Committee issued its press notice—not at my suggestion—in response to the annual LSE health lecture given by the Secretary of State on 8 March 2000, when he stated that

"the time has come to take public health out of the ghetto."

The Committee wanted to see whether the Government would deliver on that speech—that it was not merely rhetoric. It is far too early to come to any conclusions about that, but it was the speech of the Secretary of State that prompted the Select Committee to undertake the inquiry.

I shall not bore the House by mentioning again aspects of the Committee's work already covered by the hon. Member for Wakefield, but I shall talk about Cuba presently. I viewed our experiences there entirely differently from the hon. Gentleman. We visited some very interesting schemes elsewhere, including one in, I think, Newcastle.

I am not sure whether the House realises that the Health Committee has a unique guessing ability. Little did we know, as we prepared the report, that within a month structural reforms would be announced. Government announcements in the following weeks featured many of our recommendations, so I suppose we can in a way take credit. I know that hon. Members who took part in the inquiry—three of whom are present—were very pleased.

I want briefly to mention the role of school nurses. The Minister was not in office at the time of the inquiry. The Under-Secretary of State for Health, who I believe is on maternity leave, gave evidence. She and I had an exchange about the role of school nurses. During my time as a teacher I found that what they did was invaluable, whether checking heads for lice, showing children how to brush their teeth properly without pushing the gums up or a range of other work. That is why I am pleased about the Committee's recommendations.

The relevant paragraphs of the report—185 to 188—show that we were concerned that the traditional role of the school nurse had shifted away from the provision of health screening towards a more strategic public health role. That may be splendid, but most of my children are still at school and my gut feeling is uncertainty about whether the sort of support most parents would want is available. For instance, I challenged the Minister to come up with a cure for head lice. It is an embarrassing subject, but having them does not mean a child is dirty; children just catch them. She kindly sent me all the Department of Health literature on the issue. Unfortunately, many schools in my constituency still have outbreaks. Could it be that the nurse used to carry out the revolting job of checking for head lice, but now more people have them? It is very expensive to purchase all the chemicals. It is even possible to give the lice electric shocks through special combs, but apparently they resist those too. The matter is an important one.

Asthma is a real problem for children. One has only to go to a head teacher's office and open the cupboard there to see many different appliances for dealing with asthma fall from it. I do not have a simple answer. Is air

[Mr. David Amess]

pollution the cause? I do not know. We can all see that a problem exists. Another condition from which many children seem to suffer is epilepsy—this may, I suppose, be special pleading, as one of my children, aged 13, has it. It is a particularly difficult form and it seems the medication cannot be got right. We touched on it in our inquiry and I should be interested in the Minister's comments. She may want to write to me on the subject.

School nurses are an underdeveloped resource. The Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association highlighted this concern. We suggested that the employment structures of school nurses should be rationalised to allow effective joint working and partnerships—my goodness, I am coming out with new Labour-speak, but I am sure that the Minister understands what I mean. The Committee also thought that the Government should support and consult the professional bodies to develop school nursing services as a vital public health service. It would be beneficial if this service could be integrated with other public health services in the community.

The hon. Member for Wakefield touched on the recommendation that PCGs and PCTs should have a designated officer from the local authority with a broad remit for public health. I had a meeting with my local authority on Monday, and we will be getting a dedicated officer. Can the Minister advise me whether the appointment of such officers will be according to a local authority's resources, or will it be a requirement to have a dedicated officer? Such officers would be useful if PCTs are to achieve their targets. The hon. Member for Wakefield was right to emphasise that the Committee thought that the current role of the director of public health was too vague.

My final point—I shall mention Cuba—concerns sport. If everyone in the United Kingdom were living a healthy lifestyle, we would not be spending huge sums on the national health service. As a Conservative Member, how can I call on the Government to develop a nanny state that tells people not to do this and that? Nevertheless, I implore the Minister to see whether more can be done in terms of sport.

The former Minister for Sport, the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), gave evidence to the Committee. She gave a splendid account of herself, but I felt that her hands were tied. I gained the impression that Departments were not working together, and she felt strongly that the Department of Health could do more. I know that the hon. Member for Wakefield has spoken about the adviser, which is welcome, but I wonder whether the Government could do more. I had a wonderful briefing from the Central Council of Physical Recreation and Sport England. They tell me that the Treasury spends £750 per person on health care, but only £1 per person on sport. Some people would say that that is right, but the difference seems huge.

The hon. Member for Wakefield mentioned children. We have many lazy children, including my own, in this country. Young people found out what their legs were for only during the petrol crisis. Some children are so lazy that when they are dropped off at school they virtually want the cars to be driven into the classroom. Older people set younger people an example by not wanting to be driven everywhere and by being prepared to walk. Considering the terrible trial that concluded yesterday, I am not suggesting that young children, who are vulnerable, should be left to walk alone; I am simply making the point that we, as a nation, could do more to encourage our children to participate in sport.

Sport England is concerned that the Government are not promoting sport across the Departments and highlights some alarming statistics on coronary problems and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. For example, 37 per cent. of deaths from heart disease can be attributed to inactivity.

The hon. Member for Wakefield mentioned obesity. All hon. Members will have been sent reports on that growing problem. When Edwina Currie was a health Minister, she took an individualistic approach to various aspects of people's lifestyles. Some of the messages that she gave out had an element of common sense, although a few of my hon. Friends thought that she could have used slightly more diplomatic language.

Hon. Members always draw on their own family circumstances. My 90-year-old mother tells us that she goes to keep fit classes once a week. We are not sure exactly what she does there—perhaps they all sit on chairs and touch their toes, or just chat to one another. The quality of the residential and nursing homes that we visit in our constituencies varies considerably. It would be a good thing for the Government to encourage older people, especially those who are recovering from health problems, such as strokes, to do some sort of physical activity.

The CCPR believes that partnerships should be established between PCTs and voluntary sports clubs, that voluntary sports clubs and dance classes should play a key role in exercise referral schemes, and that all schoolchildren should have two hours of curricular physical education a week. I know that many children hate sport and do not want to do it, and we do not want to make them unhappy or see them bullied, but we should encourage them to engage in as much physical activity as possible.

I am heartened that so many hon. Members are here to express their interest in the report. There is nothing so frustrating as working hard on a report only to find that no one takes any notice of it.

The hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (John Austin), who has just joined us, was one of my colleagues who thought that it would be a good idea to visit Cuba. In making these remarks I mean no insult at all to the Cuban Government. They could not have been more generous with their hospitality and it was a splendid visit. However, I was shocked by the condition of the country. I should not call it a dump, but I had no idea that half the buildings were falling down and unfinished. My constituents would be outraged if they saw the state of some of the hospitals and the working conditions there.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Some of us understand the background to the physical state of and appalling poverty in the country, which is partly due to the blockade and the difficulty of getting drugs. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that makes it all the more remarkable that the health care system there has such tremendous outcomes?

Mr. Amess: I was about to come to that. The Cuban Government spend much less than we do on their health service, but people live for about the same length of time and there is about the same rate of infant mortality.

The Cubans' emphasis on sport is definitely an example that we could follow. They also have a good diet, mainly because it is a poor country. It is ironic that some of my colleagues and I became ill during the visit. Some of us are still engaged in correspondence with British Airways about who was to blame. British Airways blames it on our lifestyle in Cuba; I blame it on the rotten prawns that we ate on the flight back. Our visit to Cuba was worthwhile, but given its poverty I doubt whether my constituents would want its medical facilities to be replicated here.

This is a splendid report. I am sure that the Government will take it seriously, and I look forward to monitoring carefully how they deliver on some, if not all, of our recommendations.

3.19 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): I have never served on the Select Committee on Health, but I aspire to do so one day and I was delighted to read its report. In four years as a Member of Parliament, I have been closely involved with all my local health services, and in that time I have experienced the gnawing doubt that public health is not getting the attention that it should. I could not quite put my finger on those inadequacies, until I read the report. Reference has been made to the very sentence, in paragraph 40, that caught my eye:

> "We believe...these difficulties reflect more profound systemic and structural problems which relate to the lack of co-ordination between different Government Departments, statutory agencies, elected authorities and the voluntary sector."

Reading that was like watching a light being switched on; it summarises exactly what I think is wrong.

I congratulate the Select Committee on a superb report that puts its finger on the things that are wrong and how to put them right, and I hope that we develop a programme during this Parliament that follows the report like a route map. I want to illustrate the problems and my dissatisfactions by mentioning a couple of incidents that have occurred since the general election. A very senior public health professional came to me to ask what was happening to public health in the restructuring of our health service. It seemed a bit odd that the person in the front line—a professional with years of experience—needed to ask me about his future, his job and his role. That made it clear to me that something was wrong in public health.

The second example concerns a PCG health promotion officer—health promotion is a subject that interests me intensely—whom I visited to ask what she could do in our community. I was amazed to discover that she could not get the budget for health promotion from the local health authority, which was hanging on to the money and leaving her to do the job. As she could not get that money, she was unable to carry out her desired projects.

The Health Development Agency might well appear impressive to the Committee, but in my time as an MP with an interest in public health and the promotion of healthy living, I have never heard from it. Health Promotion England has never told me about what it is doing, and friendly though my local health authority is—we co-operate closely—it has given me no answers on health promotion and the budget that it has hidden. I could get no action from my primary care group; it has not got the money.

I should point out that the health promotion officer whom I met was incredibly imaginative in her work. She developed partnerships and sponsorships and achieved much, but she found the situation terribly limiting, and now she has found another job. Doubtless she got fed up with scratching around, but I should make it clear that she was a marvellous officer. I should also make it clear that we have a very good local director of public health, and I exclude him entirely from criticisms of the local health community.

Thank goodness that the report calls for clarity of roles, effective presence and partnerships that deliver for their local communities, because that is precisely what we need. We can get it right, and I shall give two further examples. Nationally, the smoking cessation programme has been a great success, offering a marvellous example for us to follow in future. According to the CCPR briefing, exercise on referral is a growing phenomenon at a local level. GPs in my area have come together to refer people for exercise programmes such as keep-fit classes and gymnastics courses, which the local authority provides through its recreation centre. That is another example of effective and successful partnership at a local level.

We need to tackle the other challenges that we face with the same effectiveness. This week, there has been much publicity about alcohol misuse, but despite our highly effective 10-year action plan to defeat drugs misuse, that dreadful problem remains. My experience at Stafford police station—I should immediately point out that I was not detained there—offers a practical example of why the drugs plan is not yet working effectively. Ours is one of three pilots in the country for the drug testing of people who have been charged with offences. I do not know whether it will surprise, shock or confirm the belief of hon. Members when I say that more than half of those offenders test positive for heroin or cocaine.

An arrest referral worker asks each offender if they would like some help with their drug misuse problem. Almost to a man or woman, they say, "Yes, please." There lies the problem. There are no services outside the police station to which they can be referred for treatment. By the time they have waited to get on to a course or get help from a counsellor, they have lost their resolve to solve the problem and they continue in the cycle of drugs misuse. The new integrated drugs and alcohol service teams in Staffordshire are finally up and running. I have great hopes for them for the future, but there are still problems in accessing sufficient resources to meet needs.

Other challenges include the unacceptably high level of suicide deaths and the unacceptably high level of deaths from accidents in the home and workplace. Deaths from such accidents are dwarfed by deaths on our roads. Mention has already been made of obesity. I

[Mr. David Kidney]

include that as a challenge, because I recently raised it in questions to the Minister for Sport in the Chamber, and in writing. I am pleased to see that he chairs a ministerial committee that includes representatives from the Departments of Health, Education and Skills and Transport, Local Government and the Regions, as well as representatives from Sport England, the new opportunities fund and other co-ordinators. That has monthly meetings chaired by the Minister for Sport. Let us hope that strategic thinking about sport and health going together—something my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) called for—will arise from those meetings.

In the briefing from the CCPR, I was struck by the lack of resources, in terms of the £1 per head of spending on sport. On the other side of the coin, however, I was struck by the huge resources that could be mobilised if we wanted to. Mention was made of the 110,000 voluntary sports clubs in England.

That brings me to the main argument of my contribution today; the imbalance in spending between the Department of Health and private sector advertisers who advertise products that make people unhealthy. I have seen that argument used on the television recently. In the news report about the chief medical officer's report on alcohol misuse and death from liver cirrhosis, someone said that we could spend only £1 per head, compared with the thousands or millions of pounds that advertisers can spend. We should not mind that. I certainly do not call for the spending of more public money on advertising to try to get the message across.

Instead, the Department of Health should tap into the other resources available to match the advertising in a different way. Those resources include other Government Departments, such as the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and all the quangos that it can tap into, such as the HDA and Health Promotion England, and especially local authorities such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield. I gave the example of the recreational centre. I find my local authority very keen to take part in joint health promotion campaigns and deliver practical help. The authority can reach the whole of its community, and if it does not have the experience itself, it knows someone who has. Local authorities are a huge resource that is not used enough on the health front.

Directors of public health are also key resources that should be used much more. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield mentioned their annual reports. Some of them are fantastic, and packed with useful information, but that never gets used for any good purpose.

Mr. Heald: I am listening with interest to what the hon. Gentleman says, especially about the way in which sports clubs could be used to develop the message of health promotion. Does he agree that one of the real problems is that there are not enough sports coaches with quality skills in coaching? Something needs to be done about that. Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the Sport England initiative—which the Government support and which Trevor Brooking has been fronting—designed to improve the number and quality of sports coaches? That sort of thing needs to happen.

Mr. Kidney: That is a good example and I am aware of it. We have just had the launch of Active Sport in Staffordshire. Sport England was represented and Tessa Sanderson and the Minister for Sport were there. We have money from the new opportunities fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to promote sport in schools and communities and I am optimistic about that project. It is a good example of something that can be tied into health to meet challenges such as obesity. The Department of Health could use many resources to meet the problem of advertisers spending more money than it does.

"Voluntary groups" includes sports groups. The voluntary sector in Stafford is absolutely thriving and bubbling with enthusiasm. Many such groups could be used to help the campaign for health promotion in this country. A group that has been overlooked—I did not see it mentioned in the report—is that of employers and trade unions. One of the best places to get people's attention is at work, and employers and trade unions would be willing partners in delivering the message and helping us if they were given information to pass on. That just needs co-ordination.

Another valuable resource is Members of Parliament. I want to receive messages from the Health Development Agency and Health Promotion England and help them by taking part in their campaigns. My local authority and director of public health make full use of me; I have fronted many launches in Stafford, such as "health through warmth" and the exercise on referral that I mentioned. I have promoted such schemes, talked to other decision-makers and networked. I have been delighted to carry out that role. I bet that the other 658 hon. Members would do the same thing in their communities.

I should also mention that airlines would be a good partner for tackling deep vein thrombosis. As I am a Member of Parliament, I cannot help but create some self-publicity; the subject of my ten-minute Bill, to be debated on 25 January next year, is making airlines give more information on avoiding deep vein thrombosis during flights.

The message must be one of prevention, as well as cure. I understand the immediate pressures on the Department of Health. Great restructuring is taking place, and there are pressures to reduce waiting lists and tackle high-profile killers such as coronary heart disease and cancers. People are also clamouring for high-profile drugs and medical procedures, whatever the cost. There is a big challenge to deliver in Labour's second term and all those pressures crowd out more strategic thinking that will pay dividends later.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): Order. Those who organise the sound system are finding it difficult to catch some of the speeches, so I make a plea for speakers to address the microphones.

Mr. Kidney: I will back up a bit, Mr. O'Hara. The point is to have a strategic vision and a long-term plan. I believe that a long-term plan pays and reduces pressures later. An example of that from the past is intermediate care; we now face the difficulty of rushing to keep up with demand, which we should have planned for 10 years ago.

I want to answer the point raised by the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) about the nanny state because it is vital that we avoid being accused of attempting to develop one. I agree with the quote from the World Health Organisation that health promotion is

"the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health".

We must provide facts on healthy living through guidance that must become familiar to everyone. One shocking statistic from the report of the CCPR is that only 11 per cent. of GPs recognise the Government's guidelines on the amount of physical activity recommended for adults. If front-line services have not got the message, there is not much hope for the rest of the community.

11.34 pm

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): I should like to consider the role of the public health doctor, historically and now. I will show that I think that the role has somehow lost its way. As the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said, it began with Sir Edward Chadwick, who was not a doctor but a Lancashire man brought up in a Lancashire farmhouse, in which the proverb, "Cleanliness is next to godliness", was the absolute rule. This proverb enabled him to live to the age of 90. During a long and profitable life, he sorted out the water system and proved the connection between water and illness.

Coming a little bit more up to date, in the 1880s, in my own constituency, we had a remarkably forward-looking medical officer of health, who, once he had established the waterworks, the sewers and the fire service—with which he was involved as well—he suddenly realised that the death rate from drowning in the River Severn was extraordinarily high. As the voice of the people he recommended that swimming lessons should be available. He then realised that a lot of the people who were drowning were drunkards who were just falling into the docks—in Stourport we have docks. The health officer then tried to get fences erected. He was not very successful with that, but he was amazingly forward-looking. The health officer also discovered that the mercury in teething powders caused desperate illnesses in children. This was not recognised until the 1950s; he was 70 years ahead of his time.

At that time medical officers of health really spoke for their people. Sadly, the medical officer of health role was abolished in 1974 and society then went into a limbo in which we had community medicine specialists. The community chest of the Monopoly board meant more to me than community medicine as a specialty. This was only put right by the Acheson report in 1988, which defined public health very sensibly as the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organised efforts of society. Sadly, I think that that has been rather watered down in the report.

The Select Committee—of which I was not a member at the time—picked up the Association of Directors of Public Health description of the core business of the director of public health as being medical management with the science of epidemiology. That is where I think things began to go wrong. As a medical manager, the director of public health was automatically on the executive of various NHS bodies. As with other executives, they also became, in effect, civil servants. This produced a tremendous conflict. It has been referred to in at least one letter to the *British Medical Journal* from a very senior public health doctor, who pointed out how difficult it was to act as the voice of the patient when one was in fact a civil servant.

The loss of the director of public health as a voice of the patient has led to so many of the problems in my own constituency. *The Independent* picked this up relatively soon after my election to this House, and regarded the lesson of my election as a condemnation of the state planning of health services in the area, which had failed. The newspaper went on to say that, in the market,

"the customer is always right, and if the closure of Kidderminster A&E does not make sense to local people, then it does not make sense."

Sadly, we did not have such a person to speak for the people. Those involved can convince themselves, through various methods, that what they are being told—they are, sadly, almost being dictated to—is in the best of interests of the people.

This role as a voice for the people is becoming more important. Only yesterday the press contained reports from the president of the Royal College of Surgeons, saying that because of the tremendous shortage of surgeons, a large number of hospitals would probably lose their surgical facilities. Unless we have a medically qualified voice of the people to speak up against the royal colleges, we will again be in trouble.

The role of the director of public health—the public health doctor—should be to get back to being the voice of the people. This gives me a little bit of hope because, with the reorganisation, the strategic health authority will have one senior public health doctor and—I hate to say this—he may be a long way away from being able to do much damage. I am not clear where the public health presence fits in with the primary care trusts and I should be grateful for more details of that. The Government stated in their response that there would be a new public health team in each PCT, with a board-level appointment to lead the work. I should like to have a little more detail about that and how it is envisaged.

I must mention sport, because it was one of the key points to which Liam Donaldson referred when summarising public health. They were; do not smoke, eat a balanced diet, keep active, manage stress, moderate alcohol, cover up in the sun, have safer sex, keep cancer screening appointments, read the highway code, and learn first aid. Several hon. Members referred to keeping active and that was emphasised at an inspiring meeting that a number of us attended yesterday with the Prince of Wales when we heard about his trust and charitable activities. In response to a question from the hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), the Prince acknowledged the importance of activity, including football. Another huge value of sport in the community, in addition to its tremendous health implications, is that it takes young people off the streets. I should like to hear a little more about the future role of the public health doctor and to have an assurance that sport and exercise will be emphasised.

[Dr. Richard Taylor]

3.41 pm

Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on another excellent report from his Committee. I strongly endorse his comments on the need for a ban on tobacco advertising and I share his view of the importance of sport.

3.42 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

3.57 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Thomas: The two issues that I want to highlight relate to anorexia and alcohol misuse. I apologise to the Minister and to other hon. Members for the fact that I shall not be able to stay until the end of the debate, but I shall read *Hansard* carefully tomorrow.

I urge a greater focus from the Health Development Agency and public health professionals on the issue of anorexia. I confess that I did not take a great deal of interest in the issue until a local family visited my constituency surgery. Mrs. Porter told me about the experience of her two daughters and their treatment for anorexia. Their treatment illustrates both the best side of the national health service and a side on which further work is needed.

In 1996, Helen Porter received treatment as an in-patient at Bowden house, a facility in my constituency. She was there for some six months on a placement funded by the national health service. In the words of Mrs. Porter, her daughter made excellent progress. Sadly, Rachael, her second daughter, also suffered from anorexia and became ill in 1997. Unlike her sister, she received much more sporadic treatment for the same condition. She managed to continue at university and graduated successfully last year, to the delight of all her family. When she came home from university she was, in the words of her mother, "at death's door," weighing some 30 kg. Thirteen months on, when her mother came to see me at my surgery in July, Rachael weighed only 3 kg more. She has not had the opportunity to receive the same high-class treatment at the Bowden house facility in my constituency as her sister did.

When I started to consider anorexia, I was surprised—perhaps I should not have been—to learn how widespread the condition was. An estimated 60,000 people in the United Kingdom have eating disorders. I am told that only one in 10 sufferers are male, and the majority are young women. The problem affects roughly 1 or 2 per cent. of the UK's female population between the ages of 15 and 30. Of the statistics, the most frightening must be that between six and 10 out of every 100 patients die as a result of the disorder.

I did further research and read with great interest "Eating Disorders, Body Image and the Media", the report of the board of science and education of the British Medical Association, which was published in May 2000. The report highlighted a range of issues of importance for public health professionals and stressed the importance of education, which might relate to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield about the importance of the role of local authorities in improving public health. It also identified the need for clear anti-bullying policies, proper policies on eating disorders at a local education authority and school level, and proper counselling and mentoring services. The report advocated greater research so that some of the underlying causes of anorexia could be identified, as there is still no clear view of its cause. It made a series of recommendations on diet, physical activity and mental health services for the Government's health strategy.

The Government are acting on the issue. The Minister for Public Health rightly called a summit in June 2000 to stimulate debate on the issue. I urge the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), who is in the Chamber, to consider urgently what else the Government could do to respond to the concerns of organisations such as the Eating Disorders Association. The association has highlighted the difficulty of access in some areas to specialist eating disorder treatment, the difficulties in recognising eating disorders as a problem in primary care, and differences in patterns of referral among general practitioners and other primary care professionals. The EDA has also advocated the development of therapeutic options for the problem, which are not as advanced as those for better known and more high-profile conditions.

I suspect that another point made by the EDA was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield in the report of the Health Committee on mental health services. It stressed that treatment for those who suffer from eating disorders must take place in appropriate settings. It is sad that settings are less than ideal at the moment.

For the sake of my constituents, I look to the Minister and her colleagues in the Department of Health to continue to seek to raise the profile of the issue and the Government's response to it. That family has gone through considerable trauma as a result of the condition.

I urge the Government to consider alcohol misuse, a subject that other hon. Members have mentioned. I have spent time on the scheme run by the National Council of Voluntary Organisations—which is equivalent to that run by the Industry and Parliament Trust—with Alcohol Concern, an excellent organisation that rightly continues to campaign for an alcohol misuse strategy. It has consistently highlighted the importance of alcohol to a wide range of social, economic and health problems. There is a huge public health dimension to alcohol misuse. The number of deaths directly attributable to alcohol misuse rose sharply in the second half of the 1990s from some 3,800 per year in 1994 to over 5,500 in 1999, while 60 per cent. of employers stated that their organisations had experienced problems as a result of employees' misuse of alcohol. I am told that a comparative study has shown that 15 to 16 year-olds in the United Kingdom have some of the highest drinking levels in Europe.

There is also a clear correlation between alcohol misuse and crime, notably in terms of domestic violence—60 to 70 per cent. of men who assault their partners do so under the influence of alcohol. Most tellingly, as others have mentioned, at peak times 80 per cent. of those who go to accident and emergency departments with injuries have a high percentage of alcohol in their bloodstream.

A Government strategy to tackle the problem could create coherence across the various Government Departments that have an interest in alcohol policy. Such a clear political commitment would have an enormous impact on a range of providers of services, and the imposition of clear targets would lend urgency to the tackling of problems. A strategy could also identify the structures in the public health domain and elsewhere that might be able to help to address the issues. I urge the Government to direct additional funding to this aspect of public health. I understand from a written answer to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) that just £1.1 million has been allocated specifically to deal with alcohol misuse as opposed to £91 million to tackle drugs and almost £34 million for tobacco. I do not condemn the Government for that, but I urge that, as part of a proper national alcohol strategy, another look be taken at funding in this important area.

I apologise again that I cannot be present to hear what my hon. Friend the Minister says. However, I shall study her response, and the contributions of other speakers, very closely.

4.7 pm

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): This is a timely and important debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and his Committee on the vast amount of work that they must have put into the report and their travels to other places. It is important to have this debate now because, I suggest to the Minister, the Government have entertained us with some dramatic changes in health policy in the last week or so. I do not expect my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) to agree that the Government have pirated Conservative policy in trying to get the private sector involved in the health service in the way for which—I see my hon. Friend smiling—we have argued in at least the past two Parliaments.

Mr. Heald: Just to take up my hon. Friend's partisan note, does he agree that it is sad that, for five years, so many patients have suffered when they could have had their treatment through the private sector?

Mr. Tredinnick: I hear what my hon. Friend has said. I agree with him. It is not my intention to have a party political knockabout.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I understand from a colleague that last week the Public Accounts Committee calculated that the NHS would have the equivalent of 2,000 additional consultants if those who worked part-time in the NHS and part-time in the private sector worked wholly in the NHS. I am not completely on board as regards the Government's current direction. If they moved in the opposite direction, they could have a profound impact on our problems with waiting lists.

Mr. Tredinnick: I was going to suggest that there was an inconsistency in the Government's policy. On one hand, they want the private sector to deal with acute cases; on the other, the Minister and her colleagues have not dealt with complementary and alternative medicine, which is largely in the private sector. I shall return to that.

Dr. Evan Harris: The hon. Gentleman suggested that a Government addiction to the private sector was a panacea for which he had called for some time. However, that does not mean that he was right, because both the Conservative party and the Government could be wrong.

Mr. Tredinnick: I have never looked to the Liberals for panaceas, and I never will.

Dr. Harris: Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Tredinnick: I am sorry; the Liberal Democrats. We have had the Social Democrats and—perhaps I should not go down that road, because I would hate to be called to order.

The second aspect of the Government's change of policy is that they have pretty much admitted that they cannot solve the problems with the existing criteria. The evidence for that is that they have had to go to the Chancellor for more money. I have never agreed with the Chancellor on much, but I certainly agree that he should audit what is happening at the Department of Health. The Treasury is always very tough when it is asked for more money, and I welcome that.

The third dramatic change is the decision to send patients abroad for treatment. I welcome the idea that we should reduce waiting lists, particularly if that benefits those of my constituents who are on them. However, as I have said before and I shall say again, the Government should look to those who practise different forms of therapy in this country but who are not properly integrated into the national health service. If the Government drew on the resources of those 50,000 additional practitioners—the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) smiles in what I hope is agreement—the numbers on waiting lists would fall and life would be much easier for doctors and surgeons.

When I read the report yesterday evening, I was slightly amused that the Committee had alighted on Cuba as its destination. I wondered whether we were dealing with new Labour or real Labour, the Stalinist tendency. I wondered whether the right hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) was behind the report. She has a tendency to get involved, as she did in the case of that poor Labour Member who was hounded by the Labour Whips. The press release said, "Labour thugs attack MP"—

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman is departing from the script.

Mr. Tredinnick: I certainly would not want to do that, Mr. O'Hara. However, it crossed my mind that those were the right people to go to Cuba to get a few lessons and perhaps some beer, sandwiches and cigars from

[Mr. Tredinnick]

Fidel. I am sure, however, that the hon. Member for Wakefield is not part of that militant tendency in the Whips Office.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has been to Cuba, but its people are probably the nicest that I have met in any of the places that I have visited.

Mr. Tredinnick: I have not been to Cuba, but I look forward to an invitation. I am unlikely to get one from the President after my remarks, although I live in hope.

I was interested by paragraph 19 on page 15, which stated that life expectancy in Cuba was 76 years. Paragraph 21 on page 16 states:

> "In the absence of expensive imported pharmaceutical products, considerable emphasis"—

in Cuba—

> "is placed on herbal and other alternative remedies."

[Interruption.] I thank hon. Members. Turning to paragraph 29, hon. Members will see that life expectancy in England and Wales has increased from 52 years and 55 years for women in 1910 to 74 years for men and 79 years for women in 1994. Our life expectancy here is still worse than that in Cuba. One reason for that is that the alternative and complementary services that are available in Cuba are not available on the national health service in Britain.

Mr. Hinchliffe: And we do not have socialism, either.

Mr. Tredinnick: The hon. Gentleman, as ever, makes a point that, coming from his stable, he might be expected to make. It seems bizarre that citizens of a country that cannot afford pharmaceutical products—another paragraph says that it is not allowed to import them because of the cost—and uses natural remedies have a better life expectancy than the citizens of a country that can afford pharmaceutical products. I respectfully suggest that there are one or two lessons for us there.

Dr. Harris: The hon. Gentleman is raising a very important, very serious matter. However, does he accept that better lifestyles and prevention, rather than treatments, whether conventional or alternative, are what count in terms of life expectancy? If a place has those better lifestyles, the use of the herbal and alternative remedies there does not prove that those remedies have a positive effect on life expectancy; rather it proves, and I think that many people would agree, that lifestyle issues have an impact.

Mr. Tredinnick: I do not often agree with the hon. Gentleman, but I will agree with him a little this afternoon. I accept that lifestyle is an issue and I intended to talk about that and about the amount of money that we spend on preventive care. Sport is important in Cuba, and people's lifestyle is more relaxed. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) had a pina colada on a beach—perhaps he did. Cuba is a big tourist destination, is it not? My hon. Friend is such an assiduous worker—I well remember his efforts at Basildon in the old days.

I hope that no one in the Chamber thinks that I am being flippant. Although I am trying to lighten some aspects of what I say, these are key issues. I read the report unable to believe my eyes that the Cubans should be using alternative therapies and have a greater life expectancy. In this country, already one in four people are using some form of traditional therapy, or "integrated health care" as we tend to call it now. Such therapies include herbal medicine, acupuncture, back treatments such as shiatsu, reiki—all sorts of things. There are roughly 750,000 consultations a year with 50,000 complementary practitioners. Most referrals are outside the health service. Some are now inside—we are just beginning to get there.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Tredinnick: The Minister nods and it is true, but there is a long way to go. The Government could make their life so much easier if they moved forward on the issue.

The House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology, in its landmark report, came to the conclusion that complementary therapy—the herbalists and homeopaths—had been adversely affected by the recent NHS reforms in primary care. Primary care groups have brought about a levelling down in services, and 58 per cent. of primary care groups now provide access to some form of complementary therapy. A recent survey of primary care groups found that 227 out of 278 had not come up with a policy on the matter.

The difference between GP fundholding and the primary care group system is that whereas, in the past, GP fundholders could get together as a small band and commission, primary care groups tend to be more unwieldy because more people are involved. Crucially, their membership includes quite a few old-style health authority officials. It is often less easy to commission therapies on the health service. The Minister would be well advised to examine that so that we get an increased provision in the health service, which is important when regulation is gradually being improved for all therapies.

I served on the Committees of the Osteopaths Bill and the Chiropractors Bill three Parliaments ago; those provisions are now part of mainstream health care. In those days, such treatments were considered pretty wacky. When I damaged my back many years ago, I would certainly not have told a doctor such as the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon that I was going to an osteopath, because he would have been tough with me and told me that he thoroughly disapproved.

John Austin: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if chiropractic was more readily available under the national health service, the waiting lists for orthopaedic surgery would be dramatically reduced?

Mr. Tredinnick: That is absolutely right. One of the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends, whose name I shall not mention because he is a good friend of mine, told me that he went to visit a chiropractor in a major city in England. When he was waiting for treatment, he was surprised to bump into an acquaintance. He said, "Hello, what are you doing here—you're the chairman of the local health authority, why aren't you at the royal infirmary getting treatment for your back?" His acquaintance said, "I'm not letting those people near me; I'm coming here first."

That story should not suggest that there was anything wrong with the surgeons in the hospital, but I agree with what the hon. Gentleman says—I nearly called him my hon. Friend, but I would not want to damage his chances of promotion. If one allows chiropractors in first to examine backs, pressure is taken off the waiting lists for the surgeons, who can concentrate on valuable and necessary work. The complementary world can take the pressure off the health service.

The Government have outlined targets—national health service priorities—among which coronary heart disease, cancer and mental health are key. I can remember them without looking them up. I was talking to a homeopath yesterday and he agreed that all those priorities could be dealt with using homeopathy. Hypertension, which leads to heart disease, is readily curable using homeopathic medicine, as are ulcers and asthma. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West mentioned asthma, of which he has family experience. My children have had experience of asthma, and it is frightening when it happens, but there are remedies.

Remedies for skin may also be effective, and the treatment does not have to involve powerful steroids with their side effects. I do not suggest that there is anything wrong with traditional approaches, but there are other ways in which to treat those health problems before using powerful drugs. Let the doctors use them, but let us try other remedies first and take the burden off the health service.

I shall concentrate on homeopathy for a moment, before turning to some other therapies. In Scotland, 20 per cent. of doctors use homeopathy—one in five. One of the reasons for the Act of Union with Scotland was to get doctors down to London, was it not? I think that happened in 1706—I am not an historian. We have always had a great respect for Scots medicine. We do not have anything like that here—we have only five homeopathic hospitals. We should build on that, and the Government have an opportunity to take the initiative.

Regrettably, doctors sometimes like to say that homeopathy is all rubbish and that nothing has been proved, but studies on complementary medicine are often ignored. The study entitled "Unexpected solute aggregation in water on dilution" was received in Cambridge on 20 June and accepted on 7 September, which means that it was accepted by the medical establishment. Homeopathy works through weak doses: the weaker the dose the more powerful it is—so it is more powerful if it is diluted from 30c down to 6c or 1m, for example. That has been scientifically proved. It is an important study and we must take note of it.

Yesterday I was with someone who has been using homeopathy to treat dysfunctional children—the type of children whom we were talking about earlier in the debate—at Impington village college in Cambridge. I have been given leave by the college, via the therapist, to draw the matter to hon. Members' attention this afternoon. Impington college asked homeopath Jacqueline Schaerer to help with its inclusion project. The trial proved successful.

A group of 25 children from 12 to 15 years old, with behavioural problems such as violence, swearing, truancy, fighting in the classroom, shoplifting and being generally disruptive in and out of school were treated individually, and sometimes in groups, with homeopathic remedies either weekly or monthly, with the parents' consent. After the relatively short time of three months, the teachers reported that the majority of the treated students were back in a normal classroom situation, behaving acceptably and studying to the best of their ability. Impressed by the results, the college decided to support some of the 16 to 18-year-old students; they had more emotional social problems, including suicide attempts, eating problems and even drug taking, which disrupted their education and their exams. The results were equally successful.

Impington village college valued the input of the homeopath as an important strand of its educational inclusion work. Now, a year later, the same students are still behaving in an acceptable manner but without any kind of further treatment. That is significant. I understand that almost all the pupils who received that treatment have effectively been cured of their problem. Not only have the pupils benefited; so have the teachers, parents and society in general. The trial was considered a huge success. The inclusion project was funded by Government grant No. 19.

Homeopathy can result in enormous savings not only in the general health sector, as I have suggested, but in education. The Minister seems very interested in that. If she wants to see them, I shall ensure that she has a copy of the papers. The Homeopathic Society has 1,200 members, and they are all available. The Minister can lock them onto the health service. Homeopathy has been available on the health service since 1950; she does not need to look at the regulations, and there is no reason why that should be a stalling point.

When the House of Lords reported on the subject last year, there was absolute uproar among the Indian community here and in India at the fact that ayurvedic medicine was not classified as a serious therapy. I looked up some statistics for the debate, and ayurvedic medicine has been used for more than 6,000 years and is practised in 2,000 Indian hospitals. Yet we have the audacity to say that the treatment is not proven. We need a radical rethink on our attitude to medicines from Asia, because they are increasingly popular and they have a formidable ability to cure problems.

I have in my hand a list from a Chinese practitioner who lectures in Chinese medicine and who trains western doctors in London in how to use it. The list shows the problems that traditional Chinese medicine can cure using acupuncture, which is part of traditional Chinese medicine. I shall give a copy to the hon. Lady—I nearly said right hon. Lady, but not quite: if the Minister adopts and embraces complementary medicine, she might soon be promoted and might yet be asked to the Palace. The document lists the therapeutic functions of acupuncture. They include analgesic and anaesthetic functions. Acupuncture deals with nervous problems, regulates body fluids, regulates the digestion,

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helps with respiratory problems and deals with the circulation, blood pressure, cervical vessels, coronary artery and digestive system. It can affect the blood, and is used in red cell and white cell management; it deals with blood platelets, and has an effect on the endocrine system, the nervous system and the immune system. I could go on.

Dr. Richard Taylor: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware of the Prince of Wales Foundation for Integrated Medicine. Its aim is

> "to promote integrated delivery of safe, effective and efficient forms of health care, including orthodox and complementary medicine through greater collaboration."

That organisation is trying to set up controlled trials of complementary forms of treatment, and I commend to the hon. Gentleman that method of furthering his desires. I also commend to the Minister the work of that organisation.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) to continue his speech, I want to advise hon. Members that the winding-up speeches will start at 5 o'clock, and the intention is that each of the Front-Bench spokesmen will have 10 minutes each. Hon. Members who still wish to speak—I know that two are still hoping to catch my eye—might like to bear that in mind. Should we finish before 5 o'clock, the extra time will be allocated between the Front-Bench spokesmen, and should we be interrupted by Divisions, we may have extra time.

Mr. Heald: On a point of order, Mr. O'Hara. We have already lost 12 minutes or so as a result of a Division. Will we have extra time to make up for that?

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): We have until 5.45 pm, but if there are further Divisions we may add some time. The winding-up speeches will start at 5.15 pm.

Mr. Tredinnick: On a point of order, Mr. O'Hara. It might assist if I inform you that I spoke to the Table Office on that very point. I was informed that we have extra time for every Division.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): That is right. I have just said that.

Mr. Tredinnick: I am sorry; I misunderstood you.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): I shall not repeat myself. I think that people understand. We should not waste any more time.

Mr. Tredinnick: I hope not to waste any time and I certainly have no intention of talking out colleagues who want to make a speech. I shall try to speed up.

There is currently a big debate about the regulation of acupuncture. The Minister can help by taking that forward and ensuring that herbalists and acupuncturists are regulated. Then more doctors will refer patients to them, as happened when osteopaths and chiropractors were regulated.

I turn briefly to the issue of obesity, which has been raised by several hon. Members. I agree that it is a terrible problem and an indictment of our society, and that we must do something about it. The statistics in the report show that physical education has been reduced in a third of primary schools, there is no physical education at all in 95 per cent. of primary schools, and children spend twice as much time watching television or playing with computers as doing sport. It is vital that we redress that state of affairs. Whether the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is the right vehicle for that is an important issue.

In Australia and Cuba, sport is seen as part of health. I try to exercise every day. I go to a yoga class on Wednesdays, if the Whips are kind to me and I can get away. I find that beneficial because it gets the blood moving. On the subject of smoking cessation, I defy anyone to try smoking a cigarette after a yoga session. I speak as someone who has just about knocked the habit on the head. The money that the Government have made available for smoking cessation services is very important, as I told the Minister at Health questions. Hypnotists and homeopaths can help too, and acupuncture is effective for smoking cessation, so I hope that the Government will examine those possibilities.

On diet, there is a problem with additives. A study in a secondary school, published a week or so ago, reported on the problems of E-additives in orange juice that can cause disruptive behaviour. There is too much sugar in our diet.

I have always believed that there are three classes of medicine: mainstream, conventional medicine; herbalists and homeopaths, whom I would loosely describe as "alternative"; and energy people and healers who use their hands and work with energy medicines such as Bach flower remedies. People who heal with their hands work in advanced cancer clinics such as those in Hammersmith and Bristol. Prisoners are being shown how to channel energies in prisons such as Coldingley near Guildford and Hollesley Bay near Ipswich. I have watched remarkable demonstrations in which prisoners have worked with warders and warders have worked with prisoners.

During birth, babies can have their cranial plates put in the wrong place as they go down the birth canal, and cranial osteopathy can help with that. Many prisoners have plates that are out of place, and a cranial osteopath can put back those plates, which can completely change their behaviour patterns.

Only 2 per cent. of Britain's health care budget is spent on prevention. We must look harder at prevention, and we should certainly look harder at sport.

According to the Library's statistics, the amount of research funding for complementary and alternative medicine is 0.08 per cent. of Department of Health and Medical Research Council funding, and 0.05 per cent. of research funding from medical research charities. It is a pitiful sum when one considers the money that the drug companies attract.

The report is tremendous and a great deal of work has gone into it. We can learn one or two interesting lessons from Cuba, but the big lesson for the Government to learn as they send patients across the channel before they go to the Chancellor with their begging bowl is that they should make better use of the indigenous complementary practitioner population.

4.36 pm

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick), who has spoken extensively. Indeed, he has spoken for longer than the Chair of the Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) did. The only thing about which he has not informed hon. Members—perhaps he will enlighten us—is whether there is a homeopathic cure for verbal diarrhoea.

It is a great pleasure to speak about the Health Committee report because it is excellent and raises several important issues. My interest in public health dates back to the days when my mother was the medical officer for the west of Scotland. My childhood was spent being carted around various developmental clinics that she had set up, so I speak with the benefit of years of experience of public health, albeit not of the professional variety.

The report highlights the issue of health inequalities. The Chair of the Committee said that health inequality had doubled or tripled in the past decade—he would want me to make it clear that over that period, life expectancy and health increased dramatically while morbidity decreased. None the less, health inequality concerns all hon. Members, including Ministers.

I want to speak specifically about the section of the report that states:

> "People in Black (Caribbean, African and other) groups and Indians have higher rates of limiting long-standing illnesses than white peoples."

Given that my constituency is located in a borough where 106 languages are spoken in schools, health inequality among ethnic minority groups has troubled me for a long time.

I should like to focus the Minister's attention on the problems that such groups face in screening programmes—specifically, breast screening programmes. I believe that the problem is that the system is based on the convenience of doctors and the administration. It seldom takes account of the culture and traditions of Indian and other Asian communities. I am delighted to say that, about a year ago, my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health visited my constituency to examine the breast screening programme there and speak with the Indian and Asian community about cultural differences.

At present, when the letter from the doctor arrives saying that it is time for a woman to present herself for screening, in most households of those communities, if the woman opens the letter, she will go to her husband and say, "I have this letter." If the husband does not say at that point, "That's good, it is important for the family that you go and do this," the letter goes in the bin. It is absolutely vital, especially in areas where many women, particularly elderly ones, do not speak English as their first language or even at all, that there is support from the family network and from the wider community to ensure that the women not only go for screening, but are supported when they go by another family member who speaks English.

One would imagine that mobile units were a way of addressing that problem but, sadly, they are not as mobile as their name implies. They often get dumped in a Sainsbury's car park for six months, nine months or a year at a time and people are referred to them. I urge the Minister, with her ministerial team, to examine working with local community groups such as, in my constituency, the Brent Indian Association and the Hindu Council of Brent, to make it clear that the work starts with them. The mobile unit could be located in a venue such as the local community association, and the whole community would then be encouraged to ensure that people present for screening.

We could then invert the process whereby the reference comes down centrally through the doctor to the woman, and the matter then goes into limbo. It must come from the community so that the support is there to ensure that women present for screening and receive the care that they deserve. We must turn the focus of the service delivery on its head and try to make it customer-focused and patient-focused, instead of designed for the doctors' convenience.

Dr. Evan Harris: I am very interested in the cogent case that the hon. Gentleman is making, but could he be more specific? How can those letters of invitation, an important part of the screening process, come from the community, given that they contain confidential medical information?

Mr. Gardiner: I am saying not that the letters of referral should come from the community, but that if one located a mobile unit at a community venue and a campaign was then undertaken with the local community association—a particular ethnic or community group—women would be encouraged to present for screening. The work would then be done in a venue with which the women were familiar and with the support of the whole community. The point has been made by the men who are leaders of their communities that unless the men in each family give support, the letter will not be acted on. It is vital that we seek to turn the system round, and ensure that the inequalities in health care that the report so properly mentions are tackled in ethnic minority communities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield was right in his remarks about the importance of health visiting. Health visitors have a vital role to play in health promotion and the delivery of primary health care. My hon. Friend's remarks are indeed timely, given that the draft Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001—a reference to health visitors used to be included—is being debated this week in another place.

At a recent meeting, the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), referred to health visitors as his shock troops for the delivery of primary health care and preventive medicine in the community, and for looking at how best to overcome social inequality. The report highlights Sir Donald Acheson's remarks about the

[Mr. Gardiner]

uncontroversial benefits of home visits to pregnant women and during the first two years of a child's life. Health visiting is an absolutely vital front-line support for mothers and young families. It is central to what this Government are trying to do through the sure start programme and other measures. It ensures equality of health opportunity for young children from the outset, no matter what part of society they are born into.

The report makes an important recommendation about how health visitors can get involved at the other end of the life cycle. It looks at the ways in which health visitors can use and develop their skills in order to present an equal service to the elderly population. The recommendation fits in with the Government's agenda to extend skills traditionally concentrated in health visiting and health visitors, so that the role of community public health practitioners is enlarged.

In passing, I should mention the draft Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001, and the health visiting profession's concerns about it. The profession has been surprised—I put it no more strongly—to find that the name of "health visitor" has been omitted from the order, and that it will be registered not as a distinct profession, but as a distinct nursing specialism. Given the shock waves that that decision has sent through the health visiting profession, it is vital that Ministers send the strongest possible signal that they value the role of health visitors in our primary health care delivery programme, and that they will protect in statute the body of knowledge that health visiting has built up over decades. We have been told that the education, skills and training of health visitors will be protected in statute, and Ministers must offer that assurance.

The other day, I had the good fortune to launch my own local strategic partnership, in Brent. The report is excellent in highlighting the role that such partnerships should play in building alliances across the community by working with elected bodies, the local council and all manner of authorities. Paragraph 149 of the report states that

> "health objectives are at the heart of these neighbourhood renewal strategies."

That is an extremely important part of the report's argument, and I commend the Committee for its work in highlighting that point. I hope that the Government will take that forward.

The section of the report beginning at paragraph 178 concerns cross-Government work on school health. It says:

> "The onus is on local education and health authorities, in collaboration with schools and the local community, to develop their own plans for improving health in schools using all aspects of school life, including the curriculum (particularly Personal, Social and Health Education), the physical environment of the school, the nutrition policy of the school, the nutrition policy of the school and the time spent in physical activity by children."

Many important points are contained in that short passage and, indeed, in the report's other comments on the subject.

I welcome the Government's programme for making fruit available in schools. My local area was one of those in which it was piloted. It is a tremendous initiative, and I look forward to its roll-out across the country. It is vital that children be educated into good nutritional habits and that they get the benefit that the fruit in schools programme has delivered to schools in my constituency.

I want to pay far more critical attention to the Government's policy on physical activity by children at school. The expectation that schoolchildren should have two hours per week of physical education shows a poverty of aspiration on the part of the Government that is shameful and shocking. It is a disgrace, especially as the time that children are given has declined since 1994, when they were getting two hours a week. They should have two hours per day, not per week. In respect of cross-departmental co-operation, I am delighted that the Minister for Sport is working with Ministers from the Department of Health, but we must recognise that unless policies are implemented with the full and dramatic co-operation of the Department for Education and Skills, we shall not achieve the objectives that we set.

The Chairman of the Committee was right to highlight the report on obesity that went to the National Audit Office, and to the Public Accounts Committee on which I serve. The revelations in that report were shocking. Obesity is increasing faster in children than in any other age group. From 1984 to 1994 it rose from 5.6 per cent. to 9 per cent. in boys and from 9.3 per cent. to 13.5 per cent. in girls. In 1999, the direct costs to the nation of obesity reached £0.5 billion, and the indirect costs are estimated to be £2.5 billion. It is pointless to channel funding into treatments for the diseases that are caused by obesity, which is recognised as a so-called gateway disease to a host of other ailments, if we do nothing to address the root causes of obesity through good nutrition and exercise.

I shall draw my remarks to a close because I know that other hon. Members have important contributions to make. I plead with the Minister to ensure that her Department, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Education and Skills consider restructuring the school day. It should be put on the same footing as the working day, starting at 8.30 in the morning and finishing at 5.30 or 6 o'clock at night. In the middle of the day, at about 2 o'clock, two solid hours should be taken out for sport and physical activity—not after the school day has finished, as extra-curricular activity. That central position in the timetable would make sport central to the curriculum. Children would spend the same amount of time in the classroom as they currently do, and the period in the middle of the day could be well used by teachers for the preparation and marking of work that they now have to do after the school day. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is already saying that it will put money into increasing the provision of coaching and development in that area.

Unless there is an integrated approach that looks to putting two hours of sport and physical activity at the heart of the school day, I believe that we shall not be able to deliver the health improvements that we seek for young people.

4.55 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh): Public health is such an important subject, and it is great to have the opportunity to talk about it in such detail today. I pay tribute to the contributions that my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) and many other hon. Members have made today. It is sad that we do not have more opportunities to talk about the subject. Public health is one of those things that touches almost every facet of life. The work of every Government Department is crucial to the lives of people in this country, but I believe that we should give public health more attention.

The report on public health is fantastic, and it is a tribute to the Health Committee. Sadly, I can take no credit whatever, as I did not join the Committee until the summer. I am sadder still that I missed the intriguing trip to Cuba, although I am glad that I did not have the British Airways prawn butties, which, by the sound of things, are doing their own damage to the health of the nation.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). It is obvious when he speaks on this subject that he does so with great passion, conviction and knowledge, and he deserves to be listened to. The report is a tribute to him, and also to the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) and my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (John Austin). The report has shaped Government policy; we can say that with great certainty, and that alone is a great tribute.

My background in this area is that I worked for a short time for the NHS Confederation and helped to prepare its response to the Acheson inquiry in the late 1990s. While we were talking about the Acheson report we began to see how engrained and embedded the issues were in some of the more deprived communities of the country, but it was only recently, since I became the Member of Parliament for Leigh, that I began to appreciate some of those issues at first hand. Only then did it strike me how hard it was to get underneath the issues and tackle them without being glib about the subject.

As people will know, Leigh has a long and proud industrial past, and a great tradition in coal mining; but that has left a terrible legacy to the local population. I find it quite humbling when former miners visit my constituency surgeries to see their pallid skin and to see them struggling to get around. The industrial past of the town has left great scars on the local population's health. Nothing can be done now for that generation, but let us hope that we can give the younger generation something better later in life, when they reach the same years.

What I have learned locally on an anecdotal basis has been borne out by the report of the chief medical officer this week. Some of his findings are truly shocking—a national scandal. I shall read a few conclusions from his report. He said:

> "In some parts of north-east and north-west England, communities had death rates similar to those prevailing in the 1950s."

He is talking of the late 1990s, when the data were collected. He continued:

> "Death rates of the most deprived sections of the population declined little in the 1990s, whereas death rates among the more advantaged declined substantially."

A partisan note was injected into our debate by the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick), who seems to have left the Chamber. The conclusion that I have just quoted is an indictment of the policies pursued in the 1980s and 1990s by the Conservative Government.

The chief medical officer said that

> "being poor in the north is worse for your health than being poor in the south."

He qualified that remark by saying that it was because

> "access to better educational and employment opportunities and living in a better quality environment are associated with better health."

A few months ago there was a debate about whether the north-south divide still existed. This report gives anyone who cares to look at it absolute, concrete and conclusive proof that the north-south divide is, sadly, very real.

The findings of the chief medical officer are the product of the failure of successive Governments to get behind the issue. We can say only that they failed the people in the communities where problems are still bad. The chief medical officer drew particular attention to the 20 worst wards in the country. The Minister will know that, because some of the wards of her Salford constituency are highlighted in the report. She, too, feels passionately about the subject and will be committed to making a difference, as are we all.

The report shows that housing, leisure and lifestyle opportunities, job opportunities, personal fulfilment and schooling all shape people's lives and future health. From the standpoint of my constituency, I must say that the Government are acting to address those fundamentals. Last week we were awarded £58 million to improve housing in the Wigan borough, connected with the setting up of the arm's-length management organisation for housing. We also have, in Hindley, sure start, which my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North mentioned. That is an attempt to get behind some of the difficult issues that have entrenched health inequalities in our population.

It is ironic that a Government often accused of being headline-grabbing and after the quick soundbite are putting in place policies that will deliver only 20, 30 or 40 years hence. It is a tribute to the people and the Government who have pushed those policies through that they have not gone for easier policies that produce results quicker.

I am extremely encouraged by the reforms to the national health service currently under debate in this place. Primary care trusts will have a powerful role to play in tackling health inequalities. They offer a more finely tuned mechanism to get behind the problem of health inequalities. They will be able to be more sensitive to local health needs and, crucially, less hidebound by traditional health service orthodoxies over prescribing, health promotion and other initiatives related to increasing the activity of the local community. The health service has, to date, failed on those subjects. It has not been as focused on public health and health promotion as it should have been. We now have an opportunity to turn that round.

The Government are currently examining the funding formula for primary care trusts. I hope that the Minister will touch on that when she replies. When that formula is drawn up, I hope that the Government will examine

[Andy Burnham]

closely the chief medical officer's report and the stark health inequalities that still exist in this country. As the chief medical officer says, this is not just about resources, although those are extremely important. Areas where death rates are unacceptably high need resources to begin to tackle the health problems in their communities.

We must look at the issues more broadly. Will the Minister urge her colleagues in the Government to recognise the importance of the funding of local authorities in the tackling of health inequalities? As the chief medical officer points out, the whole range of facilities, services and opportunities for people touch on their future health. Those are provided by local authorities, and the funding that they have reflects their ability to provide high-quality opportunities to the local population.

It follows naturally that funding for deprived areas such as mine in the Wigan borough must be increased if improvements are to be made. As the Member of Parliament representing Leigh in that borough, I certainly want to see those improvements.

I would like to emphasise a point that, encouragingly, all hon. Members have touched on today—the need to promote sport in society. I am surprised that all hon. Members touched on that, because it is sometimes seen as a peripheral or add-on subject to public health. It is not; it is absolutely at the heart of public health. It has a crucial role to play in driving up the quality of life. It makes people feel better about themselves, puts them in a more constructive frame of mind and gives them opportunities and life chances that they did not have before. It helps people out of a negative cycle and into a positive frame of mind, which has knock-on effects on health.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield mentioned the National Audit Office report, which contained figures for obesity in children. That alone should be enough to show that we are not doing enough to get young people to take part in sport. I believe that sport holds the answer to many of the entrenched and intractable social problems that the Government face—not just poor health but antisocial behaviour. In my constituency, there are often gangs of teenage children hanging around street corners of an evening, rattling the letter boxes of old people's houses and, worse, letting off fireworks and the like. Places could be provided for them where sports facilities were available, such as a floodlit astroturf pitch. Schemes around the country—I think that they are called midnight leagues—are targeted at areas with high crime rates. They provide attractive environments for young people—they are seen as a bit daring and trendy—and draw people away from less antisocial behaviour.

Sport tackles exclusion and improves regeneration. A town such as Leigh does not always have a great deal going for it, but people are united by a passion for sport—in our case, for rugby league. The hon. Member for Wakefield may agree that supporting rugby league clubs, such as those in Leigh and Wakefield, can sometimes be bad for our health and that of the local population. However, it is a passion that runs deep. Sport can be a galvanising factor in turning communities around; it gives them something to be proud of and draws them into healthier and more constructive lifestyles.

I should like to read a letter that I received from a 12-year-old constituent called Katie Parkinson. She wrote to me after I had written an article in our local paper. She said:

> "Recently your article in the Leigh Reporter caught my eye on 'Our town needs more sport to keep kids off the street'. Your headline couldn't of been more true. Recently, all you hear about is people who are in hospital because of drugs and alcohol and now it is becoming regular that children are doing the same so more sport should keep them off the street.
>
> I play Hockey for my school...My teacher has told me that I may be able to play for the county and that would be a dream come true but I only have school to practice and nowhere else. I once went to a team out of town but I had to keep travelling so I couldn't keep it up.
>
> In Leigh there are no Netball teams, Hockey teams and nowhere to practice golf."

That says it all. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North mentioned the drastic rise in obesity. The reason for that is that places to play supervised sports in out-of-school hours do not exist.

The hon. Member for Southend, West said that part of the problem was that sport was regarded as the poor relation in Whitehall—indeed, it is seen as barely worth considering. I speak as someone who has worked as a special adviser in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. We have worked extremely hard there for more funding for sport and it irritates me when the media comment on things such as Wembley. I take some credit for the fact that we persuaded the Government to make £750 million available through the lottery for the sport in schools initiative, which targets sports facilities in schools that are open to the community during out-of-school hours. We also managed to double the Treasury budget for sport, which, as the hon. Member for Southend, West said, will go into coaching initiatives. That is crucial. Organisations such as Sport England and the Central Council for Physical Recreation have done excellent work and have shown how we are still failing to fund sport adequately in this country. Trevor Brooking, the chair of Sport England is a great champion of that issue.

As regards solutions, one simple fact remains. The provision of sport and leisure facilities is not a statutory duty of local authorities. In the leisure sector, they are required by statute only to provide a full and comprehensive library service. Given the financial climate in which local authorities work, sport is often the first to go. We have all seen that in our constituencies. When times are hard, the grass is not cut, the person who supervises the facilities disappears, and the graffiti appears. That starts a terrible spiral of decline and leaves facilities that are not good enough to introduce young people to sport. If sports are to be taken seriously, people must learn to play them on a flat, well-cut pitch. There should be working toilets and not a boarded-up cubicle. Those factors may sound trivial, but they are crucial and not enough importance is given to them.

Allowing sports facilities to fall into decline is short-sighted and sad. It sends a poor message and fails to acknowledge the long-term impact on the lives and health of the local population. I ask the Minister to consider whether local authorities could be given a statutory duty to provide quality sports facilities to which everyone in their area has access. That would require extra funding, but sport is central to the Government's policy on crime, health, education and so on, and it would be money well spent.

In the run-up to the next spending round, and given Whitehall's traditional sidelining of sport, some will say that sport has had its lot and that it had its money in the last round, but I urge the Minister to accept that we have barely scratched the surface of what sport can do to turn round some of the intractable social problems in our deprived communities and inner cities. If we can keep ramping up the funding and make opportunities available to children, that can make the difference between drink, drugs and poor health, or a better path in life. It is that simple.

Some of the issues that I have raised go beyond the Minister's remit and it is difficult to tempt her on to ground that is not her responsibility, but I am sure that she also has strong views on the subject of public health. I hope that she will refer briefly to some of the issues that are the responsibility of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

I believe that the Government are committed to tackling health inequalities and the social problems that still exist in this country. They must acknowledge that there is a huge north-south divide which scars the country. They should make it a high priority to tackle that. Sport is an excellent place to start.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): There are 11 minutes left for each speaker before the winding-up speeches start.

5.12 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), who is an admirable Member of Parliament and for a long time has been an admirable Chair of his Committee, which has produced an admirable report. I give him more than three out of four points, but I generally agree with him three out of four times. I share his scepticism about the NHS giving taxpayers' money over the odds to the private sector, which may then use it to poach more staff from the health service, further diminishing the capacity of the NHS. It is right that he shows that scepticism.

I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need for closer links between local authority social services and the health service. Indeed, he and I want each of our parties to go further for good health and economic reasons. We also agree about the importance of effective public and patient involvement at local level. I differ with him about a proscription on consultants working privately because, if there was a ban, I think that many would leave the NHS. If he thinks that we are short of 2,000 consultants now, I agree with him and the answer is to employ 2,000 more.

I pay tribute, as did the hon. Member for Wakefield, to my former colleague, Dr. Peter Brand. The hon. Gentleman said that he did not always agree with him. He was a fellow Liberal Democrat and a fellow doctor, but I did not always agree with him, notoriously so. However, he had huge experience, and was a charming man and, I understand, a great yachter.

The hon. Member for Wakefield started by stressing the shocking differences in life expectancy between socio-economic groups. He said that that was an indictment of health policy over the decades. I agree, but it is an indictment more of acts of omission than of acts of commission. I agree that correcting the difference takes time and is not, as other hon. Members have suggested, amenable to easy targets.

The hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), atypically, stated that it was too early to make a judgment on the Government's strategy. I normally find him quick to condemn the other side and to praise his own. He was wrong to imply that the structural changes that the Government had made constituted the implementation of some of the recommendations in the Committee's report. As the hon. Member for Wakefield said, moving away from coterminosity by abolishing health authorities, and moving towards PCTs is moving away from the thrust of some of the recommendations of the report. Similarly, the abolition of health authorities and directors of public of health runs the risk of fragmenting the public health function, which the report rightly warns against. He was correct to praise Edwina Currie, who rightly sacrificed diplomacy on occasion, for speaking her mind. She was often right, and she continues to be right in many of her pronouncements on public health issues.

I was struck by the contribution made by the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney). He was right to raise questions about the effectiveness of the Health Development Agency, not because of the lack of effort of people who work in it, but because one might question whether it has been given the right priority and is properly funded and resourced. I should have thought that a measure of its effectiveness would be that it made more headlines than did the Health Education Authority, which it replaced. It has failed to do that, and that is a worry. The hon. Gentleman was right to say that health promotion was often sacrificed to immediate ambitions; I recognise that that is a temptation for any Government, and restraint is required to avoid it.

The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) gave some of the history of public health and mentioned Dr. Chadwick's motto "Cleanliness is next to godliness". When I grew up in Liverpool, they used to say that cleanliness was next to impossible. I do not think that that was directed solely at me, but perhaps it was. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the advocacy role of directors of public health on behalf of the patient and the public. One of the worries that is borne out in some of the literature is that DPHs have been recruited as adjuncts to Government, which might have trammelled their independence. Public health stretches beyond medical matters, and people who are directors of public health have backgrounds other than medical, so I hope that they are tied more rather than less into being agents of Government policy or organisation.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas), who is no longer present, raised what many of us as constituency Members of Parliament will recognise as the important issue of eating disorders. He stressed the enormous trauma that they cause whole families, let alone the sufferer, and the difficulties in accessing

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treatment. When a former Minister responsible for public health organised the body image summit, some scorned it and were sceptical and teased the Government. I was shouting, "Good on you," and would like to know from the Minister what has happened to that initiative. My worry is that the Government have been scared off. It is an important issue, and its profile should be raised.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West and others mentioned the importance of an alcohol strategy, given the huge cost in health terms of alcohol abuse. The funding for tackling alcohol problems is so much lower than that for other issues, and so much less than the alcohol industry spends on advertising its products.

The hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) raised some important points. We should not laugh at what he has said. He sets a challenge for those of us who believe in evidence-based practice, whether alternative or orthodox, as does the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology. As the hon. Member for Wyre Forest said in his telling speech, we must provide the resources to ensure that alternative medicine can pass the evidence test.

The hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner), who is also not in the Chamber, was unfairly harsh on the hon. Member for Bosworth, but he made an important point about ensuring that screening programmes were accessible to those most at risk. Will we ever have proper screening for type II diabetes? That is important for the Asian population. A shortage of radiographers and radiologists may limit the Government's ambitions for screening. The hon. Member for Brent, North made an important point about health visitors, which we have discussed, and was remarkably strong in his call for much more sport in school. It is up to people like us to say what we would drop from a crowded curriculum in order for pupils to do more sport, or how we would fund an extension to the day. One has to be responsible about that. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) would have shouted, "Hear, hear," to much of what was said on the love of sport.

The hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) is making a name for himself by his intelligent contributions and special knowledge of public health. He stressed health inequalities, income inequalities and the role of sport outside schools in communities. Sport is for girls, too. They are capable of antisocial behaviour, and we must think outside the box. That is a terrible expression; I apologise to the hon. Member for Southend, West.

I have a moment to talk about the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill, which was introduced in the last Parliament. Many of us regret that a similar measure was not mentioned in the Queen's Speech this year, but the Bill is proceeding through the Lords as a private Member's Bill with the co-operation of the Government, or at least a lack of obstruction from them. My party is grateful for that, as our health spokesman in the Lords is promoting it. As the measures have been considered by the Commons already, will the Minister give the Bill fair wind if it reaches this House in much the same state in which it left it? It would reassure people if she were to say yes.

We must tackle not only health inequalities but income inequalities. Without redistribution of wealth, we will never tackle health inequalities, or we will give ourselves less of an armoury with which to do so. The Government—it is not a matter for the Minister—must think about the importance of ensuring adequate redistribution of wealth to get rid of income inequalities as part of the strategy to deal with health inequalities.

5.22 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire): I start, as did the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), by congratulating the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and his Committee on an excellent report. The investigation was thorough and extremely interesting. I would not have thought of Cuba as a health model for the United Kingdom, and I still would not do so completely. However, there are public health lessons to be learned from the concentration on sport, a theme that has been developed throughout our debate.

I have a little experience of running a youth football team in the inner city—it was down the Old Kent road—with the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford). Many of the young people involved benefited hugely. Such teams were not widely available to them, and some of them would no doubt have become involved—they had been—in acts in which they should not have been involved. They valued being part of the team, and it kept them out of trouble. Following that experience, and from reading the findings in the report, I agree that sport is important.

The hon. Member for Wakefield and other hon. Members have made the point that given the organisational changes that are taking place, we should not have what the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon described as fragmentation. The changes that primary care groups and primary trusts are going through present a challenge on public health. There are widely held concerns that the timetable for change is demanding and ambitious, and that it may not be possible to put in place what is needed to meet it. The Royal College of Nursing and the BMA have raised that issue. The reforms have the potential to improve public health in the longer term, and primary care trusts are a good basis on which to proceed. However, if we rush the changes and do not deal clearly with public health, it could fall between two stools, as it has in the past.

The National Primary Care Research and Development Centre and the King's Fund, with support from the Department of Health, are working on the national tracker survey. The survey's research suggests:

> "Primary Care Groups and Trusts have begun to make important contributions to modernising the NHS...Progress in commissioning, health improvement and partnership working is slower."

It also suggests that there is a lack of managerial capacity and information in those organisations. The survey's project director says that

> "there is a real danger the management of the organisational changes is going to divert attention from the core functions".

He says that the

> "process of learning and building on experience"

is important. He also notes that although many improvements can be made in the next two years, the worry is that general health improvement may take longer. Many others have expressed concern about the changes, and we should take the issue seriously.

One of the survey's conclusions on information technology, which is vital to implementing the changes, was:

> "Information to support core functions of PCG/Ts is inadequate and shows little sign of improving."

Although there has been some progress in formulating plans for information management and technology and in increasing connectivity, shortages of skilled staff and resources make it doubtful whether key national targets will be achieved.

The Committee recommended that the national public health work force development plan and the public health skills audit should examine the issue to assess whether primary care has the capacity to take on public health responsibilities. However, the plan is still not available, and the Government's response makes me wonder when it will be. Will the Minister tell us when it will be ready?

The Committee commented on the role of directors of public health. It said that the way in which the role was framed was too vague and that directors had too little influence. Many witnesses voiced support for a joint appointments system for the role of director of public health. Given that we have now lost coterminosity and that the Government response talks of the Office for Public Management looking into matters, what point have we reached as regards the role of directors of public health? What does it mean when we are told that a study will be done at this late stage? Surely we should have an idea of whether there will joint appointments, how they will work and how the problem of coterminosity will be solved.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) said that school nurses played an important role in public health. The hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) picked up on that when he spoke about the role of health visitors. It is vital to bear in mind that there are groups of experienced professionals who have been doing the job and providing a valuable service. We should not allow that body of experience and knowledge, which has been built up over years, to be lost. We should give those jobs the sort of status and importance in the system that they really deserve.

I was very taken with the Penwerris example from Cornwall. Health visitors Hazel Stuteley and Phil Trenoweth set up the project and developed all the ideas, which were not just about medical matters. In that, they differed from the Secretary of State, who was criticised by the Committee for constantly resorting to medical interventions. They came up with the idea that if the houses were insulated, people would be warmer. They came up with ideas to deal with a range of public health issues in their community. That seems to be a fine example of what can be achieved, so let us give health visitors the credit that they deserve.

On the question of children today being lazy, we have a duty to give them the opportunity to exercise. It is not simply a matter of sport. We live in a society where parents—I am a parent and feel this way—do not want their children to go to school on their own. However, ideas such as the walking bus, where the children in a community walk to school together, with one of the parents keeping an eye on things and ensuring that the children are safe, should be built on. However, we should ensure that we do not make the mistake that they made in Australia where, when a scheme for cycle safety was started and children were encouraged to cycle to school, the number of accidents on the roads increased. Things must be done sensibly, but such initiatives have much to recommend them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) mentioned alternative therapies. Although he always raises that point, and it is tempting to be amused that he managed to raise it again, it is not a laughing matter. His points are very serious and it is a cause for concern that, since fundholding ended, there has been a reduction in the number of therapists, counsellors and others in what could be loosely described as the alternative field attached to GP surgeries. In the mental health field, about which I know a lot, users value such services tremendously and find them useful. The Opposition's view is that if an alternative therapy can be shown to work, it should be made available.

I was going to speak at much greater length, and I shall not be able to pick up on every contribution to the debate. However, I would like to comment on the Government's record. I do not want to be partisan, but the record shows that the Government have concentrated on issues other than public health, and that is damaging.

5.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I will do my best to deal with as many points as I can. I would like to begin by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) for his Committee's report, which is one of the most powerful reports of its type that I have read for a long time. It is wide-ranging, thoughtful, covers a huge range of issues in depth and gives the Government excellent food for thought. The report was matched by an equally powerful speech from my hon. Friend. His speech was complemented by all the contributions made today.

I am a little disappointed that there are no other women Members in the Chamber. Nevertheless, all the contributions have been excellent and I have learned a great deal about events in Members' constituencies, as well as about wider public health issues. I will want to consider further many of the issues raised.

In opening the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield made a powerful point, illustrated by the recent confidential report on maternal deaths. The figures in that report were shocking, showing that women from the poorest backgrounds were 20 times as likely to die as women from better-off backgrounds. That sums up the whole tone of the debate. These are not just issues for discussion; they are real issues that devastate people's lives.

For far too long, public health has been talked about as an academic practice. The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) talked about the study of epidemiology. That is a narrow definition of public

[Ms Hazel Blears]

health compared with what public health should mean to us. The Select Committee report and our discussions today emphasise the need to translate that knowledge and theory into practical action that makes a difference in communities. Perhaps we have reached a point in the development of public health when academic study can be translated into programmes that can be measured, so that we can measure performance and assess outcomes.

In its evidence to the Select Committee, the RCN said:

> "It is important to recognise that in some senses, public health is everybody's business".

That is a telling phrase because it implies that public health has an impact across the piece, whether it is on people's lives, business, urban regeneration, crime and disorder, sport and obesity; all the issues that have been mentioned today. Public health is one of the most wide-ranging issues that we have to consider.

Several hon. Members raised the issue of the link between poverty and ill health. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) talked about the link between income inequality and ill health. For many years, making the links was taboo, but I am delighted that we now recognise the connection. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has introduced many measures to eradicate child poverty—the working families tax credit, the national minimum wage, neighbourhood renewal, sure start programmes, massive investment in education, the new deal for communities and the fuel poverty strategy. Those are overarching methods of attacking underlying poverty and massive steps forward in improving people's health. For far too long, the issue of public health has been confined to the medical model followed by clinicians, doctors and nurses and other therapists. Valuable though that is, there are clearly bigger issues such as poverty that have a huge impact on people's health.

I believe that the report was designed to test whether the Government's action matched up to their rhetoric, following the Secretary of State's remark that it was time for public health to come out of the ghetto. Despite some of the issues that have been raised today, we have made significant progress in ensuring that public health is pushed up the agenda. I welcome the Select Committee's efforts in ensuring that it remains in the forefront of the Government's mind.

Many proposals that shift the balance of power and restructure the health service are designed to put patients and the public at the centre of the service. Several hon. Members raised issues relating to the new structure, because the report was completed before the proposals were made to shift the balance of power. People are rightly anxious to see that the public health function is carried out at local, regional, strategic and national level, and perhaps I can offer some reassurance on that point.

First, there will be a strong public health team in every primary care trust. It will engage with local communities and, crucially, with local government, which is responsible for many of the wider determinants of public health, whether that is a decent education, safe streets or warm and safe homes. The links between the primary care trusts and the local strategic partnership are key. In addition, we want to widen the primary care trust function to involve public health doctors and to bring in a wider range of professionals with relevant skills. I understand that work is taking place on training and accrediting people who are not from a purely medical background.

That picks up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield that, in the early days of medical officers for health—when environmental health departments had certain responsibilities—not only a medical model was applied. People from a range of backgrounds brought their expertise to bear on making progress. We will also ensure that there is a public health doctor with strategic management experience in every strategic health authority because, in addition to people who can deliver to local communities, it is important to have people who can take a longer-term wider view and consider where we should be going in the next 10, 15 or 20 years with our public health programmes.

We also want to be sure that a regional director of public health and support team are linked with each of the regional government offices. The latter will be increasingly responsible for a wide range of regeneration programmes. They will have the unified regeneration budget, so keying in public health with the regeneration role will give them a better and stronger role.

Capacity will be a problem. We must be creative about the sort of networks that we set up because not every area of public health in every primary care trust will have its own expert. As in other areas, I would like primary care trusts to collaborate with each other and to develop areas of expertise that they can share with their neighbours. They will not then run the risk of skimming through everything and doing a superficial job; instead, they will develop some depth and expertise that can be shared with the community through managed networks.

That is the way forward not only for public health, but for other parts of the health service that have capacity problems and where we need more skilled people. We must involve people in different ways; perhaps technicians will do jobs that others might have done, and nurses will do things that doctors might have done. We can try to break down those skills barriers to achieve a better skills mix, which will enable people to do much more. I hope that the new structure will strengthen the public health function, not fragment and dilute it.

The report mentioned a number of area-based initiatives, including partnerships, health action zones and education action zones; it also mentioned the difficulties caused by initiative overload. The only initiative for health is the action zone initiative. The regional co-ordination unit of the Cabinet Office is reviewing all area-based initiatives to try to simplify them, so that we do not have so many and that they can concentrate on simpler outcomes.

I am delighted to say that HAZs are in the first tranche of that review, but they have contributed to some innovative ways of working. They have sometimes engaged communities when the traditional ways of the health service were not able to. Health action zones have sometimes been able to use innovative ways of drawing in people, particularly those in ethnic minorities, and making sure that they can participate.

We want to give HAZs space to keep their innovative edge and their "blue-skies" thinking, which we do not see enough of in the health service. We want to integrate them as far as we can into local strategic partnerships, so that they can influence not only local government but businesses, the voluntary sector and community groups. They will allow us to ensure that public health is at the heart of building healthy communities.

Mr. Heald: In her last two minutes, could the Minister say something about what will happen in terms of the huge rise in disease, including tuberculosis and sexually transmitted disease, and hospital infection?

Ms Blears: Obviously, all of those matters are of great concern. We have the sexual health strategy for sexually transmitted diseases, but it is not an easy thing to deal with. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon said that tackling health inequality and public health issues would be one of the most challenging things that the Government could do, but we have not shied away from it. We have tackled some of the issues head-on; we know that they are of concern to our communities and that we need to take action.

Hon. Members have raised a wide range of issues. The hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) expressed concern about school nurses and asked how they could be integrated into the system. We have a project to allow school nurses and health visitors to work together. We want to ensure that school nurses have a key role in the primary care trusts, because they are a valuable resource, as are health visitors. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) that health visitors are on the front line. They can often reach families that others cannot, and they have done a fabulous job in sure start by making certain that, at the beginning of their life, children have the prospects and advantages that other communities sometimes take for granted.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) mentioned some of the practical issues that he had come across locally. I am delighted that he wants to ensure that public health is not an academic study, but that it should encompass smoking cessation, alcohol and drugs misuse. I welcome his suggestion that Members of Parliament should be ambassadors for such messages, and we shall ensure that that happens.

The hon. Member for Wyre Forest mentioned the advice of the chief medical officer, who told us not to smoke, to drink moderately, to keep active, to use sunscreen, to manage stress and to learn to relax. That is excellent advice for Members of Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) raised two particular issues. One was anorexia, and I assure him that we take it extremely seriously. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon was concerned about the body image summit. We are not shying away from those issues and we shall continue to press them. My hon. Friend also mentioned alcohol misuse. We have pledged to bring a strategy forward by 2000, and we are on target to do that.

It being fifteen minutes to Six o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 3 December 2001

DEFENCE

Suez Campaign Medal

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has had in the last five years regarding the issue of a medal for those who saw active service in Egypt between 1951 and 1954. [18178]

Dr. Moonie: Within the last five years, the Ministry of Defence has received a number of representations from hon. Members and the general public on the subject of a retrospective campaign medal for service in the Canal Zone during the period 1951 to 1954. From available records it has been determined that the Ministry of Defence has received at least two parliamentary questions for oral response, 16 parliamentary questions for written response (including this one), 340 letters from MPs on behalf of constituents and recorded as ministerial correspondence, seven early-day motions, two Adjournment debates, nine letters to a Defence Minister from other than an MP, which were answered direct by him or on his behalf by his office and 300 letters from members of the public which were variously addressed to the Prime Minister, a Defence Minister, or to Her Majesty the Queen and were answered by an official on behalf of the Ministry of Defence. It should be noted that a number of MPs have written to the Ministry of Defence on this subject on more than one occasion and a small number of veterans have written many times.

Rotorcraft Procurement

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his plans for the support, amphibious and battlefield rotorcraft procurement. [18755]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on 8 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 378W.

Parliamentary Ombudsman

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many formal notices his Department has received in the last year from the Parliamentary Ombudsman expressing an intention to carry out an investigation; and in respect of each notice how long it took to respond. [18769]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* Information on the outcome of statutory investigations which were concluded during 2000–01 are set out in the Parliamentary Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2000–01, copies of which are available in the Library of the House, or on the Parliamentary Ombudsman's website at www.ombudsman.org.uk/pca/document/par01/index.htm

Between 1 April 2001 and 31 October 2001, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has received one new statutory statement of complaint from the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The MOD responded to this case within the time scale requested by the ombudsman. The time taken to respond was 24 working days.

A formal notice regarding a matter in the War Pensions Agency was sent to the then Department of Social Security in March 2001. Following transfer of responsibility for the War Pensions Agency, the MOD will be responsible for responding to any observations the ombudsman makes in his report.

Defence Aviation Repair Agency

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to introduce further measures to monitor DARA's ability to control the agency's progress in improving turnaround times. [19184]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 110W. There are currently no plans to introduce further measures to monitor DARA's performance.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many and what proportion of letters received by his Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days; [18586]

(2) how many letters his Department received from hon. and right hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. [18566]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence does not record centrally the total number of letters it receives. However, between 20 June and 20 July 2001, the Department received 478 pieces of correspondence from hon. and right hon. Members, Members of the European Parliament, Members of the devolved legislatures and Peers, which received substantive replies from Ministers as follows:

Number of working days	*Number of pieces of correspondence*	*Percentage replied to*
Within 15	426	89
Within 20	453	95
Within 30	460	96
Within 40	468	98
Over 40	10	2

Ministers also received 662 pieces of correspondence for answer from members of the public during this period.

Service Families Taskforce

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the work of the Services Families Taskforce. [19815]

Mr. Ingram: The Service Families Taskforce was set up in 1999 to deal with service family issues that were outside the control of the Ministry of Defence (MOD). It is headed by a Ministerial Group which last met on 15 November. I also meet with representatives of service families twice a year to discuss areas of concern. The

Service Families Taskforce has been involved in a wide range of issues since its conception. The main areas of progress over the last year are:

(a) The MOD is being consulted by the Department of Health in the drafting of new Adoption legislation to ensure that service families will not be disadvantaged.

(b) We have resolved the problems that some service families had encountered, as a result of the payment of local overseas allowance, in claiming working families tax credit on return to the UK from an overseas posting.

(c) We have resolved the problems that some service spouses had encountered, due to the interpretation of residency status, in claiming Child Support Agency payments when on an overseas posting.

(d) Discussions are taking place with the Department for Education and Skills, and with local education authorities, to see what measures can be taken to improve the schools admissions process for service families.

(e) Discussions are taking place with the NHS Waiting and Booking Team on the problems service families face when transferring between NHS trust areas.

(f) Discussions are taking place with the Department for Work and Pensions to identify any problems service families have faced in the claiming of benefits while on overseas postings.

(g) Since 1 April 2001 service spouses have been able to open Stakeholder pensions while on an overseas posting.

Cluster Bombs

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has been informed by his United States counterpart of the locations in which cluster bombs have been used by US armed forces in Afghanistan. [18506]

Mr. Ingram: We are aware of the targets struck by US cluster bombs in Afghanistan.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the US Defence Secretary over the use of cluster bombs. [18353]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* I speak to the US Defence Secretary regularly on a number of issues.

Gibraltar

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the closest operational NATO *(a)* air base and *(b)* port available to UK forces to Gibraltar is; and if he will make a statement. [17983]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* The closest Allied air base to Gibraltar that would be available to UK Gibraltar-based aircraft is Beja in Portugal. The closest Allied port available to UK Gibraltar-based forces is Lisbon, although Portimão, also in Portugal, could be used for smaller ships.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what additional operational restrictions are imposed on *(a)* Royal Navy and RFA Ships, *(b)* RAF Aircraft and *(c)* UK troop deployments (i) on visits to and (ii) returning from Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement. [17980]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* There are restrictions on the direct transit of Royal Navy and FRA ships from Gibraltar to a Spanish port or from a Spanish port to Gibraltar. RAF aircraft on visits to and from Gibraltar are not permitted to over-fly Spanish territory with Gibraltar as the destination or as the airport of departure. UK troops on duty are not allowed across the border from Gibraltar to Spain.

Depleted Uranium

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* armour piercing and *(b)* hard target penetrator warheads containing depleted uranium have been tested in Wales in each of the last 10 years. [17485]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* No depleted uranium rounds have been tested in Wales in each of the last 10 years.

War Pensions Agency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the recommendations of the War Pensions Agency's 1999 DMA study were implemented in 2000–01. [19120]

Dr. Moonie: Following the recommendations of the 1999 Decision Making Appeals Study the War Pensions Agency worked with ex-Service organisations and the Lord Chancellor's Department to improve war pension appeal legislation and processes, and within the Ministry of Defence to improve the process and time scale for delivery of service documentation.

Once these improvements were achieved, the recommendations from the study were piloted during 1999–2000 and fully implemented across the Agency during 2000–01.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the recommendations of the 1999 War Pensions Agency Prior Options Review relating to the regulations of the War Pensioners Welfare Service and the partnership opportunities associated with the management of Ilford Park Polish Home were implemented by 31 March. [19117]

Dr. Moonie: A review of the objectives of the War Pensioners Welfare Service was undertaken and a report on its findings was widely circulated to the ex-service community in February 2001 inviting comment. The review's recommendations on how welfare services can be developed have received widespread support. As at 28 November 2001, 16 recommendations have been fully implemented, the remainder will be implemented during 2001–02.

The potential for establishing a partnership with a suitable organisation to provide day-to-day management of Ilford Park Polish Home was reviewed and a report produced in July 2000. The report identified key issues to be addressed and the position is being kept under review.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the service performance standards published in the War Pensions Agency's Service First Charter were achieved in 2000–01. [19121]

Dr. Moonie: During 2000–01, the War Pensions Agency achieved all of the standards set out in their Service First Charter. All of the WPA's claims and appeals average clearance time targets were achieved.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the War Pensions Agency met its target to generate efficiency during 2000–01 to absorb the effect of pay and price pressures. [19119]

Dr. Moonie: During 2000–01, the War Pensions Agency delivered efficiencies necessary to absorb the effect of pay and price pressures. By adopting a sharply focused and integrated approach to human resources and expenditure management, the agency has been able to implement additional measures to enable operation within its running cost allocation.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many armed forces personnel have applied to the War Pensions Agency for a war pension; and if he will make a statement. [19771]

Dr. Moonie: A claim for war disablement pension may only be made after discharge from the armed forces. 10,799 claims were received by the War Pensions Agency during the year April 2000 to March 2001; 5,866 claims have been received in the period April 2001 to October 2001.

Unallocated Funds

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the total unallocated funds within his departmental expenditure limit *(a)* at the start of the financial year and *(b)* to date; and what was the month seven forecast on outturn underspend against his departmental expenditure limit in (i) real and (ii) percentage terms. [19439]

Mr. Hoon: The allocation of the Ministry of Defence's departmental expenditure limit at the start of the year is set out in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 2001–02 to 2003–04—Ministry of Defence" (Cm 5109). Revised allocations are reported to Parliament in Supplementary Estimates. Outturn against six month forecast for each request for resources will be published on 4 December in the winter Supplementary Estimates Summary Request for Supply as usual.

Benchmark Capabilities

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reassess the benchmark of capabilities set out in the Strategic Defence Review; what the timescale is for this re-assessment; and if he will make a statement. [19770]

Mr. Hoon: The Strategic Defence Review (SDR) left the armed forces well placed to participate in the campaign against international terrorism, but we need to look more closely at asymmetric threats of the kind that we saw on 11 September and ensure that we have the right concepts, forces and capabilities to deal with them.

I expect to be in a position to publish some conclusions from this work in the spring or early summer of next year.

Afghanistan

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the proposed supporting role of the Territorial Army in Afghanistan. [18639]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to theanswer I gave on 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 630–31W.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the decision process for determining which line infantry battalions should be put on increased alert for deployment in Afghanistan. [19586]

Mr. Hoon: The infantry battalions originally placed at a reduced notice to move for a possible deployment to Afghanistan were selected from those within the Joint Rapid Reaction Force and reflected their place in the operational and training cycle and their suitability for the possible operations envisaged.

Transferred Employees

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the number of cases that have occurred whereby workers have transferred from an external employer to his Department; and in particular where this has involved *(a)* dismissal and *(b)* re-employment. [19466]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Major Projects Report

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the capability shortfalls in the areas highlighted by the major projects report 2001, page 13, section 1.25; what steps are being taken to rectify the shortfalls; when he expects the shortfall to be overcome in each area; and if he will make a statement. [18930]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House following the hearing.

Personnel (Credit Ratings)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are being taken to ensure that service personnel are not *(a)* given a poor credit risk rating and *(b)* denied credit as an effect of their membership of the services; and if he will make a statement. [18929]

Mr. Ingram: The granting of credit to an individual is a decision for the credit companies to make. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has held talks with the British Banking Association, the Council of Mortgage Lenders and the Finance Leasing Authority which have assured us that their members do not deny credit to service personnel because of their membership of the armed forces; their credit worthiness is assessed in the same way as for their civilian counterparts. Although some companies will not lend to service personnel who are overseas, there are sufficient companies (including NAAFI) who will do so in order to provide the armed forces with adequate choice. While some service personnel may experience difficulties, I am not aware that obtaining credit represents a significant problem for the armed forces more widely. There is no intention, nor would it be appropriate, for the MOD to involve itself in the decisions taken by private companies on the credit worthiness of armed forces personnel.

Army Recruiters

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance he has given to the MOD on the employment of soldiers on regimental duty to act as recruiters. [20630]

Mr. Ingram: Only Senior Non-Commissioned Officers appointed to specialist recruiting roles and who have attended the Regular Recruiters Course, run by the Army School of Recruiting, are termed recruiters. While serving with the Recruiting Group of the Army Training and Recruiting Agency they are not serving at Regimental Duty. Officers and Warrant Officers serving at Regimental Duty and who will conduct duties in support of recruiting operations as Team Leaders, undertake specific courses in support of their duties. Others who will serve as members of recruiting teams are given a one-day briefing prior to their deployment. Soldiers involved in the Satisfied Soldier Scheme are briefed by recruiting staff at the local Careers Office where they are deployed.

Honorary Medals

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost of issuing the Queen's Golden Jubilee medal to holders of the George cross and Victoria cross; and if he will make a statement. [19840]

Dr. Moonie: It is estimated that the cost to the Ministry of Defence of issuing the Golden Jubilee medal to holders of the Victoria cross and George cross would be in the order of £1,000.00.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the convention under which holders of VC and GC decorations are awarded honorary medals. [19839]

Dr. Moonie: The United Kingdom honours system does not include the concept of honorary medals.

PRIME MINISTER

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how many letters he received from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July; [18575]

(2) how many and what proportion of letters received by him between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days. [18591]

The Prime Minister: The information is not available in the manner requested. Between 20 June and 20 July 2001 I received approximately 250 letters from Members of Parliament including invitations and requests concerning constituency matters which were dealt with as appropriate.

I receive about 500,000 items of post per year, and my office works hard to deal with them as efficiently as possible.

General Service Medals

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals to put forward its recommendations in respect of general service medals for those who served during the Suez canal emergency 1951–54. [20008]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) on 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1057W.

Intelligence Services Commissioner

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which the Intelligence Services Commissioner could uphold a complaint to the Investigatory Powers Tribunal; [18538]

(2) what mechanism exists to ensure that the operation of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 is *(a)* achieving its desired ends and *(b)* being used in a manner consistent with the safeguards contained in the Act. [18525]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 ensures that there is independent judicial oversight of the powers in the Act. The Act requires the Interception of Communications and Intelligence Services Commissioners to report annually to the Prime Minister on any matters relating to the carrying out of their functions. These reports, excluding, after consultation with the Commissioners, confidential material, are laid before Parliament. Similarly, the Police Act 1997 requires the Chief Surveillance Commissioner to make an annual report to the Prime Minister which is laid before Parliament.

The Act also requires the Secretary of State to issue codes of practice relating to the performance of the powers and duties under this Act and to which users of the powers must have regard.

The Investigatory Powers Tribunal investigates complaints in relation to any proceedings incompatible with rights conferred by the ECHR and which concern the use of investigatory powers under the Act. It also considers any complaint by a person who believes that he has been subject to any use of these investigatory powers. The tribunal would determine whether the complainant was subject to such powers and, if so, whether their use was in contravention of the provisions in the Act. The Intelligence Services Commissioner's role in this respect is to provide assistance but only as required by the tribunal.

Cuba

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had with the US President on the US blockade of Cuba. [20246]

The Prime Minister: I have not recently discussed the US blockade of Cuba with the US President.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Internet Access (Clergy)

38. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will increase stipends to take account of the additional costs to the clergy of going on-line. [17022]

Mr. Bell: Any additional costs relating to the use of computer and e-mail equipment in the course of clergy duties should be reimbursed through expenses.

Child Care

39. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what resources have been provided to assist the development of child care provision in communities in the past 12 months. [17023]

Mr. Bell: None. The Commissioners' primary legal responsibility is the financial support of the parish ministry of the Church of England.

Vandalism

40. **David Taylor:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what recent discussions he has had with Church leaders in relation to the vulnerability of churches to vandalism. [17024]

Mr. Bell: I have had no discussions with Church leaders on this matter as it lies outside the Church Commissioners' and my own area of responsibility.

In the Church of England, the responsibility for the security of churches and churchyards lies with the individual parish authorities, although the care of individual monuments in churchyards is generally a matter for the family concerned. Advice is available from church insurers, Diocesan Advisory Committees for the Care of Churches and, nationally, from the Council for the Care of Churches. The National Churchwatch scheme also offers seminars on security in churches and the personal safety of those using them.

The view of both the Church authorities and insurers is that the best safeguard for a church against theft and vandalism is for it to be kept open and in regular use. However, the duty to care for and protect our churches should not solely concern the church authorities but the whole community. Realistic prevention lies in good citizenship not taller walls.

Poverty

41. **Mr. Drew:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement on levels of poverty among clergy with particular reference to those clergy who are *(a)* retired and *(b)* about to retire. [17025]

Mr. Bell: Clergy in office are provided with a house and paid a stipend. On retirement, a full service pension from the Church for 37 years' service amounts to two thirds of the National Minimum Stipend and a lump sum of three times the pension. Clergy are responsible for their own housing in retirement but are given assistance through a retirement housing scheme. Clergy also receive a state pension.

The Clergy Stipends Review Group has recently published a report "Generosity and Sacrifice", which looked at the issue of stipends and pensions. The Group noted that if stipends levels are no better than adequate, the current quantum of pension is not over generous in relation to stipends or in absolute terms. It felt, however, that a number of details of the provision of the pension and stipend scheme were in need of reconsideration. The General Synod at its November sessions agreed that the report should be sent to dioceses for consultation. The responses to that consultation are likely to be considered by General Synod at the end of next year.

Church Repairs (VAT)

42. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor on the reduction of VAT on church repairs. [17026]

Mr. Bell: I have not discussed the matter further with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor recently because we are waiting for the imminent announcement by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport of the details of the VAT reimbursement scheme and how it will operate. The Church has a number of concerns about the funding of the scheme which have yet to be clarified and we will be studying the details of the scheme very closely once these are published.

Ms Walley: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what guidance has been issued in respect of value added tax concessions and listed church buildings. [18455]

Mr. Bell: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport will, I understand, shortly announce the details of the Listed Places of Worship Grants Scheme. The Church of England and other faith groups represented by the Churches Main Committee look forward to the implementation of the Scheme and will want to study the criteria and other aspects of the Scheme following publication.

Bishop of Chichester (Palace)

Norman Baker: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, how much is being spent on the refurbishment of the Bishop of Chichester's palace; for what reason rooms hitherto publicly accessible in the palace are being converted into private rooms; and if he will make a statement. [18368]

Mr. Bell: The refurbishment is in fact on-going works, which are partly alterations and partly maintenance and redecoration.

The alterations are due to the need to improve the office accommodation. This has been re-located from the first floor to a more accessible site on the ground floor and there are consequential changes flowing from that move. The cost of these alterations is approximately £65,000.

It should be noted that Bishop Kemp's episcopacy lasted 27 years and was unusually long. This resulted in a large number of maintenance and redecoration items being deferred to this scheme of works. The total maintenance cost will be approximately £40,000 and this will cover general maintenance, decorations and safety related items such as upgrading the electrical installation.

VAT will be additional, although it will not apply to the alterations as the building is listed. The house is a Grade 1 listed building and the quality of work needs to reflect the special status of the building.

The question also refers to publicly accessible rooms. Bishop Kemp did not use the Tudor room and so it was used occasionally for external functions; for example, an art exhibition was held there once a year. The Tudor room is to resume its original function as the main room for receiving visitors but it will continue to be available to the public by appointment. It is envisaged that the room will also be available for seminars.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Euratom Treaty

Llew Smith: To ask the Solicitor-General what steps Her Majesty's Government intend to take in respect of the reply by the European Commission on 3 September to written question number E-1828/OIEN rejecting the judgment of the British court case, dated 29 March on whether the Euratom Treaty covered military nuclear activities. [17940]

Mr. Hoon: I have been asked to reply.

An Appeal Court hearing is due to take place shortly in respect of this case (Regina *v.* Environment Agency ex parte Marchiori). The Government note the Commission's views, but their position remains that the Euratom treaty does not apply to military activities.

WALES

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what fairly traded products, other than tea and coffee, have been purchased by his Department in each of the last five years; and what was their value. [17557]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department has very limited requirements for goods which are subject to fair trade schemes and since coming into existence on 1 July 1999 has not purchased any.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the value of fairly traded *(a)* tea and *(b)* coffee used in his Department in each of the last five years. [17556]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department has purchased no fairly traded tea or coffee. It has fewer than 50 staff and does not provide snack or canteen facilities.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many letters his Department received from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. [18571]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I received three letters from Members of Parliament in this period.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and what proportion of letters received by his Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days. [18595]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information is set out in the table:

Days	*Correspondence answered*
Under 15	10
16–19	0
20–29	3
30–39	1
40 or more	1

NORTHERN IRELAND

Plastic Baton Rounds

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the phase II report by the steering group appointed to lead the research programme aimed at finding an acceptable, effective and less potentially lethal alternative to the plastic baton round. [20400]

Jane Kennedy: After consultation with ministerial colleagues in the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence, I have today placed in the Library of the House a copy of the second report compiled by the steering group. The group was set up to take forward two recommendations in the Patten report.

This report concludes the second phase of a four-phase research programme. It is the most comprehensive analysis of the issues yet published. It reflects both the commitment and the urgency with which Government are progressing the programme aimed both at finding an acceptable, effective and less potentially lethal alternative to the plastic baton round and a broader range of public order equipment.

The report clearly sets out the priorities in this wide-ranging programme and the timetable for the next phase. It includes work seeking less lethal options as an alternative to the police use of firearms, and the Government are grateful to the Association of Chief Police Officers for its leading role in this area.

In publishing the report, I am inviting comments on it from interested parties. We shall work closely with the Northern Ireland Policing Board in taking the programme forward.

Murder Campaigns

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* ethnic and *(b)* religious murder campaigns have taken place in Northern Ireland since 1971. [11058]

Jane Kennedy: Paramilitaries from both communities in Northern Ireland do carry out acts of violence and intimidation not only against the other community but also against individuals and groups within their own community. Police investigations of such offences are often hampered when victims generally decline to make a formal complaint.

It is therefore important that members of communities, within which these attacks are taking place, notify the police if they have any relevant information. They may do so in strict confidence using the Crimestoppers line.

The Government regularly keep themselves apprised of these acts of paramilitary intimidation and support any measures taken by the police to bring these to an end. These on-going acts of intimidation are symptomatic of the situation prevailing within Northern Ireland.

The Government have a duty to protect the whole community from the threat of violence from whatever quarter and in whatever form. The Government utterly condemn any form of intimidation by groups on either side of the community.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Local Government Finance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the allocation of central Government funds to *(a)* Aylesbury Vale district council and *(b)* Buckinghamshire county council in each of the last four years. [14215]

Dr. Whitehead: Full details of all central Government allocations to county and district councils could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The principal kinds of funding that this Department has provided to Aylesbury Vale district council and Buckinghamshire county council between 1998–99 and 2001–02 are shown in the tables. These include grants and borrowing approvals for revenue and capital expenditure.

Aylesbury Vale district council

£

Nature of funding	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Revenue support grant (£ million)	3.075	2.802	2.468	3.058
Income from national non-domestic rates (£ million)	4.969	5.382	6.012	6.026
Housing investment programme (£ million)	889	1.033	2.968	[1]5.512
Management and maintenance allowance (housing revenue account subsidy)	[2,3]753.11	[2,3]765.08	[2,3]792.24	[2,3]796.44
Capital receipts initiative (£ million)	1.413	1.247	n/a	n/a
Cash incentive scheme (£ million)	0.1	0	n/a	n/a

[1] £0.995 million Housing Investment Programme and £4.517 million Major Repairs Allowance

[2] Management and Maintenance allowance allocations are a more reliable indicator than the amount of subsidy paid which is demand lead and fluctuates according to the number of dwellings in the HRA and the number of tenants entitled to housing benefit

[3] Per dwelling

Buckinghamshire county council

£ million

Nature of funding	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Revenue support grant	102.324	101.353	95.891	111.397
Income from national non-domestic rates	96.628	105.481	119.63	117.618
Rural bus challenge grant[1]	0.100	0.985	0	n/a
Rural bus subsidy grant[2]	0.265	0.561	0.489	0.716
Transport supplementary grant	1.954	1.381	0.066	7.5
Transport annual capital guidelines	1.954	1.381	0.216	0
Transport supplementary credit approval	0.946	1.615	6.029	13.035

[1] Rural Bus Challenge figures represent awards—actual spend profiles for the scheme: awarded funding may cover more than one year. 2001–02 awards will be announced shortly

[2] RBSG figures represent Grant totals actually paid to the authority. 2001–02 figure represents allocation

Channel Tunnel

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 17 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 97W, on the channel tunnel, whether the draft directives and guidance published on 13 July retain the specific goal to increase freight traffic by 80 per cent. [12976]

Mr. Jamieson: Yes.

London Underground

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many delays have been caused by signal failures on the Jubilee line since January; and what is the total length of time, in hours, lost as a result. [15571]

Mr. Jamieson: Detailed in-year operational information of this nature is a matter for London Underground and I understand that information is not collated in exactly the form requested. However, London Underground advise that, between 7 January and 13 October (the latest date for which figures have been collated), signal failures caused 75 delays of 15 minutes or more on the Jubilee line. The total initial delay resulting from these incidents was 51 hours.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 493W, on London Underground, for what reason the final assessment will be completed under Treasury Investment Appraisal guidelines; if it is his policy to ask Ernst and Young to conduct Monte Carlo simulations as an element of their robustness assessment; if the final agreement with Ernst and Young specified an end date of 17 December; and if he will make a statement. [19870]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground—a publicly owned company—is negotiating contracts to put in place the Government's plans for modernising the Tube. It is clearly appropriate for London Underground to evaluate these contracts in line with Treasury Investment Appraisal guidelines. The answer given to the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) on 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 493W, made clear the terms of reference for Ernst and Young's review of London Underground's value for money evaluation of the contracts for the Tube modernisation plans.

Aviation Industry

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to increase support for the airline industry; and if he will make a statement. [15666]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government have underwritten, on a temporary basis, third party war risk insurance for UK airlines and service providers to the aviation industry and are considering further support for UK airlines, consistent with European Commission guidelines.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to give financial aid to compensate *(a)* airlines and *(b)* airports for the four day period after 11 September when US airspace was closed. [18454]

Mr. Byers: The Government have underwritten, on a temporary basis, third party war risk insurance for UK airlines and service providers to the aviation industry and are considering whether further support should be made available within European Commission guidelines. The Commission guidelines permit financial aid to be made available only to airlines.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how much Government *(a)* expenditure and *(b)* investment there has been on (i) research for and (ii) building urban re-development projects associated with the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (A) in total and (B) in each year since the project was first proposed; [15743]

(2) how much Government *(a)* expenditure and *(b)* investment there has been on (i) research for and (ii) building the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (A) in total and (B) in each year since the project was first proposed; [15742]

(3) how much Government *(a)* expenditure and *(b)* investment there has been on (i) research for and (ii) building development projects associated with the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (A) in total and (B) in each year since the project was first proposed. [15744]

Mr. Jamieson: The following information is as much as can be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

Government expenditure on building the Channel Tunnel Rail Link:

Government expenditure associated with the Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Year	*£000*
Building	
1995–96	0
1996–97	0
1997–98	0
1998–99	0
1999–2000	0
2000–01	8,550
2001–02	[1]112,562
Total	121,112
Research	
1995–96	28
1996–97	10
1997–98	0
1998–99	128
1999–2000	554
2000–01	22
2001–02	[1]104
Total	846
Building development projects	
1996–2000	3,180
2000–01	14,680
2001–02	[1]19,947
Total	37,807

[1] To date

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many letters his Department received from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. [18559]

Dr. Whitehead: Information on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament received by Ministers, agency chief executives, Departments and agencies, and performance in handling them is published annually by the Cabinet Office. The most recent report, covering 2000, was announced by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office on 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 325W.

Between 20 June and 20 July, this Department received 839 letters from right hon. and hon. Members.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many and what proportion of letters received by his Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days. [18579]

Dr. Whitehead: The information is not available in the form requested. The information we have is as follows:

Ministerial letters[1]

	From MPs	*From others*
Number of cases	839	1,178
Answered within 15 days		
Number	696	1,001
Percentage	83	85

Ministerial letters[1]

	From MPs	*From others*
Answered within 20 days		
Number	751	1,079
Percentage	90	92
Answered within 25 days		
Number	784	1,118
Percentage	93	95

[1] 20 June to 20 July

Non-ministerial letters[1,2]

	Number	*Percentage*
Cases received	186,689	—
Answered within 15 days	178,661	96

[1] July to September

[2] This figure represents the total volume of non-ministerial correspondence received by the Department between 1 July and 30 September. The centre of the Department collects this data on a quarterly basis to monitor performance against our Service First target of replying to correspondence within 15 working days

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) when he will reply to the letter to him dated 20 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. James Hamlett; [20366]

(2) when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 20 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. James Hamlett. [16246]

Mr. Spellar: I replied to my right hon. Friend's letter on Thursday 29 November.

Rail Regulator

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) when he last met the Rail Regulator since 5 October; and if he will make a statement; [17115]

(2) when he last met the Rail Regulator. [18943]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State last met Tom Winsor on 5 October.

London-Norwich Rail Line

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what rail improvement projects are included in the Railtrack Network Management Statement on the London to Norwich line; and by when they will be completed. [18423]

Mr. Jamieson: The 2001 Network Management Statement includes the installation on this route of the Train Protection Warning System as part of the national programme. I understand that planned work on signal fitments is due to be completed by 31 March 2003.

Vehicle Design Standards

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take steps to limit vehicle performance by the introduction of mandatory design standards for vehicles. [18853]

Mr. Jamieson: There is already a requirement in Great Britain to limit the performance of the heavier goods and passenger vehicles by fitting top-speed limiters. This requirement applies to vehicles having a maximum gross weight exceeding 7.5 tonnes. The relevant legislation is contained in Regulations 36A and 36B of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986. The Government are currently arguing the United Kingdom's corner with our European partners on a European Commission proposal to extend the requirement for top-speed limiters to goods vehicles exceeding 3.5 tonnes in maximum gross weight, and to vehicles used for the carriage of passengers comprising more than eight seats in addition to the driver.

RenewCo

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what advice the ONS gave his Department on the treatment of RenewCo in the national accounts. [18773]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* The Office for National Statistics informed the Treasury that the RenewCo proposals would be classified as public sector borrowing.

Rent Restructuring

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what further plans he has to consult tenants regarding the introduction of rent restructuring from April 2002; and if he will make a statement. [19040]

Ms Keeble: A number of tenants organisations responded to the consultation on the Housing Green Paper last year, and to the consultation this year on proposals to change Housing Revenue Account subsidy to take account of rent restructuring. We are pressing ahead with rent restructuring from April 2002. We will monitor the impact and maintain a dialogue with all interested parties, including tenants groups, about the issues arising on the implementation of the policy as it develops. It would be for local authorities and registered social landlords to consult their tenants about the rents they propose to set from April 2002.

Best Value

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the relative success of best value performance indicators which depend on the measurement of *(a)* inputs, *(b)* outputs and *(c)* outcomes; [19275]

(2) which of the best value performance indicators *(a)* apply to the Council of the Isles of Scilly and *(b)* do not apply because of (i) its size, (ii) its geographical location and (iii) other reasons; [19372]

(3) which of the best value performance indicators measure *(a)* inputs, *(b)* outputs and *(c)* outcomes; [19274]

(4) what assessment he has made of the applicability of best value indicators to local authorities, with particular reference to size of authority. [19285]

Dr. Whitehead: The Best Value Performance Indicators have been designed to provide a rounded view of local government's performance. They reflect the resources devoted to the different services, the efficiency with which those resources are used, the quality of the services and service users' experience. They therefore include a mix of indicators which measure inputs, outputs and outcomes; the intention is to rely increasingly on outcome indicators whenever these can be clearly identified. The number of indicators against which an authority is required to report depends on the nature of an authority and the number of services it delivers. For 2001–02 unitary and metropolitan authorities are required to report performance on up to 123 indicators while for district councils the maximum number of indicators is 68. These will be reduced for 2002–03.

The Best Value Performance Indicators provide valuable information about the performance of individual authorities and enable local people to view the performance of their own authority alongside that of similar authorities. They will also track performance changes over time. Once best value performance plans are published in 2002 it will be possible to assess change over the two years that best value has been in place.

The Council of the Isles of Scilly is required to report on those services which it provides to local people. I understand that the Council has agreed to design a set of indicators appropriate to its circumstances, and will need to discuss these with the District Auditor.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what timetable he has set for implementing the results of his review of the operation of best value for local government. [19273]

Dr. Whitehead: The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions announced on 1 October a three month review of the best value regime for local authorities aimed at improving the quality of services. A review group, under the chairmanship of the Minister for Local Government and the Regions, has been set up to take this work forward. The review group has been asked to report to the Secretary of State by the end of this year. The Secretary of State will consider its report early in the new year and respond to its recommendations. The timetable for implementing any measures announced in his response will depend on their nature, but the intention is to act as quickly as possible ahead of the 2002–03 financial year.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the estimated cost in the latest available year of the best value regime to *(a)* central Government Departments, *(b)* local government, *(c)* fire authorities and *(d)* non-department public bodies and executive agencies. [19892]

Dr. Whitehead: *(a)* For the financial year 2001–02, £1,751,000 has been allocated for administrative costs associated with best value in central Government.

(b) £52 million has been allocated in 2001–02 by DTLR to cover the cost of best value audit and inspection in England. £21.7 million of this will be paid as grant to the Audit Commission and the remainder has been distributed through the Revenue Support Grant to cover the cost of audit fees charged to local authorities. No reliable estimates exist as to the other administrative costs incurred by authorities in complying with their duty under the Local Government Act 1999.

(c) Fire authorities precept from county councils and are thus included in the figures.

(d) The Audit Commission is the only NDPB with a formal role in best value. Their costs are met by DTLR as indicated.

Light Rail Schemes

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average cost is in *(a)* overall terms and *(b)* cost per mile of light rail schemes (i) under consideration by the Government and (ii) in development. [19347]

Ms Keeble: The capital costs of light rail lines will depend on a significant number of factors. These include land prices, whether the route is segregated or contains street running sections, the degree of double tracking along a section of route, whether there is a need for major works such as tunnels or bridges as well as the extent of wider impacts such as utility diversions. Cost figures will also include vehicles. An average cost figure per kilometre across all schemes is therefore not particularly meaningful. The table sets out a very crude calculation of the capital cost per kilometre of light rail schemes that are currently under development using the latest figures for the overall capital costs of the relevant scheme divided by the length of the route. The figures are given in cash terms.

£ million

Scheme	*Overall capital cost*	*Capital cost per km*
Sunderland Extension to Tyne and Wear Metro[1]	100	5.41
Nottingham Express Transit[2]	149	13.8
Manchester Metrolink phase 3[3]	513	8.9
Leeds Supertram: three lines[3]	484	17.3
South Hampshire Light Rail[3]	190	13.3
Merseytram	215	11.3
Stockport extension to Manchester Metrolink	61.5	7.24
Midland Metro extensions to Birmingham centre and Wednesbury to Brierly Hill	165	11.1
Bristol and South Glos. light rail	190	11.2

[1] Due to open March 2002

[2] Due to open in 2003

[3] Construction to start in 2003

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 498W, on light rail and tram schemes, which other schemes could open before 2006. [19132]

Ms Keeble: In view of the need to obtain powers under the Transport and Works Act, to carry out a tendering process and to construct the new lines, we do not currently expect lines other than those identified in my previous reply to be open by 2006

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average estimated length of time is from first submission of a proposal to the Department to completion of a new light rail project independent of an existing system. [19351]

Ms Keeble: Light rail systems typically take many years of planning and promoters are encouraged to discuss their ideas with the Department at an early stage. Accordingly, it is hard to identify precisely first submission of a proposal. The table shows the period between funding being approved and the opening of schemes in operation.

Scheme	*Year of firm funding approval*	*Year opened*
Croydon	1997	2000
Midland Metro	1995	1999
South Yorkshire Supertram	1990	1994–95
Manchester Metrolink line 1	1989	1992

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on Railtrack's cashflow position. [18937]

Mr. Jamieson: The cashflow of Railtrack plc is being managed by the administrator, to ensure the continued operations of the company, drawing down from the loan agreement that was put in place at the time of the administration, as necessary.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if Railtrack will be permitted to raise investment funding from any other source apart from the Government during the administration period. [18934]

Mr. Jamieson: Under paragraph 8.1.10 of the loan agreement, made available to the administrator, the administrator has the power to raise or borrow money.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what public subsidy to Railtrack in administration has been requested by the administrator for the period 7 October to the end of the 2001–02 financial year. [18953]

Mr. Jamieson: There is no public subsidy being provided to Railtrack in administration. Funding for Railtrack plc in administration is being provided through a commercial loan agreement, copies of which are in the House Library.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimates the Railtrack administrator has made of the final cost of completing the west coast main line modernisation. [19001]

Mr. Jamieson: A number of options for taking the project forward are currently under discussion. Until these discussions have been concluded, and final outputs agreed, an estimated cost of completion will not be known.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the most recent estimate by Railtrack of the total cost of the west coast main line modernisation prior to administration. [18954]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack's 2001 Network Management Statement, published in May, estimated the cost of the project at £6.3 billion.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what procedures the Government are putting in place to ensure that routine *(a)* track and *(b)* signal maintenance is carried on a scheduled basis during the period of administration. [19850]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for the administrator. The Government will continue to provide the administrator with sufficient funding to ensure the rail network operates on a "business as usual" basis during the administration period.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 496W, on Railtrack, what his Department's assessment of the value of the assets of Railtrack plc was as at 5 October. [19780]

Mr. Byers: The Department assessed the cash-flows that the assets would generate, and concluded that they would be insufficient to cover Railtrack's debt liability payments.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 277W, on Railtrack, what his Department's estimate of the cash needs of Railtrack plc in administration is in addition to the £3.5 billion already identified. [19910]

Mr. Byers: The cash needs of Railtrack plc in administration will depend on how long it remains in administration.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the credit rating of Railtrack bonds. [19425]

Mr. Spellar: Railtrack bonds currently have a long term credit rating of BB+ from Standard & Poor's and Baa1 from Moody's Investors Service.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 606W, on Railtrack, how many Railtrack shares were held by *(a)* individual and *(b)* institutional investors at flotation and in each subsequent year. [19841]

Mr. Jamieson: The number[1] of shares in Railtrack Group plc held by individual and institutional investors at flotation on 20 May 1996 and in each subsequent year—as detailed in the Annual Report and Accounts—is shown in the table.

Million

	Individual	*Institutional*
20 May 1996	290	210
24 April 1997	170	325
5 May 1998	150	355
30 April 1999	115	390
5 May 2000	90	420
1 May 2001	90	430

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5 million

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average Railtrack shareholding of individual investors was in each year since flotation. [19842]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not available to the Department.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in *(a)* cash and *(b)* percentage terms, what profit including dividends received a Railtrack investor would have made in selling a single share bought at flotation when its value was at (i) its highest, (ii) its lowest and (iii) its average level. [19496]

Mr. Jamieson: The gross returns on a single share bought at flotation for £3.80 and sold at the highest ever, lowest ever and average closing price of Railtrack shares are provided in the table.

Value of share at sale	*Sale price minus flotation price (£)*	*Dividends received before date of sale (£)*	*Gross cash return on flotation price (£)*	*Gross percentage return on flotation price*
Highest value on 23 November 1998 = £17.68	13.88	0.60	14.48	381
Lowest value on 20 September 2001 = £2.52	−1.28	1.40	0.12	3
Average value between 20 May 1996 and 5 October 2001 = £9.15	5.35	[1]1.13	6.48	171

[1] Shares were traded at the average daily share price several times, all falling in the 2000–01 financial year. Dividend payments therefore assume that the share was sold in 2000–01.

The returns do not take account of any tax liabilities or transaction charges paid by individual investors.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of Railtrack shares were held by institutional investors on *(a)* 1 May and *(b)* the first of each month up to 1 October. [19494]

Mr. Jamieson: The proportion of shares in Railtrack Group plc held by institutional investors on 1 May 2001—as detailed in the Annual Report and Accounts—was 83 per cent. Information on the proportion held on the first of each month up to 1 October is not available to the Department.

Airtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on the Airtrack proposal. [19337]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority is sponsoring a demand study to establish numbers of air passengers and domestic (non-airport) users who might use an Airtrack service. Work on this is well advanced, and in the new year we hope to take a view on the next stage of development of the Airtrack proposal.

We are proposing to issue a consultation paper on airport policy in general early in the new year, and this will include consideration of public transport access to airports.

Speeding

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he intends to publish revised guidance to highways authorities on speed policy. [19272]

Mr. Jamieson: The Transport Act 2000 committed the Government to consider the development of a rural road hierarchy for speed management purposes. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) on 28 November 2001, *Official Report,* columns 942–43W.

In addition, the first year report executive summary on the cost recovery system for traffic safety cameras was published on 13 August. Copies were placed in the Libraries of the House.

Local Authority Websites

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what action his Department recently has taken to promote good practice in the creation and development of local authority websites; [19061]

(2) what measures he has taken to ensure that local authority websites are accessible to those with a range of disabilities; and which organisations have been consulted. [19062]

Dr. Whitehead: We have made available £350 million of funding as part of our drive to ensure that all local authorities achieve 100 per cent. electronic service delivery capability by 2005. In 2001–02 this funding is being used to support 24 local authority pathfinders (with a further pathfinder being funded under the Invest to Save Budget) in a programme of innovation and shared learning. Many of the pathfinders are developing interactive websites, which other councils can then use as a model to create their own.

We are also in the process of developing guidance for local authorities on how they design their websites. This guidance will cover accessibility for people with disabilities, and we will consult widely when the draft document is published next year.

Energy Saving

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent measures he has taken to ensure that buildings insulation targets are met. [19106]

Dr. Whitehead: The Building (Amendment) Regulations 2001 were laid before Parliament on 11 October 2001, and come into force on 1 April 2002. Their supporting approved documents published on 31 October give guidance on the building insulation targets that are to be met. These significantly increase the building insulation standards that apply whenever building work is carried out.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the special advisers in his Department. [19344]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department's special advisers are:

Dan Corry

Michael Dugher

Jo Moore.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to spend the £920 million that was allocated to his Department for 2000–01 but not spent. [19527]

Dr. Whitehead: The 2000–01 underspend on the DETR Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit became available for use in following years in accordance with the end-year flexibility arrangements (the set of rules by which Departments are allowed to carry forward unspent budget from one year to the next). The entitlement generated from 2000–01 and previous years was announced in Table 6 of Public Expenditure 2000–2001 Provisional Outturn (Cm 5243). £516 million end-year flexibility take up is being sought in the Winter Supplementary Estimates for the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions; £93 million has been transferred to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (as part of machinery of government changes) and further take-up will be sought in the spring Supplementary Estimates. Any unused end-year flexibility will be carried forward into future years.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate the total unallocated funds within his departmental expenditure limit *(a)* at the start of the financial year and *(b)* to date; and what was the month seven forecast on outturn underspend against his departmental expenditure limit in (i) real and (ii) percentage terms. [19442]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions Departmental Annual Report for 2001 (Cm 5105) contains the Departmental Unallocated Provision (DUP) set for the present financial year in table A6a. Draw-down of the DUP has been reported to Parliament in the Winter Supplementary Estimates for the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions presented on 29 November. Outturn against six month forecast for each Request for Resources will be published in the Winter Supplementary Estimates Summary Request for Supply as usual.

Train Operating Companies

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the revenue lost *(a)* to each of the train operating companies and *(b)* in total in each of the last five years resulting from shortages of (i) booking office staff, (ii) ticket machines and (iii) on-board conductors to collect fares. [19554]

Mr. Jamieson: No such estimate has been made. This is a matter for the train operating companies.

Portable Buildings

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in relation to Statutory Instrument 2718 and the accompanying guidelines, what discussions his Department has had with all other Government Departments on the number of portable buildings they use which will have to be disposed of after five years; and what the estimated cost to public funds of disposing and replacing these units will be. [19878]

Ms Keeble: Statutory Instrument 2718 is The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Amendment) (England) Order 2001. This order amends the planning guidelines relating to telecommunications masts, and has no relevance to portable buildings. There have thus been no such discussions with other Government Departments, or estimates made, in relation to this Statutory Instrument.

However, the hon. Member did raise the issue of portable buildings in the debate in the Second Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation on 21 November 2001 which considered the Prayer against both Statutory Instrument 2718 and Statutory Instrument 3335, The Building (Amendment) Regulations 2001. The Approved Document to Part L2 of the Building Regulations, which Statutory Instrument 3335 amended, gives guidance on how portable buildings may meet the requirements of Part L2 of the Regulations under the heading "Buildings constructed from sub-assemblies".

There is nothing in the guidance in the Approved Document that indicates that portable buildings will have to be disposed of after five years. It indicates that there are no restrictions at all on portable buildings that are moved from one place to another on the same site. With regard to buildings moved from one site to another the guidance is that a building constructed from external fabric sub-assemblies obtained from other premises or from a stock manufactured before 31 December 2001, would normally be considered to meet the requirement if the fabric thermal resistance or the prospective annual energy use will be no worse than the relevant performance standards given in the 1995 edition of Approved Document L.

It would thus have been inappropriate to have discussions, in relation to this Statutory Instrument and its supporting Approved Documents, with other Government Departments on the number of portable buildings they use which will have to be disposed of after five years, and what the estimated cost to public funds of disposing and replacing these units will be.

Bus Safety

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what criteria determine the number of passengers permitted to stand on a scheduled bus; and how many people standing are permitted on an *(a)* 48 seater and *(b)* 53 seater bus. [19754]

Mr. Jamieson: Every public service vehicle must have a Certificate of Initial Fitness on which is specified the maximum number of seated and standing passengers.

The Public Service Vehicles (Carrying Capacity) Regulations 1984 prohibit the carriage of any standing passengers on:

(a) a vehicle with a seating capacity of less than 13 passengers;

(b) a vehicle with a gangway any part of the height of which is less than 1.77 metre;

(c) a half decked vehicle.

Where a vehicle is permitted to carry standing passengers the criteria used to establish the number is as follows: the total number of standing passengers carried on a single deck vehicle or the lower deck of a double-decked vehicle shall not exceed the number obtained by dividing by 1,900 the total floor area of that deck (in square centimetres) available to standing passengers. The floor area for calculation shall not include:

(a) any space occupied by a seat or within 225mm of the front of a seat required for the accommodation of seated passengers;

(b) any area which is within 225mm of the top of a step;

(c) any step and any space within 225mm of an entrance or exit other than a Secondary Emergency Exit or an exit required by Regulation 21(11) of the Public Service Vehicles (Conditions of Fitness, Equipment, Use and Certification) Regulations 1981. The space being measured from the outside edge of the vehicle and having the same width as the opening;

(d) any space forward of a transverse plane that touches the rear of the driver's seat when it is located in its rearmost position;

(e) any space on the higher level of a split level floor which is within 225mm of the edge of any unprotected step in the change of levels;

(f) any space which does not have access to a gangway as specified in sub-paragraph (g);

(g) any part of a gangway which is not at least 450mm wide at all levels;

(h) any space in which it is not possible to inscribe a square having 355mm sides.

The number of standing and seated passengers is required to be marked on the vehicle but the operator can, if he so wishes, use a lower number than that established by the above procedure.

It is not possible to give a general answer to the cases of a 48 seat vehicle and 53 seat vehicle as the above criteria may be different for each design.

Illegal Meat Imports

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with other Government Departments on the *(a)* level of illegal meat imports to the UK and *(b)* effectiveness of port controls and enforcement measures, in respect of his own Department's responsibility in overseeing local authority ports and airports. [19546]

Mr. Jamieson: Local authority ownership of certain ports and airports does not result in any DTLR responsibility in relation to meat imports. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs leads the Government's work in this area. Officials from my Department take part in discussions with DEFRA as necessary.

Holiday Accommodation

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the total number of dwellings in each local authority in England and Wales in the last four years for which figures are available for which a business rate was payable in respect of their use as holiday accommodation. [19431]

Dr. Whitehead: The number of premises in England which are subject to non-domestic rates and let as self-catering holiday homes in the last four years is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1998–99	14,607
1999–2000	14,589
2000–01	15,145
2001–02	15,398

While most of these premises are homes, the figures do include accommodation units that are purpose built for holiday letting and could not be used as homes. It is not possible to segregate these two types of property. The figures do not include premises where it is not intended that the property is let as holiday accommodation for more than 140 days in a year as these are subject to council tax and not to non-domestic rates.

I will write separately to the hon. Member with equivalent figures for each local authority in England.

The rating of holiday accommodation in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Council Tax

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what level of total council tax discount was made in each local authority in England and Wales for the last five years for which figures are available in respect of *(a)* furnished second residences privately owned for recreational investment or other private purposes, *(b)* all categories of privately owned empty properties, whether furnished or substantially unfurnished, *(c)* properties available to the armed forces or visiting forces accommodation, *(d)* halls of residence and *(e)* other categories subject to a 50 per cent. discount; and what was the total amount. [19432]

Dr. Whitehead: The information is not available in the breakdown requested, and reliable estimates are not available for individual local authorities.

The council tax bill for a dwelling that is no-one's main home, or where all the occupants are disregarded for council tax purposes is currently reduced by 50 per cent. in each local authority in England. In 2001–02 in England 588,942 properties were entitled to a 50 per cent. discount, at a total estimated cost of £220 million. Of this total, it is estimated that £80 million relates to second homes, £125 million relates to empty homes and £15 million relates to dwellings where all the occupants are disregarded.

In addition, the following classes of dwellings prescribed in legislation are exempt from council tax:

Class A

Exemption for: Empty and substantially unfurnished dwellings where works are required, under way or recently completed (valid for up to 12 months)

Class B

Exemption for: Empty dwellings owned by charities

Class C

Exemption for: Dwellings left empty and substantially unfurnished (valid for up to 6 months)

Class D

Exemption for: Dwellings left empty by prisoners

Class E

Exemption for: Dwellings left empty by patients in hospitals and care homes

Class F

Exemption for: Dwellings left empty by deceased persons

Class G

Exemption for: Dwellings where occupation is prohibited by public law

Class H

Exemption for: Empty clergy dwellings

Class I

Exemption for: Dwellings left empty by people receiving care

Class J

Exemption for: Dwellings left empty by people providing care

Class K

Exemption for: Dwellings left empty by students

Class L

Exemption for: Repossessed dwellings

Class M

Exemption for: Halls of residence

Class N

Exemption for: Dwellings occupied only by students or school leavers

Class O

Exemption for: Armed forces' accommodation

Class P

Exemption for: Visiting forces' accommodation

Class Q

Exemption for: Dwellings left empty by bankrupts

Class R

Exemption for: Empty caravan pitches and boat moorings

Class S

Exemption for: Dwellings occupied by minors only

Class T

Exemption for: Empty annexes which cannot be let separately

Class U

Exemption for: Dwellings occupied only by persons who are severely mentally impaired

Class W

Exemption for: Annexes occupied by dependent relatives.

In 2001–02, 646,128 properties in England were exempt from paying council tax at a total estimated cost of £480 million. Of this total, we estimate that £50 million relates to accommodation for armed forces or visiting forces, and £15 million relates to halls of residence.

"Council Tax: A consultation paper on proposed changes for second homes and long term empty homes" was published by DTLR on 23 November 2001. This paper invites views on a range of proposed changes to council tax discounts and exemptions in England, and includes questions on how best to define second homes and long-term empty homes.

Operation of the council tax system in Wales is a devolved matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the anticipated average percentage change in Band D council tax in England in 2002–03. [19889]

Dr. Whitehead: Decisions on council tax are for local authorities to take, after consulting with their local electorate and taxpayers.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the likely use of his reserve powers to regulate council tax set by English local authorities in 2002–03. [19890]

Dr. Whitehead: Decisions on council tax are for local authorities to take, after consulting with their local electorate and taxpayers. This Government do not operate a system of crude and universal pre-announced capping.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which the Government would use their reserve powers to regulate the Greater London Authority council tax precept. [19891]

Dr. Whitehead: Decisions on the GLA council tax precept are for the GLA to take, after consulting with their local electorate and taxpayers. This Government do not operate a system of crude and universal pre-announced capping.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what impact the heightened state of alert against terrorism will have on the level of council tax in English local authorities in the context of increased civil defence and emergency planning expenditure; and if he will make a statement. [19596]

Dr. Whitehead: Decisions on council tax levels are a matter for local authorities after consulting with their local electorate and taxpayers. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer last week made available an additional £30 million towards the extra security pressures on police authorities in England and Wales for 2001–02.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action the Government are taking in respect of the charging of council tax on empty homes. [19603]

Dr. Whitehead: "Council Tax: A consultation paper on proposed changes for second homes and long term empty homes" was published by DTLR on Friday 23 November.

Copies of this consultation paper have been placed in the House of Commons Library and can be found at www.local.dtlr.gov.uk/finance/ctax/2homes

Right to Buy

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will curtail the right to buy in areas covered by urban regeneration initiatives. [19719]

Ms Keeble: No. As we said last year in our Housing Green Paper "Quality and Choice: a decent home for all", we do not intend to make any further significant changes to the right to buy scheme.

Road Schemes

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the road schemes costing more than £5 million initiated in England and Wales since 1997 which are complete. [19755]

Mr. Jamieson: The following information covers England only. The provision of road schemes within Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

The following road schemes in England costing more than £5 million have been completed as a result of decisions made since 1997 to begin construction on them:

Trunk Roads

A1 Tempsford Junction Improvements

A50 Derby Southern Bypass (Contract B)

M60 Denton-Middleton Contract 3

Local Roads

A6002/A6007 Coventry Lane Imp.

Seaham Town Centre Link

Bridgwater Northern Distributor Road.

Further trunk and local roads are currently under construction and will be opening over the course of the next two years and many more will follow as schemes accepted as part of local transport settlements or which have been added to the Government's targeted programme of improvements complete their statutory procedures.

A41

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the Highways Agency's plans to cut back vegetation obscuring vision at the A41 roundabout at High Street and Stocklake, Aylesbury; [19706]

(2) when he expects the Highways Agency to replace missing signposts at the *(a)* A41 Henley roundabout at the left turn into Haydon Road and Weedon Road, Aylesbury, and *(b)* A41 High Street, Aylesbury, by Vale Park. [19705]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member about these operational issues affecting the A41 trunk road.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. David Lidington, dated 3 December 2001:

The Transport Minister, David Jamieson, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the A41 in Aylesbury.

The signs situated at the left turn into Haydon Road and Weedon Road at the Henley Roundabout, Aylesbury and the High Street, Aylesbury, by Vale Park were subject to vandalism and in one case accidental collision. I am pleased to inform you that replacement signs are currently being manufactured and will be erected by mid December.

Work to cut back vegetation on roundabouts is undertaken as a matter of routine during the winter pruning maintenance period between now and March. Where there is a particular safety concern immediate action is taken. The roundabout on the A41 at High Street and Stocklake, Aylesbury was not considered to be a cause for concern in terms of safety. However, the roundabout has been inspected again and there is now ivy growing over a directional sign, which will be removed as a matter of urgency.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Fire Authorities (Radio Systems)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what advice his Department issues to fire authorities on the need to ensure interoperability of radio systems with other emergency services. [19704]

Dr. Whitehead: There is existing Home Office guidance on inter-agency communications at the scene of operational incidents.

The fire service in England and Wales is currently procuring replacement wide area radio systems. The agreed operational requirement is that replacement systems must support effective inter-working between neighbouring fire brigades and must also provide an effective and continuing interface with the police and with the emergency ambulance service.

Roads (SSAs)

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the changes made to the *(a)* measurements and *(b)* methodology used for determining the length of roads as used for the purposes of standard spending assessments for local authorities since 1997. [19547]

Dr. Whitehead: In calculating Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs) for 1996–97 to 2001–02 the lengths of roads used have been estimated from local authority returns, to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR). Over this period DTLR (or its predecessor Departments) has made no change to the method of determining the lengths of minor roads. The Department does not hold central information on whether individual authorities have changed the basis they use for recording these lengths. Starting with the calculation of 2001–02 SSAs DTLR's Transport Statistics Roads Division (TSR) have used Geographical Information System (GIS) data to make comparisons between data from local authorities and their own major road network data, ironing out differences between the two, such as the elimination of the double-counting of dual carriageways by some authorities. This exercise has now been completed in time for the 2002–03 SSAs and the major road length estimates for this settlement are based on these data. No announcement has yet been made regarding the basis for minor road lengths to be used in 2002–03 SSAs. This will form part of the forthcoming consultation announcement on the provisional local government finance settlement.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the total mileage of roads for each local authority used for the purposes of calculating standard spending assessments for each year since 1997 including the figures for 2001–02. [19548]

Dr. Whitehead: The total length of roads, in kilometres, comprising of principal and minor roads, used to calculate SSAs for each local authority for the years 1996–97 to 2002–02 has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Road Safety (Horses)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on road safety and horses; and whether he plans regulating changes on this subject. [20109]

Mr. Jamieson: We have no plans for regulations affecting the safety of horseriders. We are, however, concerned that road users should understand their vulnerability and give them due consideration on the road. We are considering publicity to increase public awareness of the need to be careful around horses.

Air Traffic

Sandra Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the downturn in transatlantic air traffic in the period between September 2001 and September 2002. [17668]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* UK and US airlines have reduced capacity on some transatlantic routes since 11 September. Scheduled UK and US carriers have filed proposals with my Department which indicate plans to operate 0.7 per cent. fewer frequencies in summer 2002 compared with 2001.

Radioactive Material

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many crashes occurred involving *(a)* road vehicles, *(b)* aircraft and *(c)* trains carrying radioactive material in the UK in each year from 1997 to date. [20169]

Mr. Jamieson: Information on accidents and incidents involving the transport of radioactive material in the UK is published annually. The reports covering events in each year have been placed in the House Library.

Rural White Paper

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W, on the rural White Paper, if the £239 million allocated for rural bus service improvements includes the £15 million in the parish transport fund. [20139]

Ms Keeble: The £239 million allocated for rural transport over the next three years includes the Countryside Agency's £15 million parish transport fund.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W, on the rural White Paper, which changes ensure the revised PPG13 will develop the role of market towns as hubs for jobs and services. [20144]

Ms Keeble: Our new planning policy guidance for transport (PPG13) sets out how local authorities in rural areas should plan for new development to be primarily sited at the most accessible locations in the local area. In remote locations, well away from large urban areas most development, including for jobs and services, should be located at local service centres. These centres will include market towns and are expected to be the focal points for services in the countryside. Local service centres should be designated in the development plans prepared by local authorities. These plans form the framework within which decisions on proposals for development are taken.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W, on the rural White Paper, if he will list *(a)* the organisations which received funds and *(b)* the amount that they received to fund improvements for rural bus services in 2001–02; and what proportion of the fund has been allocated to improve rural bus services in 2002–03. [20027]

Ms Keeble: Local authorities have received the following amounts in rural bus grant to date in 2001–02 through the rural bus subsidy grant and rural bus challenge schemes.

Local Authority	*Payments to date (£)*
Bath & NE Somerset	71,492
Bedfordshire	512,742
Blackburn with Darwen	19,933
Bracknell Forest	20,450
Bristol	5,410
Buckinghamshire	286,599
Cambridgeshire	706,378
Cheshire	313,006
Cornwall	623,684
Cumbria	1,196,144
Darlington	43,219
Derbyshire	364,752
Devon	990,684
Dorset	717,498
Durham	540,339
East Riding	619,349
East Sussex	966,752
Essex	1,440,828
Gloucestershire	698,377
Greater Manchester	67,585
Halton	6,479
Hampshire	1,320,239
Hartlepool	15,081
Herefordshire	508,519
Hertfordshire	484,304
Isle of Wight	81,351
Kent	851,887
Lancashire	780,725
Leicestershire	776,664
Lincolnshire	1,067,597
Medway	78,189
Merseyside	42,636
Middlesbrough	5,895
Milton Keynes	166,120
NE Lincolnshire	38,124
Norfolk	1,500,147
North Lincolnshire	344,434
North Somerset	57,838
North Yorkshire	1,213,967

Local Authority	*Payments to date (£)*
Northamptonshire	701,499
Northumberland	779,618
Nottinghamshire	652,363
Oxfordshire	828,512
Peterborough	73,518
Plymouth	4,983
Redcar & Cleveland	48,857
Rutland	54,657
Shropshire	801,616
Somerset	519,856
South Gloucestershire	171,095
South Yorkshire	608,689
Staffordshire	807,230
Stockton-on-Tees	29,280
Stoke-on-Trent	4,836
Suffolk	1,253,255
Surrey	949,883
Swindon	49,848
Telford and The Wrekin	67,518
Thurrock	116,499
Torbay	117,725
Tyne and Wear	693,737
Warrington	53,313
Warwickshire	668,483
West Berkshire	118,806
West Midlands	44,335
West Sussex	517,826
West Yorkshire	705,668
Wiltshire	1,160,774
Windsor & Maidenhead	45,214
Wokingham	69,216
Worcestershire	1,102,672
York	65,444
Total	33,442,284

A total of £68 million will be available for rural bus grants in 2002–03. Allocations of rural bus subsidy grant to local authorities for 2002–03 and the decisions on the 2001 rural bus challenge competition will be announced shortly.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W, on the rural White Paper, what the criteria are for mandatory 50 per cent. rate relief for non-agricultural enterprises on farms; and if he will make a statement. [20142]

Dr. Whitehead: Under the Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Act 2001, 50 per cent. mandatory rate relief is available to any rateable non-domestic property with a rateable value of no more than £6,000. This is provided that it consists wholly or mainly of land or buildings which were subject to the agricultural exemption from rates for at least 183 days during the one year period immediately preceding the date on which the rate relief scheme came into effect. The scheme came into effect in England on 15 August 2001. It has yet to be commenced in Wales, which is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales. The scheme will run for five years from commencement, when it will be reviewed and can be extended by Order. If the scheme is extended, each property will be eligible for relief up to five years from when it first received the relief.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W, on the rural White Paper, what changes have been made to ensure the revised PPG7 will develop farm diversification. [20148]

Ms Keeble: We revised our planning policies for the countryside (PPG7) to reflect the importance this Government attach to effective planning for sustainable farm diversification projects. Local planning authorities are expected to be supportive of well-conceived farm diversification schemes for business purposes that are consistent in their scale with their rural location.

PPG7 should be taken into account by local authorities in preparing their development plans which form the framework within which decisions on proposals for development are taken. The guidance may also be material to decisions on individual planning applications and appeals.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W, on the rural White Paper, how many new affordable homes in rural settlements were occupied in 2001–02. [20033]

Ms Keeble: Information is not available in the form requested.

New affordable homes in rural settlements in England with a population of 3,000 or less are funded by the Housing Corporation and local authorities or through the planning system without public subsidy.

From 1 April to 31 October 2001, 379 affordable homes in rural settlements were approved, and 270 were completed, under the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme. Local authorities approved 142 units and completed 82 units in the same period.

Flood Defence Levy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will base SSA in respect of the flood defence levy on actual payments requested in 2002–03. [19485]

Dr. Whitehead: An authority's SSA for flood defence is based on expenditure, including levies, from past years. This is subject to scaling back to match the agreed national SSA total for flood defence.

The Government have announced that although we review local government finance, we will not be making any changes to the SSA methodology until 2003–04. We will, however, be consulting soon on options arising from the separate DEFRA-led review of financial and administrative arrangements for flood defence, which may affect SSAs from that date.

Homelessness

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures there are to provide accommodation for elderly people who are homeless. [19359]

Ms Keeble: Under the homelessness legislation (Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996), local housing authorities must ensure that suitable accommodation becomes available for all applicants who are eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and who fall within a priority need group. The priority need groups include a person who is vulnerable as a result of old age or with whom such a person resides or might reasonably be expected to reside.

The Housing Corporation, through the approved development programme, currently funds registered social landlords to provide accommodation for elderly people who are homeless. A continued commitment to this client group is recognised in the Housing Corporation's National Investment Strategy for 2003–04.

Planning

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if consultation draft PPG25 will apply planning applications originally submitted before its introduction. [20509]

Ms Keeble: The draft of PPG25 ("Development and Flood Risk") was superseded by the final version when it was published in July 2001. All planning policy guidance notes are material considerations, to be taken into account by local authorities where relevant to their decisions on planning applications during the period they are in force.

Low-carbon Transport

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Government's proposed action to deliver a low-carbon transport system. [20744]

Mr. Jamieson: I have today, together with the Minister of State Department for Trade and Industry, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury and the Minister of State Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, published a draft Government strategy on "Powering Future Vehicles", for consultation. This draft strategy sets out how Government propose to lead, encourage and facilitate the shift to a low-carbon transport system. This marks the start of a consultation, which will last three months. In the spring the Government will publish a final Powering Future Vehicles strategy. I have placed copies of this document in the Library.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Sport (Rural Areas)

10. **Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the provision of opportunities for sporting activities in rural areas. [16993]

Mr. Caborn: The Government are fully committed to providing a wide range of opportunities for sporting activities in all areas of the country, including rural areas. A number of initiatives including School Sports Co-ordinators, Spaces for Sport and the Arts, and the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) PE and School Sport Programme, will help to improve provision in rural areas.

Digital Services (Wales)

16. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the regulation of digital services in Wales. [17000]

Dr. Howells: The Independent Television Commission are responsible for the regulation of all digital television services in Wales except for BBC licence funded services and S4C.

Digital Boxes

17. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make available digital set top boxes free of charge to *(a)* pensioners and *(b)* others on low incomes. [17001]

Dr. Howells: My Department has no plans to make available digital set top boxes free of charge. However, the Government are committed to ensuring that terrestrial analogue broadcasting signals are maintained until switching to digital is an affordable option for the vast majority of people. As a target indicator of affordability, 95 per cent. of consumers should have access to digital equipment.

Supporters Direct Scheme

18. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on funding available to sports clubs through the Supporters Direct scheme. [17002]

Mr. Caborn: Supporters Direct was established to assist groups of supporters wishing to get involved in the responsible running of football clubs. It provides legal and other advice, and limited financial help with administrative costs, to groups wishing to form club-based supporters' trusts.

Swimming Pool (Upminster)

19. **Angela Watkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the plans for a new swimming pool at Central park, Harold Hill, Upminster, sponsored by Sport England. [17003]

Mr. Caborn: Sport England provided a lottery grant of £4.2 million towards the costs of developing the new swimming facilities in Central park, Harold Hill, Upminster in December 1999 which included a six lane, 25m pool. The total project costs at the time of the award were estimated to be approximately £8.3 million.

Public Libraries

21. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the standard of public library provision. [17005]

Tessa Jowell: The Government have encouraged better planning, accountability and performance in public library services through the introduction of Annual Library Plans (ALPs) in 1998 and standards of service on 1 April this year. The authority's performance against the Library Standards will be monitored, by the Department, through ALPs. Additionally, to help libraries provide a better service, £170 million of lottery money is being made available to libraries through the People's Network programme to upgrade their ICT infrastructure, create innovative digital content and train library staff in the use of ICT.

New Millennium Experience Company

22. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement about the cost of running the New Millennium Experience Company since 1 January and its future plans. [17006]

Tessa Jowell: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has incurred wind-down costs of £8.81 million in the period 1 January to 31 October 2001. NMEC is engaged in a wide range of tasks necessary to prepare the company for solvent liquidation including closing out and finalising all aspects of the company's financial affairs. It is intended that a liquidator will be appointed around the end of this year.

Eden Centre (Cornwall)

23. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the performance of the Eden centre in Cornwall. [17007]

Tessa Jowell: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I will write to my hon. Friend in my capacity as Chair of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Gambling

24. **Mr. Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on gambling legislation. [17008]

Dr. Howells: We are now considering all the comments which we have received since July on the report of the independent Gambling Review Body. We shall announce our conclusions early next year.

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what *(a)* evidence and *(b)* advice the Gambling Review Body considered before including Recommendation 70 in its recent report. [19952]

Mr. Caborn: Annex B to the report of the Gambling Review Body summarises the information and evidence on which it based its recommendations.

Sports (Yorkshire and the Humber)

25. **Kali Mountford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her plans to develop grassroots sports in Yorkshire and the Humber. [17009]

Mr. Caborn: The Government are committed to the development of sport and increasing opportunities for participation throughout the country. The strategy for sport—A Sporting Future for All—and the Government's Plan for Sport set out an action plan on how we intend to achieve those objectives. Responsibility for developing grass roots sport at the regional level rests with a number of organisations including Sport England, local authorities, local education authorities, schools, sports governing bodies, sports clubs, volunteers, and in order to ensure the best use of resources it is essential that all these interests work in partnership.

In the Yorkshire Region Sport England and the Regional Sports Board are working closely together to produce a new strategic plan for sport in the region.

All of the programmes for providing better sports facilities and improving sports provision are being implemented in the Region including Lottery funding, where over £130 million has been committed to the region, the School Sport Co-ordinators programme and specialist sports colleges while the Spaces for Sport and Arts, NOF Round three and NOF Green Spaces programmes will all be injecting significant new resources into facilities which will be available to schools and the wider community.

For the future I have made it clear that I wish to see a strengthened regional structure for the delivery of sport in the regions which involves local decision making and strong partnerships with all the key local interests. I will be discussing these issues with the Sport England Council and its new Chief Executive when he is in post.

Sports Participation (Young People)

26. **Judy Mallaber:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action she is taking to encourage and assist participation in sports by young people. [17010]

Tessa Jowell: The Government have initiated a variety of programmes to encourage and assist participation in sports by young people—notably £120 million over four years to establish a network of 1,000 School Sport Co-ordinators in secondary schools across England and £581 million of lottery money in England, from the New Opportunities Fund 3rd round, to help build and refurbish school sport facilities across England.

31. **Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on how she encourages sport among young people in the community. [17015]

Mr. Caborn: The Government have set up and are running a number of programmes to encourage sports among young people in the community. The Space for Sports and Arts is a joint initiative between DCMS, DfEE, Sport England, Arts Council of England and the New Opportunities Fund which has allocated £130 million to 65 LEAs to develop new sports and arts facilities on primary school sites. These will be used by young people and will also be available for community use. £581 million New Opportunities Fund money will be invested in strengthening the foundation of sport across England by building and refurbishing PE and sports facilities in schools. These will be made available to the wider community. On 11 January 2001 the Government announced an investment of £7 million over two years to train up to 60,000 young people and adult volunteers for sport. The scheme, 'Leadership and Volunteering in Community Sport,' will foster leadership skills and self-confidence in young people and contribute significantly to their personal development and employability.

Regional Theatres

27. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action her Department is taking to support regional theatres *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in London. [17011]

Tessa Jowell: Theatre funding is a matter for the Arts Council of England and the Regional Arts Boards. The Arts Council has already announced significant additional funding for theatre in England from 2002–03 which will see the budget for theatre rise from its current level of £45 million to £70 million by the end of the current planning cycle (2003–04). The theatre budget for London will increase from £8,620,514 in 2000–01 to £14,574,655 in 2003–04, or by 69 per cent.

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what support her Department is giving to regional theatres in the east midlands. [20994]

Mr. Caborn: Funding for theatre remains a matter for the Arts Council of England and the Regional Arts Boards. In March this year, the Arts Council announced a significant increase in funding for theatre in 2002–03 and 2003–04, including a 62 per cent. increase for subsidised theatre throughout the east midlands by the end of the period.

Sports Facilities (Havering)

28. **Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her support for sports facilities in the London borough of Havering. [17012]

Mr. Caborn: It is the Government's aim to ensure maximum participation in sport from all members of all communities.

In order to improve sports facilities in the London borough of Havering, the Lottery Sports Fund has awarded grants totalling over £4.6 million to 11 projects with a total project cost of over £8.9 million.

Tourism (Balance of Trade)

29. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the balance of trade is on tourism. [17013]

Dr. Howells: The latest estimate of balance of payments deficit from tourism (seasonally adjusted figures) in the year to September 2001 is £13.7 billion. Earnings and overseas expenditure in the years to September 2000 and 2001 are summarised in the following table.

Balance of expenditure by overseas visitors to the UK and UK residents abroad

£ billion

	12 months ending:	
	September 2000	*September 2001*
Visitors to the UK	12.8	11.8
UK residents	23.8	25.5
Balance (deficit)	–11.0	–13.7

Source:
Derived from International Passenger Survey

BBC (Digital Services)

30. **Miss Begg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her recent decision on the BBC's new digital services. [17014]

Tessa Jowell: On 13 September, at the Royal Television Society Convention in Cambridge, I announced my decision on the BBC's proposals for new digital television and radio services.

I gave approval to the following new services:

two new television channels for children—one aimed at children aged six to 13, another for the under six-year-olds;

BBC4—a television service intended to create a forum for debate and aimed at anyone interested in culture, arts and ideas that will replace BBC Knowledge;

five new digital radio services aimed separately at a young specialist audience (Network X), an Asian audience (Asian Network), and sports lovers (Five Live Sports Plus) as well as an archive music channel (Network Y) and an archive voice channel (Network Z) plus an extension of the BBC World Service to the UK.

I have set strict conditions for each service covering commitments to high quality, interactivity and the use of home-grown talent and productions. I have also set general conditions including one which requires the BBC to draw up and publish a plan for promoting digital television and radio services by the end of 2001.

I assessed each of the proposals against the published DCMS guidelines for BBC public service approvals and invited comments from the broadcasting and communications industry, the Independent Television Commission, the Radio Authority and consumer groups. I concluded that each approved service is distinctive and that its likely impact on the market is proportionate to its public value.

I did not give approval to BBC3, a television service aimed at 16 to 34-year-olds, which was a proposed replacement for BBC Choice. I was not convinced that the proposals were truly distinctive in an already crowded market, and have invited the BBC to put forward fresh proposals.

I will be reviewing all the new services in 2004 as part of the review of the Charter and-Agreement and licence fee funding.

Football Association

32. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with the Football Association; and what matters were discussed. [17016]

Mr. Caborn: With my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I had a meeting with the chairman and chief executive of the Football Association on 25 September. We discussed a range of football issues.

Channel 5

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has for expanding the coverage of Channel 5 to all areas of Great Britain. [17004]

Dr. Howells: There are no such plans, because the provision of digital terrestrial television now has priority for the use of scarce spectrum. Channel 5 services are carried free-to-view on all digital platforms. The Government's aim is to make the main analogue channels universally available in digital across the UK, at least matching the existing analogue coverage of 99.4 per cent. of the population.

National Lottery

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what guidance she gives to Camelot on the designation of Lottery outlets; [19109]

(2) what representations she has received from retailers in each of the last five years with regard to the allocation of lottery outlets; and what appeals procedure exists for retailers who have been rejected as lottery providers. [19110]

Mr. Caborn: There have been a number of representations from retailers during this period about decisions by Camelot Group plc not to install a terminal on their premises. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has issued no guidance to Camelot on this matter. However, its licence from the National Lottery Commission requires Camelot to provide a terminal for each postcode district within which there are at least 2,000 residents, and to make available for public inspection its criteria for selecting and de-selecting retailers. It is for Camelot to exercise its commercial judgment in applying these criteria, and there is no separate appeals procedure.

Film Industry

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the films which were made in the UK; and how many shot footage in the Teesside region in the last five years. [19069]

Mr. Caborn: The British Film Institute's Film and Television Handbook lists the films produced in the UK in a number of different categories, some of which were only partly shot in the UK. The lists have been copied for the last five years and I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Northern Screen Commission advises that the following films contain footage filmed in the Teesside region:

Elizabeth: 1997

Shopping: 1997

Like Father: 1998

Billy Elliott: 1999.

Harry Potter and the Philospher's Stone: 2000

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will estimate the total unallocated funds within her departmental expenditure limit *(a)* at the start of the financial year and *(b)* to date; and what was the month seven forecast on outturn underspend against her departmental expenditure limit in (i) real and (ii) percentage terms. [19437]

Mr. Caborn: The Department's Unallocated Provision (DUP) for the present financial year is set out in the detailed allocations table on page 223 of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport Annual Report for 2000–01 (Cm 5114). There has been no draw-down of the Department's DUP to date. Outturn against the six month forecast for each Request for Resources will be published in the Winter Supplementary Estimates Summary Request for Supply as usual.

Derek Casey

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how the amount paid to Sport England's former chief executive, Derek Casey, upon the termination of his contract, was determined; what the amount was; what conditions were placed upon the payment; what form the payment took; for what reasons the amount was not disclosed earlier; what part *(a)* her Department and *(b)* Sport England played in arriving at the amount and nature of the payment; and if she will make a statement. [19518]

Mr. Caborn: Full details of the severance package for the former Chief Executive of Sport England and of the process by which it was agreed will be included in the Sport England accounts which will be laid before the House as soon as possible.

Sports Action Zone (West Cumbria)

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what projects the Sports Action Zone in West Cumbria has initiated in *(a)* Allerdale, *(b)* Barrow and *(c)* Copeland; what sum of money is involved in each case in each borough; and if she will make a statement. [18966]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* Details of projects initiated by the West Cumbria Sports Action Zone are as follows:

£

Local authority	*Project*	*Sport England funding*	*Other agencies funding*	*Total*
Barrow	School holiday provision	4,000	—	4,000
Barrow	Disability sports development worker	93,215	—	93,215
Barrow	Active living for all men's worker	49,386	52,500	101,886
Barrow	Active living for all women's worker	13,489	67,500	80,989
Barrow	Active living all for older people's worker	35,986	45,000	80,986
Total		196,076	165,000	361,076
Copeland	Health communities worker	7,500	77,629	85,129

£

Local authority	*Project*	*Sport England funding*	*Other agencies funding*	*Total*
Total		7,500	77,629	85,129
Allerdale/Copeland	Sport for health manager	30,000	40,000	70,000
Total		30,000	40,000	70,000
Overall total		233,576	282,629	516,205

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the Needs Assessment and Action Plan for the West Cumbria Sports Action Zone will be published; and if she will make a statement. [18965]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* The Needs Assessment and Action Plan for the West Cumbria Sports Action Zone will be published in mid-December.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many and what proportion of letters received by her Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days; [18593]

(2) how many letters her Department received from hon. and right hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. [18573]

Mr. Caborn: Information on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament received by Departments and agencies and performance in handling them is published annually by the Cabinet Office. The most recent report, covering 2000, was announced by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office on 6 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 325W. Between 20 June and 20 July 2001 Ministers received 1,091 letters—298 of which were from hon. and right hon. Members. 78 per cent. of the replies to these were issued within the Department's target of 18 working days. It is not possible to break this down any further without incurring disproportionate costs.

Sport Skills

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her proposals to enable talented, young sports students to develop their skills. [20992]

Mr. Caborn: My Department's financial assistance to support and develop talented young athletes is channelled through two lottery funded initiatives administered by Sport England—the World Class Potential Programme and the World Class Start Programme.

My officials and I are also discussing with the private sector the potential for commercial sponsorship to assist with talent development.

Sports Projects

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what major sports projects in 2002 her Department is promoting in London. [17813]

Mr. Caborn: Next year, the country joins Her Majesty the Queen in celebrating her Golden Jubilee. As part of these celebrations in the London region, there is a nine day festival of sport planned from 6 July to 14 July.

This will involve on the weekends of 6 and 7 July and 13 and 14 July, the London Heathrow Youth Games preliminaries and finals. The London Youth Games began in the Queen's Silver Jubilee Year and will therefore be in its 25 year in 2002.

On 11 July there will be the Mini Youth Games for primary aged children.

Both events involve 32 London boroughs and the Corporation of London.

On 8, 9 and possibly 10 July there will be the Active Sports Talent Camps which are specifically linked to the Manchester Commonwealth Games under the Spirit of Friendship' banner. This will incorporate training and coaching clinics for those young people who show potential for 1 of 9 sports. The sports involved are: athletics, basketball, girl's football, hockey, netball, rugby league, rugby union (boys and girls), swimming and tennis.

School Sports

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to apply the money for the new opportunities fund investment in school sports. [17249]

Mr. Caborn: Plans for the new opportunities for PE and Sport in Schools programme are set out in the new opportunities fund's recently published document "Building for Tomorrow"—copies of which I am placing in the Libraries of both Houses. The programme will provide PE and sports facilities for young people and the community in general and is intended to have a long-term impact on key issues facing local communities such as education, health, crime and drugs use.

Royal Palaces

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 13 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 634W, on royal palaces, which persons residing in royal palaces have council tax charged against that accommodation they occupy; and if this tax is paid by *(a)* the royal household and *(b)* the occupant. [18375]

Mr. Caborn: Council tax is paid by all of the 244 residents residing in royal palaces listed in my hon. Friend's answer of 13 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 634W. The grant in aid for property services is only responsible for council tax on vacant properties.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 634W, on royal palaces, which members of the royal family occupy accommodation in the royal palaces other than Her Majesty the Queen and Prince Philip and Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. [18376]

Mr. Caborn: The other members of the royal family who occupy self-contained residential accommodation in the royal palaces are:

The Prince of Wales
The Princess Royal
The Princess Margaret
The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester
The Duke and Duchess of Kent
Princess Alexandra
Prince and Princess Michael of Kent.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 634W, on royal palaces, which persons residing in royal palaces occupy accommodation that is separate hereditaments for council tax purposes. [18377]

Mr. Caborn: The 244 residents with self-contained residential accommodation in royal palaces are liable to pay separate council tax.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 634W, on royal palaces, if she will list the commercial occupants of the royal palaces. [18379]

Mr. Caborn: The commercial lettings outside the security cordon are mainly arranged by estate agents. These properties are marketed in the same way as other properties included in the letting portfolios of these agents. It would be inappropriate to list the individuals concerned. None of them has any connection with the Royal Household or the Royal Family.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Brazilian Mahogany

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to support the Brazilian Government's moratorium on trade in mahogany. [17837]

Nigel Griffiths: Brazilian mahogany (Swietenia macrophylla) is listed in appendix III of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Its import into the United Kingdom is covered by annex C of EU regulation 338/97 and must be accompanied by an export permit or certificate of origin issued by the Brazilian Government's CITES management authority.

Omega, Warrington

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to assist the development of the Omega site in Warrington; and if she will make a statement. [17906]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* The Omega site in Warrington is identified in the NWDA regional strategy as one of the 11 strategic sites for investment in the North-west.

English Partnerships and Warrington borough council are taking forward the development of this site. The North-West development agency has contributed £25,000 towards the Omega partnership, which was formed to co-ordinate and oversee all aspects of the project.

Economic Development (Lancashire)

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of *(a)* the number of jobs created, *(b)* the number of jobs created to be taken up by residents of communities in need and *(c)* the estimated cost per job created as part of the (i) Luneside East, (ii) Lancaster West Business Park, (iii) Heysham Business Park, (iv) Kingsway, (v) Mellishaw North and (vi) Luneside West developments included in the bid for an economic development zone by Lancaster City Council. [18253]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* Lancaster's bid for economic development zone status is currently being assessed, along with those of other EDZ contenders, by independent consultants appointed by the Government office for the north-west.

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from the North-West development agency in relation to the bid put forward by Lancaster city council for an economic development zone. [18251]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* None.

Lune Industrial Estate

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from the North-West development agency on access to the Lune industrial estate. [18250]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* No representations have been received from the North-West development agency on access on the Lune industrial estate.

Postal Services

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with Consignia on the proposal to charge customers for post and delivery before 9.30 am. [17421]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* The Department has regular discussions with Consignia about a range of strategic issues facing the company. However, ideas about altering charging or delivery arrangements are operational issues for the company provided that it remains within the terms of the licence issued to it by the Postal Services Commission.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the proposed abolition of the second postal delivery. [17419]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* Consignia's proposals in relation to second delivery are operational issues for the company provided that it remains within the terms of the licence issued to it by the Postal Services Commission.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the management of Consignia on charging for the second postal delivery. [17420]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* The Department has regular discussions with Consignia about a range of strategic issues facing the company. Consignia's proposals in relation to the second postal delivery are operational issues for the company provided that it remains within the terms of the licence issued to it by the Postal Services Commission.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with Consignia; and if she raised the issue of industrial relations. [19470]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* The Department has regular discussions with Consignia about a range of strategic issues facing the company. The handling of industrial relations and the resolution of any disputes are issues for the management of the company and the unions. The Government have encouraged the management and unions to work in partnership to implement the recommendations in the Sawyer report published in July 2001. Progress has been encouraging but a lot more still needs to be done.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Government's policy on the ending of the second post, with special reference to rural areas. [19471]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* Consignia's proposals in relation to the second delivery are operational issues for the company, subject to the regulatory powers and duties of the Postal Services Commission in respect of service standards.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many formal notices her Department has received in the last year from the parliamentary ombudsman expressing an intention to carry out an investigation; and in respect of each notice how long it took to respond. [18770]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* The Department has received two formal inquiries from the ombudsman in the last year (ie from 23 November 2000). In the first case, a full response was sent 26 days from the date of the inquiry, and in the second case 35 days from the date of the inquiry.

Employment Tribunals

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many applications to employment tribunals were *(a)* upheld, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* withdrawn in the last year for which information is available. [19761]

Alan Johnson: The following is the information.

Outcome of employment tribunal cases disposed of in 2000–01

	Number of cases
ACAS conciliated settlements	33,169
Withdrawn	27,502
Successful at hearing	13,640
Dismissed at hearing (out of scope)	1,884
Dismissed at hearing (other)	9,582
Disposed of otherwise	7,161
Total	92,938

Source:
Employment Tribunals Service

A claim may be brought under more than one jurisdiction or subsequently amended/clarified in the course of proceedings, but will only be counted once in the above table (against the main jurisdiction).

Transatlantic Radio Signal (Centenary)

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with her counterparts in Canada and the US in respect of arrangements to celebrate the centenary of the successful transmission of a transatlantic radio signal. [19573]

Mr. Alexander: My officials in the Department and the Radiocommunications Agency have had extensive discussions with Canadian Government officials about arrangements for the celebration of the centenary. At the end of September, a senior official represented the agency and contributed to the Wireless Vision Congress at St. John's Newfoundland which was part of the Canadian celebrations of the centenary. There have been no discussions with the US Government on this issue.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements her Department has made to support the celebration of the centenary of the first transatlantic radio signal. [19572]

Mr. Alexander: I am due to host a reception at the Radiocommunications Agency on 12 December to mark this important achievement. There will be a link-up from the reception to agency officials who will be in Poldhu, where the agency has donated radio equipment to the Poldhu amateur radio club to commemorate the centenary. The agency has also produced a souvenir booklet, "Wireless over the Waves", which has achieved a wide circulation and is on its website.

Recruitment Industry

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria were used to select the Recruitment and Employment Confederation as the main negotiator for the UK employment industry. [19855]

Alan Johnson: I have met the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, which is the main representative body in the private recruitment industry, to discuss the draft conduct of employment agencies and employment businesses regulations and other issues relating to the private recruitment industry. My officials and I have also discussed these matters with a number of other representative bodies in the industry and individual recruitment companies.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average cost is for an information technology staffing agency to provide an IT professional to a client. [19868]

Alan Johnson: I have no estimate of the average cost to an information technology recruitment agency of providing an IT professional.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of temporary information technology staff operate through personal service companies. [19865]

Alan Johnson: I have no estimate of the percentage of information technology temporary staff who operate through personal service companies.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what evidence she has received that demonstrates that the quarantine period proposed in the draft of the conduct of employment agencies and employment business regulations 2001 has been set at an appropriate timescale for recruitment of information technology personnel. [19862]

Alan Johnson: The principles underlying our proposals on the quarantine periods to apply to the payment of transfer fees are in line with suggestions made by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, the private recruitment industry's principal trade association.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she has completed a regulatory impact assessment on the proposed draft of the conduct of employment agencies and employment business regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement. [19860]

Alan Johnson: A regulatory impact assessment on the proposed new Employment Agency regulations has been produced and published on my Department's website.

Our objective in overhauling the existing regulations, which date from 1976, is simpler, clearer regulations, which are relevant to the market of today and of the future. The proposed new regulations are in many cases updated versions of existing requirements. They are designed to benefit recruitment agencies, those employed through them and hirers. They will remove unnecessary restrictions on agencies operations and the services they offer, while protecting the interests of work seekers and vulnerable groups.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she is planning to undertake further consultation on the draft of the conduct of employment agencies and employment business regulations 2001. [19854]

Alan Johnson: I will be consulting further on the main changes we propose to the draft conduct regulations.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many IT agencies operate in the UK; and what percentage of these have a turnover in excess of £2 million per annum; [19866]

(2) what information she has collated on the number of IT staffing agencies which are privately owned and managed small and medium-sized enterprises and if she will make a statement. [19867]

Alan Johnson: I do not have full details on the information requested, but the Association of Technology Staffing Companies, the body representing the IT staffing companies, estimates that there are some 2,000 companies in the sector with a total annual turnover of almost £2 billion.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* representative organisations and *(b)* individual companies in the recruitment industry. [19858]

Alan Johnson: In recent months I have met a number of representative bodies and individual companies from the private recruitment industry to discuss the draft conduct of employment agencies and employment businesses regulations and other issues.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will list the *(a)* companies, *(b)* organisations and *(c)* individuals who have been invited to discuss the proposed draft of the conduct of employment agencies and employment business regulations 2001; [19852]

(2) if she will publish the names of the *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations who have commented on the proposed draft of the conduct of employment agencies and employment business regulations 2001. [19857]

Alan Johnson: A list of the respondents to the last consultation exercise on the proposed draft conduct of employment agencies and employment businesses regulations has been placed in the Libraries of the House. I have also held discussions with a number of these.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she has received representations from the IT industry about the proposed draft of the conduct of employment agencies and employment business regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement. [19859]

Alan Johnson: I received representations on the draft conduct of employment agencies and employment businesses regulations from the representative bodies, individual recruitment companies and workers within the IT industry.

Our draft conduct regulations are designed to benefit recruitment agencies, employment businesses, their clients and those seeking employment through them. They will remove unnecessary restrictions on organisations in the recruitment industry, including the IT sector, and the services they can offer, while protecting the interests of work seekers and vulnerable groups. I recognise that the IT sector plays an increasingly important role in the recruitment industry.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what specific concerns prompted the review of the Employment Agencies Act 1973; [19853]

(2) if she will she make a statement on the aspects of the Employment Agencies Act 1973 which triggered a revision of the present legislation. [19863]

Alan Johnson: I have no plans to review the Employment Agencies Act 1973 at the present time. The Government consider that the existing Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations 1976 do not meet the Better Regulation Taskforce's five central principles of good regulation:

transparency, accountability, targeting, consistency and proportionality. Our objective in overhauling the existing legislative framework governing agency conduct, which dates from 1976, is simpler, clearer, regulations, which are relevant to the labour market of today and of the future.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what studies have been conducted into the number of temporary employees who have taken up permanent employment in the *(a)* nursing, *(b)* secretarial, *(c)* information technology and *(d)* transport industries in the last 12 months. [19861]

Alan Johnson: The Recruitment and Employment Confederation estimates that about one fifth of temporary workers transfer to permanent employment each year. However, I have no breakdown by specific sectors.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she last met the Association of Technology Staffing Companies; and if she will make a statement. [19864]

Alan Johnson: Although I have met a number of bodies representing the various sectors within the private recruitment industry over recent years, I have not yet had the opportunity to meet representatives of the Association of Technology Staffing Companies (ATSCo). However, my officials have had a number of productive meetings with the ATSCo over the past year.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by what date she expects to lay the draft of the conduct of employment agencies and employment business regulations 2001. [19856]

Alan Johnson: I expect to lay the draft conduct regulations before Parliament early in the new year.

Galileo Project

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the next stage of funding for the Galileo project was discussed at the November European Space Agency ministerial meeting; what commitments were made by each member state; and if she will make a statement. [19085]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* Yes. A declaration for subscription to the next phase of the Galileo programme was opened at the Ministerial Council. A majority of ESA member states subscribed. The UK indicated that it would want to await the outcome of the EU Transport Council before finalising its position.

My Department is working closely with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and others within Whitehall to examine the economic case for providing further funding to the Galileo project, if it goes ahead.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will consult on *(a)* employment and *(b)* goods and services in age discrimination legislation. [18837]

Alan Johnson: The forthcoming consultation on age discrimination legislation will focus on employment and vocational training. This is our priority, and will implement the EU employment directive. Those responding to the consultation are free, of course, to raise related matters, including the question of extending provision to goods and services.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many letters her Department received from hon. and right hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. [18570]

Ms Hewitt: My Department received 936 letters from hon. and right hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July.

Railtrack

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on the proposed takeover of Railtrack by WestLB. [17285]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government welcome the interest shown in the role of the network operator by third parties. However, ultimately it is for the administrator to formulate a proposal for a transfer scheme and put it to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for approval.

TREASURY

Pre-Budget Report

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish disaggregated figures for the *(a)* Customs and Excise duties and *(b)* other taxes and royalties shown on lines 8 and 10 of table B8, page 174, of the pre-Budget report 2001. [20129]

Mr. Andrew Smith: More detailed figures for tax receipts in 2000–01 and 2001–02 are shown in table C7, page 192, of the Budget 2001 and in table B11, page 184, of the 2001 pre-Budget report.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason the FSA took two months to issue a public statement after being informed on 24 September of a previously undisclosed letter dated 1 April 1999 from Mr. Christopher Headdon, then Actuary to Equitable Life, to Irish European Reinsurance Company. [19887]

Ruth Kelly: I understand that the FSA disclosed the existence of the letter at the earliest point that it was appropriate to do so. The letter was relevant to commercial negotiations which have only just been concluded and the FSA press statement of 26 November reported the outcome of those discussions as soon as practicable following the conclusion of the negotiations.

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has received a copy of the report requested in the letter of 16 October from the Economic Secretary to Sir Howard Davies; and if he will publish it. [20817]

Ruth Kelly: The FSA sent the report to the Treasury on 20 November 2001. I have today forwarded the report to Lord Penrose as further input to his Inquiry. I have also asked the FSA to make the report publicly available. Copies of my letter to Lord Penrose and the report itself have been deposited in the Library of the House.

London Underground

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what involvement officials from HM Treasury have had in the value for money assessment of the public-private partnership for the London Underground; if he will place in the Library the assessment he has received from the Office for National Statistics concerning the accounting treatment for the PPP for the London Underground; and if he will make a statement. [19519]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The value for money assessment of the London Underground PPP will be carried out by London Transport in line with the relevant guidance produced by HM Treasury and the Treasury Taskforce. London Transport is also working to ensure that when it evaluates final PPP bids it addresses the issues raised by the National Audit Office in its report 'The financial analysis for the London Underground Public Private Partnerships'.

The Office for National Statistics has made no assessment of the accounting treatment of the PPP.

Treasury Investment Appraisal Guidance

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he plans to make to Treasury investment appraisal guidance; and if he will make a statement. [19521]

Mr. Andrew Smith: A review of the Capital Appraisal process, including the detailed guidance issued by the Treasury on investment appraisal, was announced at the time of the pre-Budget report last year. When the review concludes I will decide whether any changes need to be made to the current guidance.

Cross-border Bank Transfers

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the average charge for a cross-border bank transfer of 100 euros *(a)* in the Euro zone and *(b)* involving a UK bank; and if he will make a statement. [19587]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has made no assessment of charges for cross-border credit transfers either *(a)* in the Euro zone, or *(b)* involving a UK bank.

Capital Assets

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 270W, on capital assets, (1) if he will place in the Library the classification of each asset reverting to the public sector for PPP contracts signed in the last 12 months; and what was their aggregate value; [19185]

(2) what proportion of PPP contracts by value in 2000–01 were classified as *(a)* finance leases and *(b)* operating leases; and if he will make a statement; [19188]

(3) if he will place in the Library the aggregate value of capital assets expected to revert to public sector ownership in each of the next 25 years; and if he will make a statement. [19186]

Mr. Andrew Smith: This information is not held centrally. Information on the assets held by each department and major PPP projects is available in departmental resource account.

Regional Investment

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the expenditure was *(a)* under the single regeneration budget, and its equivalents, *(b)* under the housing capital programmes outside the SRB, *(c)* under the European regional development fund and the European social fund, *(d)* by specialised economic regeneration agencies, *(e)* by TECs, skills and learning councils and on education and training by the Employment Service and the further education funding councils, *(f)* by the DTI on regional policies including regional selective assistance, *(g)* by the enterprise boards and *(h)* under specialist regeneration activities including employment zones and new deal in communities in each of the last 10 years for each of the nations of Great Britain. [18522]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Spending in devolved areas is a matter for the devolved Administrations to determine within their overall departmental expenditure limits, announced following Spending Review 2000. Information on receipts from European Community institutions analysed by fund and by Department is published in table 14d of the departmental report of the Chancellor's Departments (Cm 5116). Information on the programmes of UK Government Departments is published in the relevant Department's departmental report.

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to allow regional development agencies to issue regional bonds as a regional investment facility. [18514]

Mr. Andrew Smith: There are no such plans. However, Regional Venture Capital Funds will shortly be up and running across the country. These will provide at least £270 million of investment in the regions and are supported by up to £80 million of Government resources.

Asian Community Events

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Asian community events he has attended within the last 12 months. [15914]

Ruth Kelly: Over the last 12 months, Treasury Ministers have attended numerous meetings at which members of the Asian business, faith and other communities have been present, including the Bradford Mela (Peel Park, Bradford, 1 July 2001), Diwali celebrations in Southend-on-Sea (5 November 2001) and 16th Anniversary Asian Traders Dinner (London, 13 November 2001).

Residents (Tyne and Wear)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the numbers of residents of each authority in Tyne and Wear in each year since 1991 *(a)* in total and *(b)* the percentage in the age ranges (i) 0 to 4, (ii) 4 to 14 and (iii) 14 to 24 years. [19491]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 30 November 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the number of residents in each local authority in Tyne and Wear in each year since 1991. I am replying in his absence. (19491).

The information for the total number of residents and the percentage in the age ranges 0–4, 5–14 and 15–24 in the local authorities in Tyne and Wear is in the attached table.

Estimated resident population mid-1991 to mid-2000 for districts within Tyne and Wear metropolitan county

Year/district	*Total persons (thousands)*	*Percentage of persons aged*		
		0–4	*5–14*	*15–24*
1991				
Gateshead	203.1	6.2	11.8	13.8
Newcastle upon Tyne	278.2	6.4	11.3	17.0
North Tyneside	195.5	6.2	12.3	12.6
South Tyneside	157.2	6.7	12.6	12.7
Sunderland	296.4	7.0	13.4	14.7
1992				
Gateshead	203.1	6.3	12.0	13.2
Newcastle upon Tyne	281.7	6.4	11.6	16.4
North Tyneside	195.2	6.2	12.4	12.2
South Tyneside	157.3	6.6	13.0	12.3
Sunderland	297.1	7.0	13.6	14.2
1993				
Gateshead	202.9	6.3	12.2	12.8
Newcastle upon Tyne	285.3	6.4	11.9	15.8
North Tyneside	194.8	6.2	12.6	12.0
South Tyneside	157.2	6.5	13.3	11.9
Sunderland	297.8	6.9	13.8	13.7
1994				
Gateshead	202.4	6.2	12.2	12.4
Newcastle upon Tyne	283.6	6.4	12.0	16.2
North Tyneside	194.1	6.1	12.6	11.6
South Tyneside	156.7	6.5	13.4	11.5
Sunderland	297.2	6.7	13.8	13.7
1995				
Gateshead	201.8	6.1	12.2	12.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	283.1	6.4	12.2	16.5
North Tyneside	193.9	6.0	12.5	11.4
South Tyneside	156.3	6.3	13.5	11.3
Sunderland	295.8	6.6	13.8	13.7
1996				
Gateshead	201.0	6.0	12.3	11.4
Newcastle upon Tyne	282.3	6.1	12.4	16.7
North Tyneside	193.6	5.9	12.4	11.1
South Tyneside	156.1	6.1	13.6	10.9
Sunderland	294.3	6.3	13.8	13.6
1997				
Gateshead	200.2	5.9	12.4	10.9
Newcastle upon Tyne	279.5	6.0	12.6	17.0
North Tyneside	193.3	5.7	12.4	10.7
South Tyneside	155.4	6.0	13.7	10.6
Sunderland	293.0	6.1	13.9	13.6
1998				
Gateshead	198.9	5.8	12.4	10.6
Newcastle upon Tyne	276.1	5.8	12.7	17.2
North Tyneside	194.0	5.7	12.4	10.4
South Tyneside	154.6	5.8	13.8	10.3
Sunderland	292.3	5.9	13.8	13.7
1999				
Gateshead	198.1	5.7	12.3	10.4
Newcastle upon Tyne	273.0	5.6	12.5	18.4
North Tyneside	193.2	5.6	12.3	10.1
South Tyneside	153.5	5.6	13.7	10.6
Sunderland	290.7	5.7	13.8	14.1
2000				
Gateshead	196.9	5.5	12.3	10.5
Newcastle upon Tyne	270.5	5.3	12.4	18.6
North Tyneside	194.1	5.6	12.1	10.2
South Tyneside	152.7	5.5	13.5	10.9
Sunderland	289.5	5.6	13.6	14.1

Source:

Office for National Statistics

Teenage Pregnancy

Richard Burden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many girls resident in Birmingham, Northfield registered *(a)* the conception and *(b)* the birth of a child before the age of 16 years in each year since 1997. [19390]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Richard Burden, dated 30 November 2001:

As National Statistician I am replying to your recent question on the number of girls resident in Birmingham, Northfield that registered the conception and birth of a child before the age of 16 years, in each year since 1997 (19389).

There is no requirement to register conceptions in England and Wales. Estimates are however produced by the Office for National Statistics, based on registrations of births and notifications of abortions performed under the Abortion Act (1967). The available figures for estimated conceptions and registered livebirths under 16 for residents of Northfield Parliamentary Constituency since 1997 are given in the table:

Number of conceptions and livebirths under age 16. Residents of Birmingham Northfield Parliamentary Constituency. 1997–2000

	Conceptions under 16	*Livebirths under 16*
1997	19	4
1998	29	1
1999	21	5
2000	[1]—	6

[1] Figures not yet available

Source:

Office for National Statistics

House Sales

David Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average cost of charges to *(a)* sell and *(b)* buy a house has been in each of the last five years broken down by region. [18911]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Wright, dated 30 November 2001:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the average cost of charges when buying and selling a house in each of the last five years broken down by region (18911).

Available estimates are of average weekly expenditure on fees for moving house and are shown in the attached table. They are from the Family Expenditure Survey and are for the United Kingdom. Two figures are shown for each year, the first averaged over all households and the second averaged just over the households who had any expenditure on moving house fees.

Like all estimates from sample surveys these figures are subject to sampling variability. This is particularly high for an item such as moving house fees because the sample of households who incur such expenditure is small and the amounts they spend cover a wide range. For this reason it is not possible to give reliable breakdowns by region or for buying and selling separately.

Household expenditure on professional fees for buying and selling a house

United Kingdom 1995–96 to 1999–2000 *£ per year*

	Expenditure on professional fees for moving house	
Financial year	*Averaged over all households*	*Averaged over households with any expend*
Average annual household expenditure		
1995–96	48	1,250
1996–97	60	1,230
1997–98	73	1,260
1998–99	59	1,220
1999–2000	75	1,300

Source:

ONS, Family Expenditure Surveys 1995–96, 1996–97, 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000.

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Census

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects all 2001 Census forms to be *(a)* processed and *(b)* analysed. [19879]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, dated 30 November 2001:

The National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales has been asked to reply to your recent question on when all 2001 Census forms are expected to be (a) processed and (b) analysed. I am replying in his absence (19879).

The processing of the 2001 Census is being carried out in two main phases. Our main contractors Lockheed Martin are scheduled to capture, code and deliver data on an area-by-area basis over the period September 2001 to April 2002.

On delivery to ONS, the data for each area is then subject to a complex set of 'downstream' computing and manual activities, which ultimately create a full and final database of Census records from which all national and local area Census outputs can be generated, and which is expected to be completed by the end of June 2002.

The 2001 mid-year national and local authority population estimates based on the final Census area counts are scheduled to be published in August 2002, and the first key analyses from the census itself to be released by the end of December 2002. Further, more detailed, analyses will continue throughout 2003.

Export Credit Guarantees Department

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will proceed with the second stage of the independent review of the implementation of the recommendations made by KPMG in December 1999 on the adequacy of the *(a)* risk management system and *(b)* processes of the Export Credit Guarantees Department. [20818]

Mr. Boateng: My predecessor announced to the House on 30 November 2000 that KPMG would carry out a post-implementation review of ECGD's progress in addressing the recommendations made by KPMG in December 1999. The first stage of that review was completed last January, and was reported to the House on 31 January. I am pleased to announce that the second stage has now commenced. The review is expected to take between four and six weeks, and I will place a copy of KPMG's report in the Library of the House.

Public Service Pensions

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase public service pensions from April 2002. [20816]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Legislation governing public service pensions requires public service pensions to be increased annually by the same percentage as state earnings-related pensions (additional pensions). My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions announced on 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 894W that benefits such as additional pensions will be increased by 1.7 per cent., in line with the annual increase in the Retail Prices Index up to September 2001. Public service pensions will therefore be increased by 1.7 per cent. from 8 April 2002, except those which have been in payment for less than a year, which will receive a pro-rata increase.

Tax Credits

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which tax credits he defines as public expenditure. [19838]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Treasury's calculation of net taxes and social security contributions treats all tax credits as reductions in tax collected since the working families and business tax credits appear as reductions in their tax bills.

The Treasury's calculation of public sector receipts, drawn from ONS's national accounts treats some tax credits as public expenditure—mostly WFTC and DPTC.

Council Tax Payers

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many council tax payers there were in each year since 1997; and what his estimate is of this figure for the 2001–02 financial year. [19646]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

We do not collect information on the number of council tax payers in England. Figures for the number of properties in England subject to a council tax charge for each financial year from 1996–97 are given in the table.

Total number of dwellings subject to a council tax charge from November 1995

Number of chargeable dwellings as at:	*In respect of financial year:*	*Total*	*Percentage increase over previous year*
1 November 1995	1996–97	19,755,865	—
1 November 1996	1997–98	19,933,603	0.9
3 November 1997	1998–99	20,055,311	0.6
3 November 1998	1999–2000	20,233,435	0.9
3 November 1999	2000–01	20,374,128	0.7
1 November 2000	2001–02	20,585,744	1.0
1 November 2001[1]	2002–03	20,717,285	0.6

[1] Estimate

Mortality Ratios

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the standard mortality ratios for each *(a)* parliamentary constituency in Scotland and the north-eastern Government office region of England and *(b)* electoral ward in the city of Newcastle upon Tyne for all causes, for (i) respiratory disease, (ii) coronary disease, (iii) stroke and (iv) cancer. [19487]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 30 November 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question asking for the standardised mortality ratios (SMRs) for (a) each parliamentary constituency in Scotland and the North Eastern Government Office Region of England and (b) each electoral ward in the City of Newcastle upon Tyne, for all causes, and for (i) respiratory disease, (ii) coronary disease, (iii) stroke and (iv) cancer. I am replying in his absence (19487)

Figures for Scotland are the responsibility of the Scottish Executive.

SMRs for electoral wards and parliamentary constituencies can be calculated only on the basis of ward populations from the 1991 Census. This pre-dates the creation of Government Office Regions. Hence the available data on parliamentary constituencies does not match Government Office Regions.

The attached table shows SMRs for all causes of death, and for (i) respiratory disease, (ii) coronary disease, (iii) stroke and (iv) cancer for each ward (as constituted at the time of the 1991 Census) in Newcastle upon Tyne District Metropolitan County District, in the years 1991–1993, based on populations from the 1991 Census.

Standardised mortality ratios[1] for selected causes, for wards in Newcastle upon Tyne metropolitan county district Years of registration of death 1991–93

	All Causes		*Respiratory disease[2]*		*Coronary heart disease[2]*		*Stroke[2]*		*Cancers[2]*	
Ward	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*
Benwell	141.5	148.6	183.9	182.3	137.6	147.9	160.8	171.6	139.9	122.1
Blacklaw	124.4	126.2	84.7	104.2	128.4	128.0	182.5	86.3	164.0	109.4
Byker	129.5	123.5	136.9	113.7	120.1	105.8	146.9	95.5	158.2	149.3
Castle	83.2	99.3	101.1	68.8	66.8	78.4	52.9	121.0	104.5	118.9
Dene	90.0	76.3	50.4	51.7	114.7	89.9	74.0	49.4	94.4	92.4
Denton	109.4	109.4	101.8	93.4	128.1	121.4	159.2	81.5	119.2	118.2
Elswick	173.2	122.3	209.4	125.4	126.7	111.9	156.6	105.6	183.3	138.8
Fawdon	109.5	93.9	99.6	80.6	119.3	130.1	86.6	67.6	125.8	95.7
Fenham	100.9	98.0	124.1	61.0	105.3	89.3	96.7	81.7	126.8	117.7
Grange	130.3	116.3	119.8	114.7	96.3	102.8	147.6	116.1	148.4	116.7
Heaton	99.1	96.6	85.2	86.3	105.9	97.4	58.8	95.8	114.0	118.1
Jesmond	132.9	104.0	112.8	92.2	96.1	139.4	130.5	109.4	101.8	98.4
Kenton	122.5	109.3	109.0	117.9	88.6	139.7	122.7	143.4	116.0	114.0
Lemington	131.5	124.5	125.0	55.0	109.8	93.6	153.0	211.18	100.8	115.0
Monkchester	161.6	139.1	144.5	197.3	163.0	166.8	123.0	122.1	162.1	172.2
Moorside	124.2	97.0	66.3	85.3	133.6	88.7	115.4	112.8	129.3	101.5
Newburn	129.7	103.4	104.0	128.5	139.5	116.9	114.0	64.5	128.3	131.5
Sandyford	120.0	106.7	81.7	85.9	102.6	118.0	160.2	114.5	103.6	144.7
Scotswood	128.2	97.4	90.8	144.0	107.4	110.6	104.2	65.8	155.2	95.4
South Gosforth	106.0	104.2	57.9	87.0	111.6	102.3	99.0	113.3	95.0	117.9
Walker	151.4	130.7	189.1	126.9	122.8	138.0	133.4	106.4	184.2	131.2
Walkergate	145.8	117.6	144.3	133.7	148.5	114.8	142.5	131.5	141.5	118.2
West City	171.4	151.4	190.6	151.0	165.4	126.5	178.6	140.7	185.8	130.6
Westerhope	94.4	98.1	71.6	70.5	93.1	109.6	153.3	96.9	101.0	120.3
Wingrove	117.6	107.5	119.0	94.6	124.7	104.9	106.5	81.7	106.4	132.9
Woolsington	109.7	99.3	71.0	41.5	136.6	122.3	39.0	114.6	126.2	87.4

[1] Standardised to the population of England and Wales

[2] International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision codes:

Respiratory disease—460–519

Coronary heart disease—410–414

Stroke—430–438

Cancer—140–208

Economic Activity and Employment Rates

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate *(a)* the economy activity rate and *(b)* the employment rate of those aged over 21 years and up to pensionable age in each region and nation of the UK for each year since 1996, broken down by age and sex. [19488]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 30 November 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on economic activity and employment rates. I am replying in his absence (19488).

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of economic activity and employment rates for people aged 16 and over. The economic activity rate is the number of people who are economically active as a percentage of the relevant population. The employment rate is the number of people in employment as a percentage of the relevant economically active population. The latest available LFS estimates are for summer (June to August) 2001.

These estimates are available through the House of Commons Library.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many letters his Department received from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. [18562]

Mr. Boateng: 663 letters were received.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what proportion of letters received by his Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days. [18582]

Mr. Boateng: A sample of the 663 letters received in the period concerned indicates that 69 per cent. were answered within 15 days, 87 per cent. within 20 days, 96 per cent. within 30 days and 98 per cent. within 40 days.

Landfill

John Mann: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what effects the proposed changes in the landfill tax credit scheme will have on parish council-led regeneration projects. [19342]

Mr. Boateng: There are at present no proposals to change the scheme. The Government are attracted to replacing all or part of the scheme with a public spending programme to direct resources towards Government priorities on sustainable waste management. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is aiming to issue a consultation paper by the end of this year.

Smuggling

Ms Stuart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further steps are being taken to reduce the levels of illegal imports of *(a)* beer and *(b)* alcohol. [19450]

Mr. Boateng: As part of the pre-Budget Report the Government announced on 27 November that Customs activity this year to tackle cross-channel passenger smuggling of alcohol and tobacco has had a profound impact. Revenue losses from this form of smuggling have been reduced by 76 per cent. compared to last year, with cross-channel passenger smuggling of beer almost eliminated and cross-channel passenger smuggling of wine and spirits more than halved.

Building on these successes, and those of its wider efforts to tackle tobacco smuggling, the Government published alongside the PBR a paper "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud" which sets out the strategic principles that underlie the Government's approach to tackling fraud and outlines the steps being taken to tackle other forms of fraud and smuggling in the alcohol sector.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what discussions he has had with Commissioner Bolkestein regarding distortions to the working of the Single Market caused by the level of UK excise duty rates; [19368]

(2) what discussions he has had with Commissioner Bolkestein regarding HM Customs and Excise policy of policing at ports of entry; [19369]

(3) if he has been able to reach agreement with Commissioner Bolkestein regarding the confiscation of vehicles and goods from suspected smugglers before conviction. [19370]

Mr. Boateng: I met Commissioner Bolkestein on 20 November and explained that the Government are totally committed both to the principle that EU citizens should be able to engage in cross border shopping for their own use in other member states and to tackling criminal smuggling. The Government are confident that the approach of UK Customs to tackling those individuals who seek to break the law by smuggling alcohol and tobacco into the UK is fully consistent with our EU obligations and that once the European Commission is fully informed of the situation, they too will be satisfied.

Vehicle Seizures

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what records HM Customs and Excise are required to keep of the number of private cars seized by them; and what plans he has to change that requirement. [19396]

Mr. Boateng: Customs collate centrally and publish annual statistics on the number of vehicles seized across the UK. At a local level, Customs maintain specific records of all vehicles seized to deal with appeals and court cases as well as for intelligence gathering.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much compensation was paid in each year since 1995 to drivers and their families from costs arising from cars wrongly impounded by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, including *(a)* consequential costs arising from loss of use of a car, *(b)* loss of items in the car, *(c)* loss of earnings and *(d)* travel costs incurred in collecting the car from Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. [19401]

Mr. Boateng: Information in this form is not centrally collated by Customs.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what procedures are in place for the audit and reporting of *(a)* the number of private cars impounded by HM Customs and Excise at Channel ports, *(b)* personal possessions contained in private cars impounded by HM Customs and Excise at Channel ports and *(c)* disposal of tax discs in cars disposed of by HM Customs and Excise. [19402]

Mr. Boateng: At a local level, Customs maintain specific records of all vehicles seized to deal with appeals and court cases as well as for intelligence gathering. Personal possessions are returned to the owner either at the time of seizure, or can be collected within 30 days. Tax discs are an integral part of a vehicle to legalise road use and are retained. Local managers carry out assurance checks on all information held, and all Customs procedures are subject to internal audit and scrutiny by the National Audit Office.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue from the disposal of private cars and personal possessions in those cars was retained by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in each of the last five years. [19400]

Mr. Boateng: None. All moneys relating to the sale of seized vehicles are returned to the Exchequer.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what procedures are in place for *(a)* handling tax discs and *(b)* disposal of personal possessions in private cars which have been disposed of by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise at channel ports. [19398]

Mr. Boateng: Once a vehicle has been forfeited to the Crown, Customs dispose of the vehicle in the most cost-effective way. If Customs choose to sell the vehicle at auction then the tax disc is sold as part of the vehicle. If the vehicle is crushed, Customs return the tax disc to the DVLA and the Exchequer is refunded.

In the great majority of cases any personal possessions in private vehicles are taken by the individual at the time of seizure. However, Customs allow at least 30 days for the collection of personal possessions before they are disposed of.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many private cars were impounded by HM Customs and Excise at channel ports in each year since 1995; and how many have been released to their owners by HM Customs and Excise following appeals by the car owners. [19397]

Mr. Boateng: Customs' centrally held information on the numbers of private vehicles seized does not distinguish the location at which seizure took place, nor is the number of vehicles restored on successful appeal centrally collated.

For the number of vehicles seized across the whole of the UK from 1994–95 to 1997–98, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 18 June 1998, *Official Report*, column 274W. For the number of vehicles seized across the UK in 1998–99, 1999–2000 I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 15 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 125W. Figures for the number of vehicles seized by Customs across the UK during 2000–01 are contained in the Government's response to the independent report by John Roques into "The Collection of Excise Duties in HM Customs and Excise" (House of Commons command 5329, July 2001), a copy of which was placed in the Library on 19 July 2001.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue was raised from the disposal of personal possessions in private cars disposed of by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in each of the last five years. [19399]

Mr. Boateng: In the great majority of cases any personal possessions in private vehicles are taken by the individual at the time of seizure. However, Customs allow at least 30 days for the collection of personal possessions before they are disposed of. In the rare event that personal possessions are not claimed within a reasonable period, Customs dispose of them. It is not normally Customs practice to sell such items.

Scout Uniforms (VAT)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the imposition of VAT on certain scout uniforms. [19338]

Mr. Boateng: VAT reliefs for young children's clothing and footwear apply also to items of scout uniform.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 272W, on Equitable Life, if he will inform the hon. Member for Christchurch as soon as the response has been sent to the Parliamentary Ombudsman. [18661]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* The response was sent to the Parliamentary Ombudsman on 30 November.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidelines the FSA has issued to companies about reinsurance practices following the disclosure of Irish European Reinsurance Company's involvement with *(a)* Independent Insurance and *(b)* Equitable Life. [19633]

Ruth Kelly: The FSA's Interim Prudential Sourcebook for Insurance Companies already makes provisions covering reinsurance practices. In particular, it requires insurance companies to prepare their accounts following the insurance accounting guideline contained in the ABI Statement Of Recommended Practice. This covers the treatment of reinsurance contracts in some detail, and requires that the accounts should properly reflect the economic substance of any transaction.

The Interim Prudential Sourcebook also requires companies to have appropriate procedures for assessing the creditworthiness of counterparties, including in particular reinsurers.

In addition, the FSA has placed a responsibility on all firms to be "open and honest" with the regulator and, for certain firms covered by schemes of operation, there will be a specific requirement to disclose reinsurance arrangements and to notify the FSA of a material change to these.

The FSA intends to review the use of financial reinsurance within the insurance market and the extent of the industry's reliance on it.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to publish the next departmental report and expenditure plans for HM Customs and Excise. [20201]

Mr. Boateng: In April 2002.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to publish the annual report 2000–01 for HM Customs and Excise. [20202]

Dawn Primarolo: Customs hope to publish the annual report for Customs and Excise in late January 2002.

Equitable Life

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 135W, on Equitable Life, if he will give the total cost of the review; what is the sum of the costs which have already been recovered by way of fees imposed by *(a)* the PIA and *(b)* the Treasury; and what the total is of the remaining costs to be recovered by the FSA by way of fees. [20286]

Ruth Kelly: The FSA has informed me that its total costs in preparing the review were around £4 million, of which £1.3 million was incurred in the FSA's financial year ending 31 March 2001. These costs will have been recovered by £1.07 million of fees charged on behalf of the insurance directorate and £0.23 million on behalf of the PIA. The balance of £2.7 million will be recovered by subsequent fees.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to publish draft regulations to implement the aggregates levy. [20196]

Mr. Boateng: Customs are in intensive discussions with representative industry bodies about detailed implementation of the levy and aim to issue draft regulations reflecting those discussions by the end of December.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the rate of aggregates levy *(a)* imposed and *(b)* planned by each member state of the European Union. [20198]

Mr. Boateng: The aggregates levy is designed to address the environmental effects of aggregate extraction in the UK. Aggregate taxes in other EU member states are a matter for the individual states themselves.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the likely differential impact of the aggregates levy on each of the regions of the United Kingdom. [20197]

Mr. Boateng: A regulatory impact assessment for the aggregates levy was published at the time of Budget 2000. It is available from the Customs and Excise website.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if imported concrete products will be subject to the aggregates levy. [20199]

Mr. Boateng: No concrete products are subject to the aggregates levy.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangement he plans under the aggregates levy for bad debt relief. [20195]

Mr. Boateng: Primary legislation gives the Commissioners of Customs and Excise the power to make regulations relating to bad debt relief. Customs are in intensive discussions with representative industry bodies about this subject and aim to issue draft regulations reflecting those discussions by the end of December.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how he plans to regulate the relationship between the aggregates levy and existing contracts for aggregates. [20188]

Mr. Boateng: Appropriate provision has been made in section 43 of the Finance Act 2001.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the public service agreement targets for a 1 per cent. reduction in unit spending per full-time equivalent *(a)* higher and *(b)* further education student in 1999–2000 over 1998–99. [14052]

Margaret Hodge: Between 1989 and 1997, publicly planned funding per full-time equivalent higher education student fell by over 36 per cent. from just under £7,600 to just over £4,800. Lord Dearing's national committee of inquiry into higher education concluded in 1997 that higher education institutions could not absorb the reduction planned by the previous Government of over 6 per cent. He proposed that higher education institutions should be asked to deliver no more than a 1 per cent. reduction in costs and the Government accepted his recommendations.

In practice, the actual reduction in unit of funding per student in 1999–2000 was 0.3 per cent.

Last November, the Government announced cash increases in publicly planned funding of £412 million, £268 million and £298 million over the three years to 2003–04. This means that for the first time in over a decade there will be a real-terms increase in the unit of funding per full-time equivalent student of 0.7 per cent. in 2001–02, with fully funded increases in student numbers over the following two years.

The current PSA target for higher education is that while maintaining standards we will increase participation towards 50 per cent. of those aged 18 to 30 by the end of the decade.

It is too early to comment on the achievement of the PSA target for further education. Data for 1999–2000 are not yet available. However, while there was a real-terms per capita funding cut of 5.8 per cent. between 1995–96 and 1998–99, under the current Government's spending plans funding to the sector has increased overall. The Government have announced year-on-year increases of £527 million and £237 million in 2001–02 and 2002–03 in publicly planned further education funding allocated to the Learning and Skills Council.

Women Role Models

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps have been taken to provide female students at all levels with women role models who have succeeded in traditionally male dominated fields. [16265]

Margaret Hodge: A number of steps have been taken, both by my Department and other Government Departments, as well as by institutions in the education sector, to provide both women and men with role models to encourage them to learn, train and work in non-traditional fields.

For example, as a result of a very successful pilot programme offering girls work experience in non-traditional work areas such as construction, engineering, IT and telecommunications, my Department is taking forward taster days for girls and is currently working with the national education business partnership network on a roll-out of the programme for girls at key stage 4.

The science and engineering ambassadors scheme is being launched in January 2002 as part of Science Year and has been jointly developed by DfES/DTI. It will give more young people the opportunity to interact with female role models who are practising scientists and engineers. The DTI, through the work programme of its promoting SET (science, engineering and technology) for women unit and engineering policy unit enables organisations such as the SETpoints, the careers education and business partnerships, Let's Twist at Bradford college and the WISE campaign to run events with women scientists and engineers, produce posters and magazines such as SPARK that promote positive images of women in non-traditional careers. Science Year is particularly targeting some of its resources and publicity at girls. For example, television advertisements and a careers video have featured girls and women. The faces of modern science photographic project includes a large number of role models for all under-represented groups and will result in the production of a book for use by careers advisers and ConneXions officers.

Many colleges and training providers are actively engaged in programmes to attract more women into male dominated fields and a number of initiatives funded by the European Social Fund involve the use of women role models. WISE, mentioned above, the Association for Women in Science and Engineering, the Women's Engineering Society and the British Council are all proactively using women role models from within industry as a mechanism for encouraging other women to study in non-traditional fields.

We are also encouraging men to undertake work in areas where they are under-represented, such as child care. The second phase of our national recruitment campaign, "Do Something You Love for a Living" is actively promoting the recruitment of men and people from ethnic minority backgrounds into the work force while placing a heavy emphasis on training and qualifications. We featured a male nursery nurse in one of our advertisements and screened this at times when there was likely to be a large male audience. Men are also featured in the campaign booklet and accompanying case studies and research into the effectiveness of the campaign showed that the advert featuring the man was the best-recalled one. Aside from raising the status of working in the sector, the focus on training and qualifications should encourage more men to respond to the campaign.

Supply Teachers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many registered supply teachers there are in England and Wales. [17118]

Mr. Timms: We do not keep a central register of supply teachers.

There were 19,600 short-term supply teachers (on contracts of less than one month) employed for the whole day in the English maintained schools sector on the 18 January 2001, the date of the annual census of teachers in service, approximately 4.6 per cent. of all teachers employed in the maintained schools sector.

Hardship Funds

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was allocated for hardship funds for universities in the United Kingdom, broken down by university, in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [17288]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 22 November 2001]:* The Government have provided £93 million for higher education students through the access and hardship funds in 2001–02, over four times the amount in 1997–98. The funds are used to provide hardship payments and access bursaries, as well as fee waivers for part-time students on benefit and low incomes, and opportunity bursaries for young disadvantaged students through the excellence challenge programme.

The following table shows amounts allocated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) for students in hardship in 2000–01 and 2001–02. In 2001–02, the funding allocated includes access bursaries for students with children. Access and hardship funds for institutions in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are a matter for the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Executive and the Northern Ireland Executive respectively.

Final allocations for universities in England in 2000–01 and 2001–02

Universities	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Anglia Polytechnic University	691,486	854,662
Aston University	276,030	278,577
University of Bath	267,498	271,888
Birbeck College	111,608	121,252
University of Birmingham	875,448	901,753
Bournemouth University	384,087	445,844
University of Bradford	385,141	417,907
University of Brighton	583,768	755,668
University of Bristol	541,065	541,229
Brunel University	588,193	647,004
University of Cambridge	531,125	578,031
University of Central England	778,045	872,064
University of Central Lancashire	979,553	1,489,797
City University	261,495	267,026
Coventry University	606,472	644,015

Final allocations for universities in England in 2000–01 and 2001–02

Universities	[1]*2000–01*	*2001–02*
De Montfort University	1,249,159	1,415,411
University of Derby	765,302	942,961
University of Durham	521,220	555,678
University of East Anglia	405,690	465,111
University of East London	736,867	1,120,286
University of Essex	227,538	257,669
University of Exeter	444,830	480,717
Goldsmiths College	353,339	457,685
University of Greenwich	751,574	1,017,097
University of Hertfordshire	727,393	947,762
University of Huddersfield	678,624	751,882
University of Hull	593,822	679,622
Imperial College	452,918	423,603
Keele University	309,558	335,842
University of Kent at Canterbury	336,590	415,866
King's College London	636,907	650,510
Kingston University	570,969	643,022
Lancaster University	425,412	445,961
University of Leeds	874,808	1,086,166
Leeds Metropolitan University	830,705	934,475
University of Leicester	455,502	450,902
University of Lincoln	577,290	727,194
University of Liverpool	627,509	646,298
Liverpool John Moores University	847,622	996,410
London Guildhall University	667,305	951,555
Loughborough University	474,876	466,898
University of Luton	462,662	544,196
University of Manchester	902,642	899,678
UMIST	261,519	250,127
Manchester Metropolitan University	1,388,324	1,610,662
Middlesex University	1,082,189	1,475,900
University of Newcastle upon Tyne	598,166	587,039
University of North London	872,810	1,214,406
University of Northumbria at Newcastle	798,650	923,715
University of Nottingham	568,494	551,515
Nottingham Trent University	984,801	1,081,621
Open University	1,042,445	993,033
University of Oxford	625,931	579,448
Oxford Brookes University	488,594	562,141
University of Plymouth	901,311	1,143,584
University of Portsmouth	706,458	818,947
Queen Mary, University of London	439,926	464,513
University of Reading	423,670	453,033
Royal Holloway, University of London	245,889	236,960
University of Salford	820,310	946,017
University of Sheffield	812,753	954,623
Sheffield Hallam University	1,123,355	1,328,270
University of Southampton	672,875	697,594
South Bank University	875,250	1,338,506
Staffordshire University	825,018	944,026
University of Sunderland	747,135	898,232
University of Surrey	220,311	212,410
University of Surrey Roehampton	418,472	540,877
University of Sussex	388,644	474,880
University of Teesside	521,456	652,280
Thames Valley University	734,478	1,022,286
University College London	660,411	655,840
University of Warwick	487,561	516,493
University of West of England, Bristol	901,535	1,033,502
University of Westminster	729,804	978,103
University of Wolverhampton	1,042,587	1,353,182
University of York	388,130	429,327

General college	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Bath Spa University College	209,428	309,506
Bolton Institute of Higher Education	409,387	537,382
Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College	311,510	356,388
Canterbury Christ Church University College	328,053	429,332
Cheltenham and Gloucester College of HE	371,907	446,249
Chester College of Higher Education	168,486	204,287
University College Chichester	239,544	318,550
Edge Hill College of Higher Education	336,041	418,087
King Alfred's College, Winchester	199,854	223,519
Liverpool Hope	329,629	419,066
University College Northampton	486,555	550,760
College of Ripon and York St. John	192,368	220,291
St Mary's College	127,618	137,086
Southampton Institute	753,050	794,565
University College Worcester	229,879	294,181
Specialist Colleges		
Bishop Grosseteste College	54,511	58,845
Arts Institute at Bournemouth	[2]0	116,650
Bretton Hall	179,843	[3]0
Institute of Cancer Research	0	3,840
Central School of Speech and Drama	42,087	47,328
Conservatoire of Dance and Drama	0	14,294
Cranfield University	136,777	131,722
Cumbria College of Art and Design	66,612	73,901
Dartingdon College of Arts	34,911	46,442
Institute of Education	113,454	144,679
Falmouth College of Arts	84,247	110,769
Harper Adams University College	57,639	55,565
Homerton College, Cambridge	68,431	[4]0
Kent Institute of Art and Design	118,665	123,269
University of London (Institutes and Activities)	30,489	26,175
London Business School	23,633	21,270
London School of Economics and Political Science	145,905	140,045
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	18,905	17,633
The London Institute	663,760	884,242
Newman College	83,473	111,666
Northern School of Contemporary Dance	11,273	12,756
Norwich School of Art and Design	56,324	70,196
School of Oriental and African Studies	132,870	183,514
School of Pharmacy	28,502	28,442
Ravensbourne College	40,536	54,936
RCN Institute	20,476	25,783
Rose Bruford College	32,505	36,185
Royal Academy of Music	45,736	43,772
Royal Agricultural College	0	18,042
Royal College of Art	159,848	143,863
Royal College of Music	44,979	40,481
Royal Northern College of Music	26,067	25,260
Royal Veterinary College	31,414	38,232
St George's Hospital Medical School	47,852	73,960
College of St. Mark and St. John	193,382	269,175
St. Martin's College	305,004	440,093
The Surrey Institute of Art and Design University College	135,961	150,707
Trinity and All Saints	200,478	210,760
Trinity College of Music	23,800	24,030
Wimbledon School of Art	34,239	44,376
Writtle College	92,300	97,560
Total	56,849,126	66,643,000

[1] In addition to the allocations listed in 2000–01, the Government made available a total of £14.8 million for mature student bursaries. HEFCE is not able to provide a breakdown of the bursary allocations.

[2] Arts Institute at Bournemouth, Institute of Cancer Research, Conservatoire of Dance and Drama and Royal Agricultural College are all showing not to have an allocation in 2000–01, as these institutions were not funded by HEFCE at that time.

[3] Bretton has no allocation in 2001–02 as it has now merged with Leeds Metropolitan University.

[4] Homerton College received an allocation in 2000–01, but for 2001–02 their allocation was added to the University of Cambridge's total.

Further Education Funding

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the operating costs were of *(a)* the Further Education and Funding Council and *(b)* the training and enterprise councils in relation to their functions in administering the funding of further education in (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 1998–1999. [17295]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 22 November 2001]*: The total Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) cost of administration taken from its published accounts was £23.3 million in 1998–99 and £25.5 million in 1999–2000.

There were no specific grants paid to TECs by the DfES for further education and it is not possible to identify how much was spent by them on this particular activity.

The Learning and Skills Council has taken over the functions previously carried out by the FEFC, much of what was done by TECs, as well as various activities carried out by the Department for Education and Employment and Government offices. It has also taken on additional activities such as greater involvement and intervention at local level to raise basic skills, and managing a 9 per cent. real terms increase in the overall programme budget allocated to post-16 education and training compared to plans for 2000–01. In spite of this, its overall operating costs (its administration budget this year is £188 million) are significantly lower than the £270 million—£280 million which was estimated to have been spent by its predecessors.

Higher Education

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many, and what percentage of, pupils entered higher education at age 18 from the Isle of Wight in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999 and *(e)* 2000. [17676]

Margaret Hodge: The available data are shown in the table.

Students aged 18 from the Isle of Wight local education authority entering higher education courses[1] at HE institutions[2] in the UK

Academic year	*Entrants*	*As proportion of 18-year-old population (%)*
1996–97	153	12
1997–98	165	12
1998–99	166	11
1999–2000	142	10
2000–01	186	13

[1] Full-time and part-time undergraduate courses, as at December 1.

[2] Data on the home LEA of students who enter HE courses at FE institutions is not available centrally, so these students have been excluded from the answer.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 8 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 511W, on higher education, if she will break down the data given to *(a)* teaching staff, *(b)* research staff and *(c)* combined teaching and research staff. [18333]

Margaret Hodge: The data are shown in the table.

Academic staff in UK higher education institutions

	Teaching staff	*Research staff*	*Combined teaching and research*
1995–96			
Full-time	9,000	33,210	69,250
Part-time	4,060	4,130	6,930
Total	13,060	37,340	76,180
1996–97			
Full-time	8,210	33,350	69,220
Part-time	4,790	4,360	7,650
Total	13,000	37,700	76,870
1997–98			
Full-time	7,530	33,800	69,160
Part-time	5,330	4,030	8,230
Total	12,860	37,830	77,390
1998–99			
Full-time	6,400	34,560	71,420
Part-time	5,550	4,400	8,740
Total	11,950	38,960	80,160
1999–2000			
Full-time	6,860	35,080	71,860
Part-time	5,990	6,310	9,660
Total	12,850	41,390	81,510

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency's Staff Record. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10.

School Trips (Risk Assessment)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what duty is placed on *(a)* schools and *(b)* local education authorities to undertake a risk assessment when organising school visits by bus; [17872]

(2) what guidance she gives to local education authorities about ensuring the safety of pupils on school visits. [17873]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require schools and local education authorities, as employers, to assess the risks of all types of school visit.

My Department issued 'Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits: a Good Practice Guide' for schools in England in 1998. Supplementary advice will become available in December.

National Curriculum Tests

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the results of individual primary schools in national curriculum tests for *(a)* reading and *(b)* mathematics at age seven years are available centrally to her Department. [18261]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Yes. For pupils aged seven (key stage 1), my Department collects individual pupil level data, by school and local education authority, for task and test results in English and mathematics and teacher assessment results in English, mathematics and science. In English, the task and test results are split into reading task, reading test, writing task and spelling. These results are aggregated at national level and published together with the key stage 2 and 3 results in a statistical release.

Streaming

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what recent assessment she has made of the continental European system of advancement from year to year based on academic performance rather than age; [18262]

(2) what assessment she has made of the relative efficiency of teaching classes grouped by *(a)* age and *(b)* ability. [18263]

Mr. Timms: The Government support a flexible approach to pupil grouping, including setting by ability where appropriate. The White Paper "Schools—achieving success" emphasises the need to increase opportunities for all pupils to progress in line with their abilities. There will be more flexibility in future for younger gifted pupils to learn alongside older pupils.

School Sport

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to promote sport and PE in schools. [18337]

Mr. Timms: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies I gave on 26 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 459W and 22 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 451W respectively. The number of school sport co-ordinators has now increased to 372.

Nursery Places

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what level of funding has been made available to Leicestershire to provide free nursery places to three-year-olds; and what assessment she has made of the total cost of providing free nursery places for all three-year-olds in Leicestershire by 2004. [18498]

Margaret Hodge: In 2001–02 £3.1 million has been made available to provide 2,638 free nursery education places for three-year-olds in Leicestershire. This level of funding could increase before the end of 2001–02 if Leicestershire receives additional funding in the spring term as a result of its recent bid for additional places.

No assessment has yet been made of the total cost of providing free nursery education places for all three-year-olds in Leicestershire by September 2004. This will be dependent on the demand for places and also the level of provision that the local education authority decides to make available for three-year-olds from its own resources.

Early Years Development Partnerships

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance her Department gives to local education authorities on their relationship with early year development partnerships. [18499]

Margaret Hodge: Strategic guidance is issued to local education authorities and early years development and child care partnerships every two years. This includes guidance on the relationship between the two.

The strategic guidance is supported by implementation guidance issued annually which sets out the operational framework in which the local education authority and early years development and child care partnership should work over the coming year.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance her Department gives to local education authorities about providing additional funding to early year development partnerships to provide free nursery places for all three-year-olds. [18500]

Margaret Hodge: The Department for Education and Skills does not provide guidance to local education authorities on providing additional funding to their early years development and child care partnerships for free nursery education places for three-year-olds. Such spending priorities are determined locally and are at the discretion of the local authority.

In 2001–02 £3.1 million has been made available to provide 2,638 free nursery education places for three-year-olds in Leicestershire. This level of funding could increase before the end of 2001–02, if Leicestershire receives additional funding in the spring term as a result of its recent bid for additional places.

Teacher Vacancies

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the source was of the figures she used which illustrate the gap between the supply and demand of teachers in her speech on the social market function. [18345]

Mr. Timms: The graph on page 11 of my social market foundation pamphlet shows two columns for 2001. The lower figure of 410,000 is the number of teachers in post. The higher figure, of some 435,000, includes vacancies and occasional teachers covering for other teachers. The figures are drawn from the publication "Statistical First Release on Teachers in Service and Teacher Vacancies"—the latest edition is for April 2001, and this is in the House of Commons Library and on the DfES website. The final column for 2006 is a projection based on recent trends.

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there were in Bedfordshire in October *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [19736]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available for the dates requested. Full-time teacher vacancies in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools reported by the Bedfordshire local authority were as follows:

Date	*Vacancies*
January 1998	26
January 2001	76

School Finance

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Government initiatives offer additional funding which require schools to lodge specific applications. [19404]

Mr. Timms: Schools are required to lodge specific applications for the following initiatives, which attract additional funding:

Teachers' Threshold Grant

Teachers' Performance Pay Progression Grant

Welcome Back Bonuses

Golden Hellos

Grammar School/Non-selective School Partnerships

Training Schools

Specialist Schools

Grant Maintained School Transitional Grant for Insurance

Capital funding for Voluntary Aided Schools.

Most other additional funding is allocated and paid to local education authorities through the standards fund: they must devolve around 75 per cent. of the grant to their schools to spend according to their own needs and priorities. It is for authorities and schools to agree the particular arrangements for allocating the grant to schools. Almost all standards fund grants are allocated to LEAs on a formula basis and the Government expect LEAs to devolve grants to schools by a fair formula, in which case schools should not have to apply for grant.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of total school spending in England and Wales is spent on schemes and improvements instigated by her Department. [19343]

Mr. Timms: The table shows the total national SSA allocation and total national grant funding for schools in England in 2001–02.

	£ million
National SSA Allocation: 2001–02	
Total SSA	[1]22,512.900
National Grant Funding for Schools: 2001–02	
Standards Fund revenue	1,524.810
School Standards Grant	600.306
Education Budget Support Grant	52.000
Education Action Zones	58.400
Teachers Pay Reform Grant	[2]—
Transitional Funding (former GM Schools)	9.600
Capital	1,818.404
Total	4,063.520

[1] Including support for Early Years, Youth Service and other non-school spending by local education authorities

[2] The figures will not be known for a while, but Threshold costs for each academic year are expected to be in the region of £450 million

Schools and local education authorities have the freedom to decide how to spend their education budget support grant and school standards grant. Schools also have considerable freedom over the use of their standards fund allocations.

Funding for schools in Wales is the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of total school spending in England and Wales is allocated to teacher salaries and related costs. [19379]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is responsible for England only. The latest available data are for the financial year 1999–2000. The proportion of total spending on teacher salaries and related costs in pre-primary and primary schools is 62 per cent., and 66 per cent. for secondary schools.

Teacher Housing

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent discussions she has had with local authorities on teacher housing; and if she will make a statement. [18886]

Mr. Timms: Officials and Ministers are in regular contact with local education authorities on a range of issues concerning teachers including housing. Policy on key worker housing is a matter for the Department for Transport Local Government and the Regions (DTLR). Officials and Ministers in this Department work closely with DTLR colleagues to deliver programme such as the starter home initiative which will provide over 3,500 teachers with help to buy their first home.

Autistic Spectrum Disorders

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to increase funding allocated to deal with children diagnosed with difficulties in the autistic spectrum disorders. [18910]

Mr. Timms: Funding is not made available for specific categories of special educational need. Rather, funding is allocated and distributed via local education authorities (LEAs), which have a duty to provide appropriately for all children in their area. This includes the duty to identify children's individual special educational needs and to deliver the most appropriate provision to meet those needs.

More than £23 billion is available annually for the education of school children, including children with special educational needs. Over £1 billion of this is used by LEAs to provide additional support for children with special educational needs.

We have also made £91 million of supported expenditure available for special educational needs in next year's standards fund (2002–03). This is five times the amount available in 1997–98. The fund can be used for a range of activities, including training for staff in special educational needs, improvements in speech and language therapy provision for children with communication difficulties and the greater inclusion of children with SEN in the mainstream. This latter includes early intervention for pupils with SEN, training on child development and behaviour management, and improved links between special and mainstream schools.

Domestic Violence

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance she provides to schools to help education professionals identify students affected by the impact of domestic violence. [19099]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Children who experience or witness domestic violence can suffer in many ways, and the education service has a significant role to play in identifying these and children who are at risk of harm, or who are in need. We issued guidance to all schools about their role in identifying the needs of children affected by a range of difficulties, including domestic violence, in 1995.

My officials are in the process of reviewing and updating that guidance to reflect the guidance in "Working together to Safeguard Children", the Government's most recent guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Among other things, this stresses that everyone working with children should be alert to the frequent interrelationship between domestic violence and the abuse and neglect of children. These messages will be reflected in the updated guidance to schools that my Department will issue next year.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what support she offers to education professionals to help them deal with the impact of domestic violence on their students. [19100]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department's guidance to schools about their role in protecting children strongly advises that all schools should have an appropriately trained designated teacher who is known to all staff. Designated teachers provide support and guidance on child protection issues to other education staff. They also liaise with other agencies, including social services and the police, to safeguard the best interests of children.

In addition, from next September schools will introduce the new curriculum subject "Personal, Social and Health Education and Citizenship". Within this subject there is scope to discuss domestic violence in a safe environment, including how families deal with it and where to go for help.

Education Action Zones

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information she has on which schools, in education action zones in which McDonald's has been a partner, have used that company's schools resource packs. [19107]

Mr. Timms: We hold no information on which schools in education action zones have used McDonald's schools resource packs.

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in which education action zones McDonald's has been a partner. [19108]

Mr. Timms: Two education action zones (EAZs), Weston and Ellesmere Port, have franchisees of McDonald's as partners on their zones' action forum.

The EAZs listed have McDonald's as a sponsor and contributor for cash and in-kind donations:

Statutory EAZs

Herefordshire EAZ
Newcastle EAZ
North East Lincolnshire—Grimsby EAZ
Plymouth EAZ
South Tyneside EAZ
Breightmet and Tonge (Bolton) EAZ
Bridgwater EAZ
Dingle, Granby and Toxteth EAZ
Downham and Bellingham EAZ
Dudley EAZ
East Manchester EAZ
Gillingham EAZ
North Stockton EAZ
North West Shropshire EAZ
Preston EAZ
Speke Garston EAZ

Excellence in Cities (EiC) Action Zones

Barking Gateway to Excellence EiC Action Zone
Liverpool—EXCITE EiC Action Zone
Liverpool—North Deanery EiC Action Zone
Willington—North Tyneside EiC Action Zone.

Student Loans

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what facility exists to pay off the outstanding balance on a student loan. [19811]

Margaret Hodge: Borrowers can pay off the outstanding balance on their student loans direct to the Student Loans Company at any time. Borrowers who wish to do so are advised to contact the SLC to arrange the most appropriate way to make the payments.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to require the Student Loans Company to issue regular statements to individuals about the outstanding balance, repayments made and the projected term of the loan. [19813]

Margaret Hodge: Borrowers under the pre-1998 scheme (mortgage style loans) receive annual statements from the Student Loans Company. They sign a loan agreement which sets out the repayment terms—five years for less than five loans and seven years for five or more loans.

For borrowers under the new income-contingent loans scheme, repayment is collected by their employers through deductions from their earnings, in line with tax and national insurance contributions. These borrowers will get a statement from the SLC after the end of the tax year, once the SLC has received details of their repayments from the Inland Revenue.

Self-employed borrowers would receive their statements after the end of the tax year as long as they made their self-assessment returns to the Inland Revenue on time.

Loan repayments under the income contingent scheme rise or fall with earnings. They do not, therefore, have a projected repayment term.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to improve the information available by the Student Loans Company about the balance on an individual's outstanding loan. [19814]

Margaret Hodge: Borrowers under the pre-1998 scheme (mortgage style loans) can contact the Student Loans Company at any time to obtain information on their outstanding loan.

For borrowers under the new income-contingent loan scheme, repayments are collected by their employers, through deductions from their earnings, in line with tax and national insurance contributions.

These borrowers will get a statement from the SLC after the end of the tax year. This will happen after the SLC has received details of their repayments from the Inland Revenue.

Self-employed borrowers would receive their statements after the end of the tax year as long as they make their self-assessment returns to the Inland Revenue on time.

My officials are currently working with the SLC to find better ways of providing account updates for income contingent loan borrowers, in particular to ensure that repayments are stopped as soon as the loan is repaid.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many student loans have been issued; and what is the total value of student loans issued, broken down by each LEA area. [20193]

Margaret Hodge: In academic year 2000–01, there were 648,500 loans to the value of £1,920.8 million issued to students normally domiciled in England and Wales. Information broken down by LEA area is not held centrally, but we are asking the Student Loans Company to write to the hon. Gentleman further on this.

Education Initiatives

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many statutory *(a)* plans and *(b)* reports (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools complete annually; [19403]

(2) how many new education initiatives that require action by head teachers have been launched by her Department in the current financial year. [19708]

Mr. Timms: Primary and secondary schools are statutorily required to produce each year a report from the governing body for parents, a report for parents on their children's achievements, and an annual budget plan. Since the start of April 2001, the Department for Education and Skills has sent primary schools 20 documents for action of which nine were new, and secondary schools 22 documents for action of which nine were new.

Sex Discrimination (Single-faith Schools)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will ensure that existing sex discrimination legislation is enforced in respect of single-faith schools. [19630]

Mr. Timms: All schools in the maintained sector are already required to comply with existing sex discrimination legislation.

Departmental Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects to spend the £1.44 billion that was allocated to her Department for 2000–01 but not spent. [19528]

Estelle Morris: Of the £1.44 billion available in end-year flexibility from the former Department for Education and Employment, my Department has so far drawn down £584 million to spend this year and transferred £326 million to the Department for Work and Pensions. The remaining funds have been allocated and will be drawn down when needed.

"Curriculum Online"

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will publish the Government's conclusions following the consultation paper, "Curriculum Online"; and if she will make a statement. [19609]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The consultation paper "Curriculum Online" closed on 1 July; we received 159 responses, which have now been analysed. We are considering the responses and are currently making arrangements for publication shortly.

In summary, the responses demonstrated widespread support for the Government's vision of a service to provide teachers with easy online access to a consistent, coherent and comprehensive set of digital learning materials to support teaching across the curriculum.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will estimate the total unallocated funds within her departmental expenditure limit *(a)* at the start of the financial year and *(b)* to date; and what was the month seven forecast on outturn underspend against her departmental expenditure limit in (i) real and (ii) percentage terms. [19436]

Estelle Morris: The Department for Education and Employment annual report for 2000–01 (Cm 5102) contains the departmental unallocated provision (DUP) set for the present financial year in table 4.2, under the line entitled "Emergency Reserve".

There has been no draw down of the Department's DUP to date. Outturn against six-month forecast for each request for resources will be published in the winter supplementary estimates summary request for supply as usual.

University Resources

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to include university interaction with the community when assessing the allocation of resources to universities. [19459]

Margaret Hodge: The higher education reach-out to business and the community fund and its successor, the higher education innovation fund, have given higher education institutions (HEIs) the opportunity to apply for funding for interaction with the community.

Furthermore, the higher education active community fund of £27 million will be distributed over three years to HEIs to support volunteering among students and staff. Volunteering helps HEIs to build bridges with their communities; it helps students to gain workplace experience and staff to develop their careers; and it helps voluntary sector organisations gain access to higher level skills and knowledge. The HE active community fund will assist in the creation of 14,000 new volunteering opportunities for HE students and staff.

Additionally, higher education institutions are receiving £57 million of widening participation funding over three years from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) as part of the Government's excellence challenge policy. This money helps institutions to reach out to more young people from communities who do not have a tradition of entering higher education.

Student Drop-outs

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the first year student drop-out rate was in new universities in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000. [19615]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* The available information on non-continuation rates is contained in "Performance Indicators in Higher Education", published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The figures show, for each individual HE institution in the UK, the proportion of entrants to full-time first degree courses who do not continue in higher education beyond the first year. HEFCE also calculates a sector-wide non-continuation rate, but nothing is published for all new universities in aggregate. Copies of the HEFCE publications covering students starting courses in 1996–97 and 1997–98 are available in the House Library; prior to 1996–97, non-continuation rates were not published for individual HEIs.

Primary Schools

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will allow the redesignation of primary schools as three to 11 year-old schools at the request of local education authorities. [20150]

Mr. Timms: Where a local education authority wishes to alter the age range of a community primary school, by a year or more, it must publish notices to do so after consulting all interested parties, in particular the local early years development and child care partnership. If there are no objections and the proposals are not linked to others to be decided by the local school organisation committee, the local education authority may determine to implement them. In other cases it will be for the school organisation committee, or, where the school organisation committee does not reach a unanimous view, the Schools Adjudicator, to decide whether the change can be made. In the case of voluntary or foundation schools it is for the governing body to publish proposals, but the decision-making procedure is otherwise the same. The Secretary of State no longer decides such proposals.

Higher Education Review

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the terms of reference are for the higher education review. [20194]

Margaret Hodge: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out the scope of the current review of higher education in her speech at the London Guildhall university on 22 October 2001.

The review will cover the key areas that form the overall mission of the higher education sector, looking to the longer-term structure of incentives required to ensure that each is resourced and supported. The areas being considered in the review are:

Widening participation

World-class research

Linking universities with industry and communities

Teaching excellence

Management and leadership.

Class Sizes

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what initiatives her Department has in place to reduce class sizes in English secondary schools. [20626]

Mr. Timms: The average size of a secondary class taught by one teacher in England in January 2001 was 22.0. The January 2001 figure also shows that the secondary pupil/teacher ratio improved for the first time in 10 years and now stands at 17.1. The improvement reflects increased Government spending on schools.

Teachers' Pensions

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she intends to make provision for increases in employers' contributions to teachers' pension costs in 2002–03 in her support to education authorities. [19486]

Mr. Timms: In 2002–03 education standard spending will increase by over £1.3 billion, a 6 per cent. rise on this year's figures. The 6 per cent. increase is enough to cover all the cost pressures on local education authorities next year, including the rise in employers' contributions to teachers' pensions.

Specialist Schools

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was raised in sponsorship by each specialist school since its year of designation. [19240]

Mr. Timms: There are no specific requirements for specialist schools to raise sponsorship after designation and we do not keep any records about this.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the average *(a)* pupil-teacher ratio in secondary schools in England and *(b)* pupil-teacher ratio for specialist schools. [19241]

Mr. Timms: The pupil-teacher ratio in maintained secondary schools as at January 2001 was 17.1.

The equivalent figure for maintained secondary specialist schools was 16.9.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the various means of selection used by those specialist schools which select a proportion of their intake; and what advice has been given by her Department on the means of selection which may be used. [19242]

Mr. Timms: We do not hold information on the means of selection. Admission arrangements are set locally by a school's admission authority (local education authorities for community and controlled schools, and the governing body for aided and foundation schools), and this includes deciding how children will be tested for their aptitude for a particular subject. My Department's code of practice on school admissions (1999) advises that:

> "tests used to identify whether a pupil has aptitude for a particular subject should be objective, have a distinctive subject focus, should not discriminate against applicants on the grounds of gender, ethnic origin, disability or family background, and that they must test for the subject aptitude concerned, not for any other aptitude or for ability".

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list those specialist schools which select a proportion of their pupils by aptitude for their specialist subjects; and what percentage of pupils is so selected in each school. [19243]

Mr. Timms: The latest available information is for school year 1999–2000. For that year, specialist schools which had selected a proportion of their pupils by aptitude for a subject or subjects relevant to their specialist designation, together with the percentage of pupils selected in each school, is shown in the table.

Specialist schools: selection by aptitude

Specialism	*School*	*LEA*	*Percentage*
Technology	Archbishop Blanch School	Liverpool	5.6
Technology	Archbishop Temple School	Lancashire	10.0
Language	Bohunt School	Hampshire	10.0
Arts	Brentwood Ursuline Convent School	Essex	10.0
Technology	Chaucer Technology School	Kent	Up to 100
Arts	Chestnut Grove School	Wandsworth	16.0
Technology	Cornwallis School	Kent	10.0
Technology	Deacon's School	Peterborough, City	15.0
Technology	George Spencer GM School	Nottinghamshire	10.0
Technology	Heathside School	Surrey	4.0
Language	Hockerill Anglo European School	Hertfordshire	10.0
Arts	Intake High School	Leeds	10.0
Technology	Lodge Park School	Northamptonshire	10.0
Technology	Lynn Grove VA High School	Norfolk	15.0
Technology	Mill Hill County High School	Barnet, London borough of	10.0
Technology	Ninestiles School	Birmingham	10.0
Sports	Oakbank School	Bradford	10.0
Sports	Oldfield School	Bath and North East Somerset	10.0
Technology	Philip Morant School	Essex	15.0
Technology	Sandwich Technology School	Kent	10.0
Technology	Small Heath School	Birmingham	10.0
Technology	St. Margaret's C of E High School	Liverpool	15.0
Technology	St. Martin's School	Essex	10.0
Arts	St. Marylebone School (The)	Westminster	10.0
Sports	Wye Valley School (The)	Buckinghamshire	10.0

Notes:

This information was taken from progress reports submitted by 403 schools in December 2000. Progress reports for schools operational as of September 2000 are currently being received but the information from these has not yet been collated.

The 1998 School Standards and Framework Act provides for schools with a specialism to select up to 10 per cent. of their intake on the basis of aptitude for a specialist subject prescribed in regulations. Prior to the 1998 Act schools had greater discretion over aptitude selection and this accounts for the percentages above 10 per cent.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many specialist schools *(a)* allow primary schools to use their facilities and *(b)* provide specialist teaching in neighbouring primary schools. [19245]

Mr. Timms: We do not hold collective records of specialist school involvement with primary schools under these headings. However, all specialist schools have arrangements with primary schools whereby the latter benefit from use of the specialist school's facilities or staff time or both.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many specialist schools allow their local community to have free use of the specialist facilities. [19244]

Mr. Timms: We expect every specialist school to have arrangements whereby some members of the local community benefit from the use of some of the school's facilities. We do not collect data on the ways in which this expectation is realised.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many letters her Department received from hon. and right hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. [18560]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament received by ministerial agency chief executives and Departments and agencies, and performance in handling them, is published annually by the Cabinet Office. The most recent report, covering the year 2000, was announced by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office on 6 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 325W. Between 20 June and 20 July 2001, the volume of correspondence received by my Department and percentage of replies within the set target was:

Total volume of ministerial correspondence received: 1,783

Percentage of replies sent within the target: 71 per cent.

Recruitment and Retention Fund

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reason the recruitment and retention fund is limited to two financial years. [19340]

Mr. Timms: Funding of £35 million for the recruitment and retention fund was made available in April and we said that there would be at least that available next year. No decisions have been made concerning the future of the fund.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria were used to allocate the recruitment and retention fund. [19377]

Mr. Timms: The fund was allocated on the basis of vacancy data from the annual census of vacancies conducted each January averaged over the three years 1998–2000.

Terrorism

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much she forecasts will be spent in the current financial year by her Department as a direct result of measures associated with the current action against terrorism. [10951]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The additional costs forecast to be incurred by the Department for Education and Skills on enhanced security measures in the current financial year, as a direct result of measures associated with the current action against terrorism, is £233,783. That figure includes £100,000 for IT network resilience.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Solicitor-General how many letters her Department received from hon. and right hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. [18590]

The Solicitor-General: Information on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament received by ministerial agency chief executives, and Departments and agencies, and performance in handling them is published annually by the Cabinet Office. The most recent report, covering 2000, was announced by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office, on 6 April 2001, *Official Report,* columns 325–27W. Between 20 June and 20 June 2001 a total of 22 letters were received by my Department from hon. and right hon. Members.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Solicitor-General how many and what proportion of letters received by her Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days. [18576]

The Solicitor-General: Of the 22 letters received by my Department from hon. and right hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July, 95 per cent. were replied to in under 15 working days and 100 per cent. were replied to in under 20 working days.

During June and July some 212 letters were received from members of the public and of these 70 per cent. received replies within the target of 20 working days.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Zimbabwe

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations *(a)* his Department and *(b)* international organisations to which the UK belongs, have made to the Government of Zimbabwe on the approval of a Public Order and Security Bill and the operation of free media. [18090]

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Zimbabwe regarding the proposed introduction of a new Public Order and Security Bill in Zimbabwe. [18878]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 28 November 2001]:* The Government of Zimbabwe have said that they plan to table a Public Order and Security Bill, to replace the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act, introduced in 1960. The Bill itself has not yet come before the Zimbabwe Parliament. Discussion at this stage would thus be premature. The early indications are that, if enacted, the Act could have a profoundly negative impact on freedom of expression in Zimbabwe.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many letters his Department received from hon. and right hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. [18561]

Mr. Straw: My Department received 1,349 letters from hon. and right hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July 2001.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many and what proportion of letters received by his Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days. [18581]

Mr. Straw: Of the 1,349 letters received from hon. and right hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July:

(a) 72 per cent. were replied to in under 15 days;

(b) 79 per cent. were replied to in under 20 days;

(c) 81 per cent. were replied to in under 30 days;

(d) 82 per cent. were replied to in under 40 days;

(e) 18 per cent. were replied to in over 40 days.

Joint Entry Clearance Unit

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken *(a)* to assess the extent of and *(b)* to raise awareness of institutional racism with entry clearance officers working for the Joint Entry Clearance Unit. [17988]

Mr. Bradshaw: All correspondence to the Joint Entry Clearance Unit is monitored for allegations of racism. The work of entry clearance officers is scrutinised by the independent monitor, who reports to Parliament on the quality of the decision making process. The Parliamentary Ombudsman can investigate allegations of maladministration, including racism. He has received one such complaint this year, which was unfounded.

All entry clearance staff are trained in race awareness.

Sudan

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Sudan about the recent bombing of civilian and humanitarian facilities in Malualkon, Bahr El Ghazal; and if he will make a statement. [20203]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are aware of recent aerial bombing incidents in Bahr El Ghazal which affected humanitarian operations there. The UN have made strong protests to the Sudanese Government about these incidents. We regularly call on the Government of Sudan, both bilaterally and within the framework of the EU Sudan dialogue, to stop the indiscriminate aerial bombardment of civilian and humanitarian targets. We have urged both sides to stop immediately hostilities in order to create an environment conducive to negotiations and to engage in a continuous and sustained negotiation towards a just and lasting political settlement.

Royal Visits

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions in the past five years members of the Royal Family, other than Her Majesty the Queen, Prince Philip and Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother, have been accommodated *(a)* in the residences of United Kingdom representatives overseas and *(b)* at public expense when primarily involved on private visits overseas. [18378]

Mr. Straw: Members of the Royal Family on private visits overseas may be accommodated at the residences of UK representatives overseas, particularly if security questions are involved, but no consolidated record is kept.

The FCO does not pay hotel and other bills when members of the Royal Family travel privately.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) how many letters her Department received from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July; [18564]

(2) how many and what proportion of letters received by her Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days. [18584]

Clare Short: We received 139 letters from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. Of these, 98 were answered in less than 15 days, 17 in less than 20 days and two in over 40 days. Twenty two letters did not require a response.

Tuvalu

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is making available to the people of Tuvalu. [19251]

Clare Short: DFID does not provide bilateral assistance to Tuvalu. My Department administers a regional programme in the Pacific totalling some £4 million per year, which is inclusive of the poorest Pacific island countries. We work closely with key regional partners including the Form Secretariat, Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC). Given the regional nature of the programme, it is not possible to determine exactly how much of this assistance goes directly to Tuvalu. DFID also contributes to the multilateral programmes maintained by the Asian Development Bank, World bank, the EU and the UN from which Tuvalu benefits.

Animal Health Research

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about the future of the Centre for Tropical Veterinary Medicine at the University of Edinburgh. [20178]

Clare Short: My Department has contracted the Centre for Tropical Veterinary Medicine at the university of Edinburgh to manage our animal health research programme.

We have no responsibility for the future of the centre.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the President of the Council (1) how many letters he received from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July; [18568]

(2) how many and what proportion of letters received by his Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days. [18588]

Mr. Robin Cook: I received 21 letters from hon. and right hon. Members during this period.

Of the total replied to, the information requested is as follows:

(a) 18 (86 per cent.)

(b) 1 (4 per cent.)

(c) 2 (10 per cent.)

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many and what proportion of letters received by his Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days. [18592]

Mr. Leslie: Information on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament, received by agency chief executives and Departments and agencies, and performance in handling them, is published annually by the Cabinet Office. The most recent report, covering the year 2000 was announced by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office on 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 325W.

Within the period 20 June and 20 July 2001 the Cabinet Office received 54 letters from hon. and right hon. Members. Out of these, 20 letters were transferred to other Government Departments or required no response. Of the remaining 34 letters left for the Cabinet Office to reply, *(a)* 27 (80 per cent.) were replied to within the 15 working day target, *(b)* a further five (94 per cent.) letters were replied to within 20 working days and *(c)* the remaining two (100 per cent.) letters were replied to within 30 working days. For *(d)* and *(e)* the Cabinet Office have a 100 per cent. success rate as all letters were replied to within 30 working days.

Information on the volume of other correspondence, including letters from members of the public was published as part of the six service standards for central Government. The report, covering the financial year 2000, is referred to in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) on 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 454–56W, and a copy is available in the Libraries of the House. These types of correspondence are not collected in the format requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many letters his Department received from hon. and right hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. [18574]

Mr. Leslie: Information on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament received by ministerial agency chief executives, and Departments and agencies, and performance in handling them, is published annually by the Cabinet Office. The most recent report, covering 2000, was announced by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office on 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 325W. Between 20 June and 20 July the Cabinet Office received 54 letters from right hon. and hon. Members: to the Department replied to 80 per cent. within the 15 working day target.

Islamic Society of Britain

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what inquiries he made about the credentials, impartiality and political record of the Islamic Society of Britain before signing its Pledge to Muslims on religious tolerance. [14843]

Mr. Leslie: Officials made appropriate inquiries before the Government signed the pledge on religious tolerance.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will state what steps were taken by the Cabinet Secretary to check the credentials, impartiality and political record of the Islamic Society of Britain before signing its Pledge to Muslims on religious tolerance; [14781]

(2) if he will make a statement on the decision by the Cabinet Secretary to sign the Pledge to Muslims on religious tolerance organised by the Islamic Society of Britain. [14780]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1056–57W.

Unallocated Funds

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will estimate the total unallocated funds within his departmental expenditure limit *(a)* at the start of the financial year and *(b)* to date; and what was the month seven forecast on outturn underspend against his departmental expenditure limit in (i) real and (ii) percentage terms. [19435]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office departmental annual report for 2001 (Cm 5119) contains the Cabinet Office Departmental Unallocated Provision (DUP) set for the present financial year in Table 6 on page 87. Draw-down of the DUP was reported to Parliament in June 2001 in the Cabinet Office Summer Supplementary Estimate (Cm 5215).

Outturn against the six month forecast for each Request for Resources will be published in the Winter Supplementary Estimates Summary Request for Supply as usual.

SCOTLAND

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many letters her Department received from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. [18569]

Mrs. Liddell: Information on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament received by ministerial agency chief executives, and Departments and agencies and performance in handling them is published annually by the Cabinet Office. The most recent report, covering 2000, was announced by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office on 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 325W. Between 20 June and 20 July, the volume of correspondence and percentage of replies within the set target was: nine letters and 66.67 per cent. on target.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what proportion of letters received by her Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days. [18597]

Mrs. Liddell: The information is as follows:

(a) 103 letters or 83.7 per cent. replied to in under 15 working days;

(b) 112 letters or 91 per cent. replied to in under 20 working days;

(c) 122 letters or 99.2 per cent. replied to in under 30 working days;

(d) 122 letters or 99.2 per cent. replied to in under 40 working days; and

(e) one letter or 0.8 per cent. replied to in over 40 working days.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by the Scotland Office were the subject of a holding answer in the last three Sessions of Parliament. [20009]

Mrs. Liddell: Approximately 25 per cent. in each of the Sessions December 2000-May 2001; November 1999-November 2000; and November 1998-November 1999.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with Railtrack, since 5 October, concerning the timing of upgrades to the west coast main line. [19984]

Mrs. Liddell: I hope to meet with Railtrack senior management shortly to discuss a range of matters.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Genetically Modified Fish

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the views expressed by the Director General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, on 7 March 2000, in relation to genetic modification of aquatic species and the safety of genetically modified organisms. [6639]

Mr. Meacher: The views of the Director General on genetically modified organisms are expressed in the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation report on the State of the World's Fisheries published in 2000. The Director General's statement says:

> "We have no problem with genetically modified organisms (GMOs) as long as they are proved to be safe to human beings and have no negative impact on the environment. That is a very clear position."

In assessing this statement I agree that safety for human health and the environment is paramount. This is the rationale behind the European Regulatory regime, which prohibits releases of genetically modified organisms into the environment. Directive 90/220 requires that anyone wanting to release genetically modified organisms in any country in the EU must have prior approval subject to a detailed risk assessment.

However this does not mean that there are no problems with the marketing and use of GMOs. In addition to the safety aspects, there are other issues of concern including public acceptance, ethics, liability and socio-economic impacts.

In relation to genetic modification of aquatic species, such as fish, I refer to my recent statements on this topic on 19 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 77W and on 20 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 198W.

White Goods Disposal

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what grounds a local authority can refuse to take away used white goods where no other form of waste disposal exists. [17888]

Mr. Meacher: Waste collection authorities can refuse to take away only those used white goods that are classified as 'commercial' waste. They may arrange to collect and dispose of such waste, if approached by commercial traders, but they are not obliged to. Waste collection authorities have a statutory duty to arrange for the collection of household waste. However, they are entitled to impose a charge for collection for certain items, set out in Schedule 2 to the Controlled Waste Regulations 1992.

Waste disposal authorities have a statutory duty, under section 51(1) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, to provide reasonably accessible sites where householders can dispose of their waste free of charge but they may restrict the availability of specified sites to specified descriptions of waste.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations her Department has received from *(a)* retailers, *(b)* local authorities and *(c)* environmental groups regarding EC Regulation 2037/2000 and its implementation in the UK. [17891]

Mr. Meacher: My Department has received a number of representations from retailers, local authorities and environmental groups concerning EC Regulation 2037/2000. More recently we have received representations regarding the collection and disposal of domestic fridges and freezers from retailers and local authorities, in particular through a number of stakeholder meetings, hosted by DEFRA and DTI.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps have been taken to ensure that there are alternative recycling routes for used fridges and freezers. [17900]

Mr. Meacher: The Department, and the DTI, have hosted a number of stakeholder meetings to discuss the maintenance of existing systems for householders wishing to dispose of old fridges and freezers. Local authorities have statutory duties to accept and collect household waste, including bulky waste.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many used fridges and freezers have been taken back for recycling by UK retailers in 2001 prior to 17 November. [17893]

Mr. Meacher: My Department does not hold this information. We would estimate that 1.3 million fridges and freezers have been taken back by UK retailers in 2001 prior to 17 November. However, we do not know what proportion was recycled.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans there are to build a recycling plant capable of removing CFCs from fridges and freezers under EC regulation 2037/2000. [17892]

Mr. Meacher: I understand that a number of commercial companies intend to invest in plant in the UK.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress is being made in respect of *(a)* finalising measures to manage waste refrigeration equipment and *(b)* announcing assistance and advice for local councils consequent upon the impact of EC regulation 2037/2000. [18556]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 28 November 2001]:* The Department has written to all local authorities in England informing them of the requirements regarding the recycling/disposal of fridges under the regulation. A further letter will be issued shortly to remind local authorities of their obligations to receive and collect waste refrigeration equipment from householders. Guidance on storage of waste refrigeration equipment has been issued in draft. An announcement, on financial assistance for local authorities, will be made shortly.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance has been issued to local authorities informing them of their obligation to meet EC regulation 2037/2000 when storing and recycling used goods. [17889]

Mr. Meacher: The Department wrote to all local authorities in England informing them of the provisions of the regulation. A further letter will be issued to remind local authorities of their obligations to receive and collect waste refrigeration equipment from householders. Guidance on storage of waste refrigeration equipment has been issued in draft and will be finalised shortly.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department is taking to ensure that the UK conforms to EC regulation 2037/2000. [17895]

Mr. Meacher: My Department and the DTI have published three guidance booklets covering the requirements of EC regulation 2037/2000. More recently both Departments have hosted a number of stakeholder meetings to discuss the management of waste refrigeration units. My Department has been liaising with the Environment Agency to develop guidance on the standards for extracting CFCs form insulation foam in fridges, and on the storage of waste fridges and freezers, pending treatment. Draft guidance on these issues has been issued and will be finalised shortly. A statutory instrument to assign regulatory functions and to set out offences and penalties has been drafted and is expected to come into force in the new year.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance she has issued on the safe disposal of goods containing CFCs as required by EC regulation 2037/2000. [17901]

Mr. Meacher: My Department has already issued draft guidance on the extraction of CFCs from fridges and freezers, and draft guidance on the storage of waste refrigeration equipment, prior to CFC extraction. These will be issued in final form shortly. Information for householders on safe disposal of fridges and freezers will also be issued.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions her Department has had with European recycling plants in preparation for the implementation of EC regulation 2037/2000 on 1 January 2002. [17894]

Mr. Meacher: Officials from the Department have had a number of meetings with representatives from a recycling company in Germany. Representatives of the German industry more recently attended the stakeholder meetings hosted by DEFRA and have been consulted on draft guidance and standards for CFC removal.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice she has issued to local authorities on the maximum charges that can be levied on consumers for collecting bulky appliances from private residences. [17890]

Mr. Meacher: No advice has been issued to waste collection authorities on the maximum charges that can be levied on consumers for the collection of bulky appliances from private residences. Charges are to be set to recover a local authority's costs but not to make a profit and are a matter for the authority concerned.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funding is being made available for local authorities to re-process end-of-life refrigerators under the Draft Environmental Protection (Control of Ozone Depleting Substances) Regulations 2001. [18173]

Mr. Meacher: An announcement on financial assistance for local authorities will be made shortly.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the storage facilities that local authorities, as waste disposal authorities, will need in order to re-process end-of-life refrigerators under the Draft Environmental Protection (Control of Ozone Depleting Substances) Regulations 2001. [18172]

Mr. Meacher: Local authorities will need to store waste refrigeration units until suitable processing facilities come on-line. The number that will require storage prior to recycling is dependent on the construction of suitable facilities for the recovery of ozone depleting substances. Some of these could be operational as early as spring 2002. Guidance on the storage of waste refrigeration units has been issued in draft and will be finalised shortly.

Critical Sewers

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance she gives to water companies on the expected asset life of critical sewers; and what action she will take to ensure that critical sewers are replaced before they fail completely. [18081]

Mr. Meacher: In 1998 in "Raising the Quality" the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions gave guidance that water and sewerage companies should maintain their assets in a way which will deliver a high standard of serviceability to customers and the environment. Ofwat has identified this as an area for companies to include in their draft business plans for the 2004 periodic review of prices. The water industry, Ofwat and the Environment Agency are working together on the assessment of future capital maintenance needs, for the review. Asset lives are a factor in this.

Nuclear Risk Assessment (France)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the dangers of a civil emergency arising out of nuclear contamination consequent upon a nuclear accident in France; and if she will make a statement. [18198]

Mr. Meacher: No specific assessment of the risk of nuclear contamination as a result of an accident in France has been made. However, the UK has arrangements in place for co-ordinating the response to any overseas nuclear accident that may occur. These arrangements include a bilateral agreement with France and were fully tested in May 2001 as part of a joint international exercise based upon a nuclear accident at Gravelines nuclear power station, situated on the French coast. Further tests and exercises are conducted on a regular basis throughout the year to consider various nuclear accident conditions.

Energy Efficiency

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 26 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 409W, on energy efficiency, (1) what analysis of overall percentage improvements in domestic energy efficiency is required before figures for those overall percentage improvements can be published; and when she intends to publish the figures; [18732]

(2) what the closing date was for the energy conservation authorities to report their energy efficiency improvements to 31 March. [18731]

Mr. Meacher: Energy conservation authorities were asked to submit their fifth annual progress reports to 31 March 2001 to their region's Government office, by 31 August this year. While many met the deadline, a large number did not.

Before publishing the overall reported percentage improvement, we check that each report has been completed fully and accurately, going back to the authority with questions if necessary. Until we have done this for all authorities—around 350—and provided written feedback to each on this year's performance, we are not in a position to publish the reported percentage improvement.

We have nearly completed our analysis and expect to publish this information early next year.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of her Department's budget is spent on promoting energy saving. [17430]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* The Department is responsible for energy efficiency. The latest complete figures available relate to the predecessor Department (DETR) in the financial year 2000–01. The funding made available to support and promote energy efficiency in 2000–01 totalled about £163.5 million, 6 per cent. of that Department's programme expenditure.

The major elements of expenditure were on the energy efficiency best practice programme, support for the Energy Saving Trust and the home energy efficiency scheme.

DEFRA funding in this financial year for energy efficiency is likely to be in the region of £220 million. This includes £50 million for the work of the Carbon Trust.

Packaging

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made in encouraging companies to reduce packaging. [19054]

Mr. Meacher: The EC Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste—94/62/EC—was implemented in Great Britain by the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 (as amended).

The regulations require businesses who deal with packaging to recover and recycle specified tonnages of packaging waste, calculated by the amount of packaging handled by the business. Businesses can reduce their obligation by using less and reusing packaging whenever possible. By increasing the amount reused producers are able to reduce the tonnages of packaging waste they are required to recover and so lessen their costs of compliance.

The recovery and recycling targets for 2001 under the packaging regulations are 56 per cent. for recovery and 18 per cent. for material-specific recycling of packaging waste. Data received to date suggest that, if businesses meet their obligations, these targets should be met.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the timetable to publish the implementation of European Commission packaging directives. [19050]

Mr. Meacher: The EC Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste—94/62/EC—came into force in 1994. The Directive was implemented in Great Britain by the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997.

We are currently awaiting a proposal from the European Commission for revised targets to be met in 2006.

Waterways

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the report of the freight study group on the potential usage of the waterway system for the carriage of freight [19530]

Mr. Meacher: The report of the Freight Study Group is expected early in the new year.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what arrangements her Department has for co-ordinating policy relating to canals with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. [19531]

Mr. Meacher: We recognise the need for close liaison between DEFRA and DTLR on issues of common interest relating to canals. As a consequence the Freight Study Group will report to both Departments, and respective Ministers received a joint briefing recently from the chairman of the Freight Study Group.

River Quality

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 517W, on river quality, what chemical levels of *(a)* biochemical oxygen demand and *(b)* concentrations of dissolved (i) oxygen and (ii) ammonia are deemed to be (A) good, (B) fair, (C) poor and (D) bad in the Environment Agency's general quality assessment scheme for rivers. [19237]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* The Environment Agency's General Quality Assessment (GQA) scheme assigns stretches of rivers and canals to one of six quality grades (ranging from A for water of very good quality to F for water which is of bad quality) based on the monitoring results for biochemical oxygen demand and concentrations of dissolved oxygen and ammonia. The overall grade is that of the poorest of the three determinants. The grade classes are expressed as percentiles as set out in the table.

Standards for the chemical GQA

GQA grade	*Dissolved oxygen (% saturation) 10-percentile*	*Biochemical oxygen demand (mg/l) 90-percentile*	*Ammonia (mgN/l) 90-percentile*
A (very good)	80	2.5	0.25
B (good)	70	4	0.6
C (fairly good)	60	6	1.3
D (fair)	50	8	2.5
E (poor)	20	15	9.0
F (bad)	less than 20	—	—

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many and what proportion of letters received by her Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days. [18577]

Mr. Morley: Information on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament received by ministerial agency chief executives, and departments and agencies and performance in handling them is published annually by the Cabinet Office. The most recent report covering 2000, was announced by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office on 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 325W. Between 20 June and 20 July 2001, the volume of correspondence and percentage of replies within the set target was:

Letters received: 718

8 per cent. received replies within 15 working days;

7 per cent. received replies within 20 working days;

13 per cent. received replies within 30 working days;

3 per cent. received replies within 40 working days;

17 per cent. received replies over 40 working days.

The Department keeps a central log of ministerial cases only and so this figure does not include letters received in this period that were dealt with by officials.

We are working hard to ensure the Department's record is improved and the targets met. The Department has suffered severe disruption due to allocating top priority to defeating the foot and mouth epidemic. I accept this is not an adequate excuse for not giving hon. Members good service and now that normality is returning to the Department one of our urgent priorities is to rectify any weakness in our service delivery.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many letters her Department received from hon. and right hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. [18589]

Mr. Morley: Information on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament received by ministerial agency chief executives, and Departments and agencies and performance in handling them is published annually by the Cabinet Office. The most recent report covering 2000, was announced by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office on 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 325W. Between 20 June and 20 July 2001, the number of letters received was 718. The Department keeps a central log of ministerial cases only and so this figures does not include letters received in this period that was dealt with by officials.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of 12 September from the hon. Member for Hexham regarding assistance to Tyredale council to promote tourism. [20028]

Alun Michael: A response to the hon. Member's letter of 12 September has been sent today.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the efficiency and promptness of her Department's staff in responding to correspondence received from hon. Members; and if she will make a statement. [20025]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to all Members on 14 November setting out her assessment of the current problems faced by the correspondence section. The Department suffered severe disruption due to allocating top priority to defeating the foot and mouth epidemic. On top of this the sheer volume of correspondence received since the creation of DEFRA has had a severe impact on the section. I accept this is not an adequate excuse for not giving hon. Members good service, and now that normality is returning to the Department one of our urgent priorities is to rectify any weakness in our service delivery.

The size of the section has increased threefold and the management strengthened; our IT systems are in the process of being improved, and new guidance and training is being rolled out throughout the Department. We hope that this will bear fruit in the very near future.

Rural White Paper

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W, on the rural White Paper, if she will make a statement on clarifying guidance on best and most versatile land. [20151]

Alun Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Planning and Construction on 21 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 253–55W. This included an amendment to guidance in Planning Policy Guidance note 7 (PPG7), "The Countryside—Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development", on best and most versatile agricultural land. Decisions about the development or protection of such land are for local planning authorities to take in accordance with that guidance. The guidance is on DTLR's website at www.planning.dtlr.gov.uk/policy.htm.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W, on the rural White Paper, what proportion has been allocated and which organisations have received funding from the community service grants schemes in 2001–02. [20140]

Alun Michael: The Countryside Agency has allocated £1.5 million for expenditure on Community Service grants for this financial year.

I have today deposited in the Library of the House a list of organisations that have received funding under the scheme.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W, on the rural White Paper, if she will outline the work done to date on the Countryside Agency's policy-maker's checklist and the extent of consultation during this process. [20155]

Alun Michael: The Policy Makers' Rural Proofing Checklist was published by the Countryside Agency on 24 April 2001. It followed consultation by the Countryside Agency with Government Departments and a number of other interested organisations, including the Local Government Association, the Country Land and Business Association and the Council for Protection of Rural England. The Checklist is available on the Countryside Agency's website at: www.countryside.gov.uk

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W, on the rural White Paper, how many communities have received support from the parish plans fund in 2001–02; and what amount they have received. [20141]

Alun Michael: To date 243 parish and town councils have registered an interest to produce a plan. 72 have been made a formal offer of grant and 44 parishes have received funding. A list of those parishes has been deposited in the Library of the House today.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W, on the rural White Paper, when the consultation paper on quality parish and town councils will be published. [20152]

Alun Michael: The consultation paper on quality town and parish councils was published on 7 November 2001. Copies of the consultation paper were placed in the Vote Office and I wrote to each Member of Parliament enclosing a copy of the consultation paper.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W, on the rural White Paper, which market towns have received funding from the regeneration programme in 2001–02. [20143]

Alun Michael: Regional development agencies and their partners have agreed 112 towns for inclusion in the market towns initiative and most of these will have received some degree of support in 2001–02 depending on the stage they have reached in the consultation, planning and implementation process. The agreed list of 112 market towns has been deposited in the Library of the House today.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many asylum applications have been granted in each of the past two years in Northern Ireland; and how many applications await adjudication; [18859]

(2) how many asylum seekers have sought refuge in Northern Ireland in the last two years broken down by *(a)* gender, *(b)* adult/child status, *(c)* country of origin and *(d)* country from which they entered the UK. [18858]

Angela Eagle: Information on asylum applications and decisions in Northern Ireland is unavailable. Asylum applications data are not available at regional level except by port of application. Corresponding information on initial decisions relating to regional applications is also unavailable. The requested information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case records.

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of suspected terrorists who he expects to be detained under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill; and if he will make a statement. [18850]

Mr. Blunkett: It would not be right for me to provide estimates at this stage but as the Prime Minister stated during oral questions on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 854, our assessment is that the power will be required

> "only in a small number of cases".

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library copies of legal advice, received by his Department, which relates to the obligation to respect private lives of individuals and the provisions specified in clauses 17 to 19 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill. [17194]

Mr. Blunkett: No. Such advice falls within the category described in Part II, section 4(d) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information and will not be disclosed.

Suspicious Financial Transactions

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many referrals relating to suspicious financial transactions have been referred to NCIS in each of the last three years; and how many prosecutions have resulted. [17916]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 203W.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for increasing the numbers of asylum decisions. [16923]

Angela Eagle: Increasing the number of asylum decisions was a public service agreement (PSA) target in the years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 but is not a PSA target in 2001–02. Outturn in 2000–01 was 132,840 against a target in the range 130,000 to 150,000.

Correspondence

Derek Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will instruct the Integrated Casework Directorate of the Immigration and Nationality Department to acknowledge the letters from the hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup dated 13 August, 2 October and 26 October concerning Yuliya Smirnova, his reference S.1042831. [16837]

Angela Eagle: My officials wrote to the hon. Member on 22 November. I am sorry for the delay in replying. The Integrated Casework Directorate (ICD) stopped automatically sending acknowledgements of receipt of Members' representations addressed to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) Board about 12 months ago. However, it is ICD's policy to acknowledge the receipt of applications and other casework-related correspondence where an acknowledgement is requested.

Muslim Fundamentalism

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the level of support for Muslim fundamentalism within the United Kingdom. [16409]

Angela Eagle: The total Muslim population in the United Kingdom is estimated to be between one and one and a half million. The number of people supporting what might be described as a "Muslim fundamentalist" view is impossible to assess, as it will depend on precisely how the term is interpreted. But support within the Muslim community for what might be regarded as extreme Islamist views is commonly judged to be small.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of the continuing threat of Muslim fundamentalist terrorism in Britain after the destruction of the bin Laden organisation in Afghanistan. [17029]

Mr. Blunkett: There have been a number of public threats made by bin Laden and his supporters against Western interests since 11 September.

While we do not comment on intelligence, we believe the overall level of threat to the United Kingdom has remained at the heightened level identified immediately post 11 September. We believe that attacks against the United States remain bin Laden's priority. We do of course keep these issues under review.

European Arrest Warrant

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the Government's policy on protection of the principle of speciality in the Council Framework Decision on the European arrest warrant; and if he will make a statement. [20147]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The United Kingdom (UK) does not intend, generally, to apply the dual criminality test to requests made to the UK authorities under the provisions of a European arrest warrant, and therefore would not, generally, expect to apply the rule of specialty in a case where a person is surrendered by the UK to another European Union member state.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his intention to apply the dual criminality test to offences listed under Article 2.4 in the Belgian Presidency's draft text of the Framework Decision on a European arrest warrant; and if he will make a statement. [20149]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Draft Article 2.4 of the Framework Decision allows the executing member state to decide whether to apply the dual criminality test, and this point will be finalised in the legislation necessary to implement the Framework Decision.

The Government will reflect on this, in particular, whether it should retain the dual criminality test for abortion and euthanasia.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to include in the Framework Decision on the European arrest warrant power for a person who is due to be extradited to oppose their extradition on the grounds that their human rights under the ECHR would not be protected by the requesting country; and if he will make a statement. [20154]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Framework Decision is intended to create a system enabling faster procedures for surrender of a fugitive as between European Union member states. Protection for the individual is provided in the domestic incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) in the issuing state's criminal justice system, rather than before courts in the United Kingdom (UK). This is the principle of mutual recognition on the basis of which we would similarly expect our EU partners to return those we want to bring to our courts to stand trial.

The question of compatibility with ECHR rights will be addressed again by the Government as part of the legislative process to implement the Framework Decision. It is conceivable that there may be a wholly exceptional case in which the UK courts may judge that there is a risk of treatment, on return of a fugitive to an EU member state, that is incompatible with the ECHR. Under those circumstances, the District Judge could refuse to execute a request for a European arrest warrant.

Kainos Wings

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has given the Prison Service regarding the closure of Kainos wings; and if he will make a statement. [19608]

Beverley Hughes: None. The closure of the Kainos wings is properly within the discretion of the Prison Service Management Board.

Sense in Sentencing

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many responses his Department has received following its consultation, Sense in Sentencing; and if he will list those who have responded. [18511]

Beverley Hughes: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Home Department, on 21 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 355W, which gave details of the level of response to the consultation on the Halliday report, 'Making Punishments Work'. Those who have responded will be listed in the summary of responses to be published at the end of January 2002.

Young Offenders Institutions

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the number of *(a)* mentally and *(b)* personality disordered prisoners now held in young offenders institutions. [16313]

Beverley Hughes: The table shows the principal findings for young people aged 16 to 20 in a survey of the prevalence of mental ill health in the prison population of England and Wales carried out in 1997 by the Office for National Statistics. The report of this survey, 'Psychiatric Morbidity among Prisoners' was published in 1998. A second report, 'Psychiatric Morbidity among Young Offenders in England and Wales', which contains further analysis of the data from the survey, was published in 2000.

Percentage

	Remanded young men	*Sentenced young men*	*Sentenced young women*
Functional psychosis in the past year[1]	8	10	[2]9
Neurotic disorder in past week[3]	52	41	67
Hazardous drinking in year before imprisonment	62	70	51
Drug dependence in year before imprisonment	57	52	58
Personality disorder[1]	84	88	[2]84

[1] From clinical interview

[2] Probable diagnosis identified during lay interview

[3] From lay interview

Immigration Hotline

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will improve the quality of service of the hon. Members' hotline for immigration matters. [18272]

Angela Eagle: The hotline was set up to deal with representations in general non-asylum cases which involve urgent or compelling compassionate circumstances. It currently deals with about 500 calls a week.

The number of operators has recently been increased to 10 to offer a rapid response to hon. Members.

Drug Treatment and Testing Orders

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the cost to public funds in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 of drug treatment and testing orders. [17330]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 28 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 956W.

Terrorism Act

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been arrested under the Terrorism Act 2000 since its enactment in connection with *(a)* Northern Ireland-related terrorism and *(b)* international terrorism; how many of each have been subject to extended detention; on how many occasions an extension order was refused; and how many individuals in each category have been (i) charged under the Act, (ii) charged with other offences and (iii) subject to other procedures. [17764]

Mr. Blunkett: The Terrorism Act 2000 came into force on 19 February 2001. I refer my hon. Friend to the following table.

	Great Britain	*Northern Ireland*
S41 arrests/detentions		
Irish terrorism	14	93
International terrorism	71	0
Total	85	93
Extensions of detention		
Irish-related cases	11	8
International related cases	11	0
Applications refused	0	1
Charges		

	Great Britain	*Northern Ireland*
Terrorist related offences	15	11
Other offences	12	17
Immigration procedures	13	0

Dual Nationals

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take powers to collect statistics relating to the number of UK citizens with dual nationality with *(a)* Pakistan, *(b)* Bangladesh and *(c)* India. [17359]

Angela Eagle: Information that is currently collected relates to the number of persons granted British citizenship; the number of persons who were granted British citizenship in the United Kingdom in 2000 whose previous nationality was Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Indian is given in the table.

Previous nationality[1]	*Grants of British citizenship in 2000*
Pakistani	8,631
Bangladeshi	5,380
Indian	8,135

[1] Nationality possessed (or main nationality in cases of dual nationality) immediately before acquiring British citizenship

It would not be possible or viable for the Home Office to collect information on the number of United Kingdom citizens with dual nationality as part of the process of applying for citizenship, since it would not be possible to determine the number of persons who renounced or retained their previous nationality.

At present there are no plans to collect the information requested.

Passports

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional steps he is taking to make UK passports more difficult to *(a)* forge and *(b)* alter; and if he will make a statement. [17416]

Angela Eagle: The Government take very seriously the security and integrity of the United Kingdom passport. The United Kingdom Passport Service works very closely with the Immigration Service and other agencies to monitor the incidence of attempted forgery and manipulation of United Kingdom passports.

The new digital British passport which the United Kingdom Passport Service has been using since October 1998 contains advanced security features to prevent forgery and alteration. These include a digital image of the holder's portrait and signature on the personal identification page of the passport which has been moved from the back cover to the last page of the passport. Both of these changes are designed to increase protection against portrait substitution.

The personal identification page is also protected by a clear plastic laminate which incorporates a holographic device, and a series of laser perforations. In seeking to fully protect the passport special attention has also been paid to the component materials, and special printing techniques have been applied to the page designs.

The design of the passport and the special security features incorporated within that design are kept under constant review.

Asian Community Functions

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the Asian community functions *(a)* he and *(b)* his Ministers have attended since 7 June. [18744]

Mr. Blunkett: I attended the Asian community 30th Anniversary of Gujurat Samachar (Asian Voice) event on 31 October, which took place at the HoC. I also visited the Industry Road Mosque in Sheffield on 5 October. In addition I and several of my Ministers have had a large number of meetings with representatives of the Asian faiths as well as chairing meetings of the Race Relations Forum and speaking at the Ethnic Minority Network Conference organised by my Department. Ministers within my Department who have attended specific functions are as follows.

10 October: Keith Bradley Asian Community Celebratory Event in Manchester

29 September: John Denham Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR) in London.

Heather Arnold

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will determine the parole application of Heather Arnold. [13921]

Beverley Hughes: The Parole Board has considered Mrs. Arnold's case and has made a recommendation. In line with normal practice, the Secretary of State will need to consider whether the Parole Board's recommendation may be accepted. The Secretary of State will make a decision on this case as soon as possible.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Community Legal Service

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of advice providers listed in the Community Legal Service Directory have failed to make a positive commitment in writing to the aims and objectives of the Community Legal Service and to commit to making a Quality Mark application by the deadline of October; and if she will break these figures down (i) with reference to type of advice provided, (ii) with reference to client group and (iii) excluding legal firms. [18846]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are 9,878 organisations listed in the current Community Legal Service Directory (3rd Edition) and 7,112 (72 per cent.) have either made an application or have obtained the Quality Mark. Of the remaining 2,766 (28 per cent.), most have made a formal commitment in writing to apply for the Quality Mark by October 2001 but a small number have not applied. The organisations who failed to meet the October deadline may write to the Legal Services Commission setting out the reasons why they were unable to apply by that date and consideration will be given as to whether or not to accept the application.

The Legal Services Commission is working with the London Learning and Skills Council to help support small and ethnic groups achieve the Quality Mark. A pilot is being run in two London boroughs and includes disability groups.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she intends to remove advice providers without Quality Marks from the Community Legal Service directory; and what target she has set for the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of advice providers who should have a Quality Mark by this date. [18845]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Those organisations which have not applied for a Quality Mark will not appear in the next edition of the Community Legal Service Directory, which is to be published in April 2002 (4th Edition). The deadline for applications was the end of October 2001. Organisations which have failed to meet this deadline may write to the Legal Services Commission setting out the reasons why they were unable to apply by that date and consideration will be given as to whether or not to accept the application. There are currently 502 Quality Mark holders at the General Help and General Help including casework levels, and over 1,700 organisations that have applied for the Quality Mark at General Help and General Help including casework level. The target for the number of advice providers to April 2002 is 1,250 at the General Help and General Help including casework levels.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what estimate she has made of the *(a)* cost and *(b)* burden to an advice provider of applying for a Quality Mark; and what plans she has to offer small voluntary organisations help to meet these costs and burdens. [18843]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Legal Services Commission is working with the Learning and Skills Council to assess the resource implications for an advice provider in applying for a Quality Mark. This work is due to be completed in April 2002 and will feed into the Legal Services Commission's Quality Mark support strategy. The Legal Services Commission has commenced a number of initiatives that have the potential to provide information about the needs of advice providers and identify barriers to accessing the Quality Mark. A number of the projects are targeted at smaller organisations including Black Minority Ethnic groups and refugee support groups.

CAFCASS

Mr. Steen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what steps she has taken by the Children and Family Courts Advisory and Support Service to negotiate with NAGALRO and guardians ad litem following the judgment of Mr. Justice Scott Baker on 14 September; [16465]

(2) what plans she has to review the operations of CAFCASS following the judgment of Mr. Justice Scott Baker on 14 September; and if he will make a statement; [16466]

(3) how many guardians ad litem in the UK have resigned since the establishment of CAFCASS; what impact this has had on waiting lists for children seeking *(a)* support, *(b)* welfare and *(c)* help; and if she will make a statement. [16467]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor issued a statutory direction to CAFCASS on 3 October instructing them to begin consultation about the issue of the self-employed guardians' contracts. This consultation is under way, and CAFCASS have written to all self-employed guardians. The discussions with NAGALRO will be chaired by an independent person, and the responses of the guardians to consultation will also be assessed independently.

The information we have received from CAFCASS shows that of 716 self-employed guardians, 28 have withdrawn their services altogether, and a further 90 are not accepting new cases. 175 previously self-employed guardians have accepted contracts as employed guardians. The remainder of the guardians, employed or self-employed, continue to work normally, as do the other employees of CAFCASS. In addition CAFCASS has advertised for and identified 197 people eligible for appointment as guardians.

At the week ending 16 November, guardians were working on 11,930 cases nationally. A further 282 cases were allocated that week. The number of unallocated cases was 177. In the hon. Member's South West Region there were 848 active cases. A further 26 cases were allocated that week and six cases awaited allocation.

CAFCASS is subject to independent inspection by HM Magistrates' Court Service Inspectorate. The Inspectorate will complete its first inspection next year. Its preliminary view, based on the initial visits it has carried out so far, is that:

> "CAFCASS ... has generally continued to deliver a service to children, families and courts to at least the same quantity and quality standards as in the previous services prior to CAFCASS being established in April 2001. In addition, there has been a significant investment in IT that is beginning to pay dividends".

The Lord Chancellor and I are monitoring the situation closely. I am having weekly meetings with the Chairman of CAFCASS, and am also receiving weekly reports from him. We value extremely highly the work of all the guardians and other staff of CAFCASS, whether they are employed or self-employed, and I hope that all sides can now move on to develop the child-focused service that we all want to see.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many letters her Department received from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. [18565]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament received by ministerial agency chief executives, and Departments and agencies and performance in handling them is published annually by the Cabinet Office. The most recent report, covering 2000, was announced by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office on 6 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 325W. Between 20 June and 20 July 2001, 149 letters were received directly by the Lord

Chancellor's Department; however, 27 of these letters were transferred to other Government Departments, and 19 were transferred to agencies of the Lord Chancellor's Department. Of the 103 letters dealt with by the Lord Chancellor's Department 65 per cent. were replied to within the 20 day departmental target.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many and what proportion of letters received by his Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days. [18585]

Mr. Wills: For general correspondence received at LCDHQ 320 letters were received within the period. 282 (88.1 per cent.) were responded to in under 15 days, 303 (94.7 per cent.) were responded to in under 20 days, 317 (99.1 per cent.) were responded to in under 30 days, 319 (99.7 per cent.) were responded to in under 40 days, one (0.3 per cent.) responded to in over 40 days.

For the Court Service, 565 letters were received within the period. 542 (97.4 per cent.) were responded to in under 15 days, 563 (99.11 per cent.) were responded to in under 20 days, 565 (100 per cent.) were responded to in under 30 days, nil under 40 days, nil over 40 days.

For the Public Guardianship Office, 6,103 letters were received in June. 5,686 (93.2 per cent.) were responded to in under 15 working days. In July 5,063 letters were received, (93.4 per cent.) were responded to under 15 working days.

Further information about PGO response times is not available.

Ministerial Visits (North-East)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many times since November 2000 Ministers from the Lord Chancellor's Department have visited *(a)* the Teesside area and *(b)* Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency to meet locally based businesses. [19074]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Since November 2000, Ministers from the Lord Chancellor's Department have not met any locally based businesses from either *(a)* the Teesside area or *(b)* Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency.

Parliamentary Ombudsman

Mr. Chope: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to her answer of 28 November 2001, *Offical Report,* column 1005W on the Parliamentary Ombudsman, what the circumstances were of the cases which gave rise to *(a)* a period of 91 working days and *(b)* a period of 55 days being taken by the Court Service to respond. [20185]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information given was in calendar days rather than working days as had been requested. Those cases were dealt within 64 and 38 working days. I attach a copy of the amended statistical table. *(a)* The case of Lavender was sent to the Court Service on 7 August. The PCA asked for comments by 17 September. A reply was sent to the PCA on 6 November. There was a delay of 34 working days. The delay was due to the file being mislaid. The PCA was kept informed of the progress in locating the file at all times. *(b)* The case of Glasser was sent to the Court Service on 6 July. The PCA asked for comments by 23 August. A reply was sent to the PCA on 5 September. There was a delay of eight working days. A meeting has been arranged between the Court Service and the PCA to address the problems that occurred in these matters and to avoid any future difficulties.

Formal notices issued by Parliamentary Ombudsman: 1 April to 31 October 2001

Department	*Number received*	*Number responded to*	*Working days to respond to each notice*
Lord Chancellor's Department[1]	2	2	16, 17
Court Service	10	10	8, 9, 24, 12, 17, 17, 24, 33, 38, 64
Public Guardianship Office	2	1	26
HM Land Registry	1	1	19
Northern Ireland Court Service	0	0	—
Public Record Office	0	0	—

[1] Letter of 27 February 2001 not received until 30 April 2001

Parking (Royal Family)

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what special arrangements *(a)* the Royal family and *(b)* spouses of the Royal family have for parking in London when not on official business. [18374]

Mr. Wills: Subject to security considerations, there are no special parking arrangements for members of the Royal family, including spouses, when not on official business.

Referral Fees

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the proposal by the Law Society to enable solicitors to pay referral fees. [R] [19557]

Mr. Wills: While the Lord Chancellor has noted the consultation document "Solicitors Introduction and Referral Code" issued by the Law Society in January 2001, he has yet to see any firm proposals from the Law Society. The Lord Chancellor will consult the designated judges on any application that requires his approval under the provisions of Schedule 4 of the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990. He will also consider whether to consult with the Legal Services Consultative Panel and the Director General of Fair Trading.

Employment Tribunals (North Wales)

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to provide a permanent location for Employment Tribunals in North Wales. [18868]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The Employment Tribunals Service is actively seeking to establish a permanent location for hearings in North Wales as soon as possible.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the proportion of total claims for incapacity benefit paid in respect of the main relevant medical conditions. [11322]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Ageism

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will make a statement on recent measures he has introduced to tackle age discrimination; [19362]

(2) what measures there are to get more people in their 50s and 60s into work. [19366]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: This Government recognise the importance of tackling age discrimination in the workplace. We have already provided voluntary guidance to help employers. By 2006, we will legislate against age discrimination in the workplace. This timescale will allow us to consult extensively with employers, individuals, and expert groups on age positive practices, and on all aspects of the legislation.

We are committed to employment opportunity for all, regardless of age. For those over 50, there is a comprehensive range of back to work programmes, including new deal 50 plus, new deal 25 plus and the new deal for disabled people. Government support has ensured that the employment rate for the over 50s has increased each year for the last four years. Through new deal 50 plus alone, which was launched in April 2000, more than 51,000 people have been helped into work.

The Department also leads with its AgePositive campaign, which is vigorously promoting the business benefits of employing an age diverse workforce. The campaign focuses on the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment and a wide range of research and promotional activities. On 3 December we launched a new AgePositive website and a range of new research studies.

Benefits (Birmingham, Northfield)

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people in Birmingham, Northfield claim *(a)* both disability living allowance and income support and *(b)* a disability premium as part of their income support applicable amount; [19384]

(2) how many over 60-year-olds in Birmingham, Northfield have the *(a)* disability and *(b)* higher pensioner premium added to their income support applicable amount; [19385]

(3) how many single parent families in Birmingham, Northfield are in receipt of *(a)* working families tax credit and *(b)* income support. [19388]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Benefit recipients in Birmingham, Northfield constituency

	Thousand
Income support (IS) recipients receiving disability living allowance	1.1
IS recipients with a disability premium	2.8
Pensioners receiving MIG with a disability premium	0.8
Pensioners receiving MIG with a higher pensioner premium	1.9
Lone parents receiving IS	1.8
Lone parents receiving working families tax credit	1.3

Notes:

1. All figures are for May 2001.
2. Figures are based on 5 per cent. sample data and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling error.
3. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
4. IS recipients with DLA are cases where DLA is paid to the benefit recipient. Cases where DLA is paid to the partner only are not included.
5. Disability premiums are classed as severe disability premium, disability premium and enhanced disability premium.
6. Pensioners are cases where the benefit recipient and/or partner are aged 60 or over.
7. IS lone parents are single parents aged under 60 who do not receive a disability premium.

Sources:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry August 2001.

Working Families' Tax Credit Statistics Quarterly Enquiry May 2001.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many benefit claimants in Birmingham, Northfield are not in receipt of income support but are in receipt of *(a)* housing benefit and *(b)* council tax benefit. [19386]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the table.

Total housing benefit and council tax benefit case load in the Birmingham city council area where the recipient is not in receipt of income support or jobseeker's allowance[1]

Local authority	*Number of cases*
Birmingham	
Total housing benefit cases not in receipt of income support/jobseeker's allowance[1]	23,390
Total council tax benefit cases not in receipt of income support/jobseeker's allowance[1]	34,400

[1] Income based

Notes:

1. The data refer to benefit claims, which may be a single person or a couple
2. The figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 cases
3. The table also includes people not receiving jobseeker's allowance (income based), due to insufficient data we are unable to exclude these cases
4. Figures are only available by local authority area

Source:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System Quarterly 100 per cent. case load stock-count taken in May 2001

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Birmingham, Northfield claim the minimum income guarantee. [19387]

Mr. McCartney: As at May 2001 there were 3,000 minimum income guarantee recipients in the Birmingham, Northfield constituency.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many households in Birmingham, Northfield have children in receipt of free school meals. [19383]

Mr. Timms: I have been asked to reply.

Information on free school meals is not available in the form requested.

The number of children known to be eligible for free school meals in maintained nursery, maintained primary, maintained secondary and special schools in the parliamentary constituency of Birmingham, Northfield as at January 2000 was 4,305.

War Pensions Agency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what additional cost savings measures referred to on page 75 of the 2001 departmental report were taken to enable the War Pensions Agency to operate within its running cost allocation in 2000–01. [19118]

Dr. Moonie: I have been asked to reply.

During 2000–01, the War Pensions Agency adopted a carefully controlled expenditure regime ensuring that proper financial procedures were embedded within the Agency. Monthly reviews of expenditure were undertaken and closely scrutinised to enable the agency to operate within the running cost allocation for 2000–01.

The 2000–01 programme of work was regularly reviewed and the impacts of any proposed changes to the agency's capacity to deliver the programme were considered. Links were also ensured between the agency's work programme, investment appraisal procedures and appropriate approval routes for change initiatives.

Benefit Reductions

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what reductions are applied to a liable person's liability to pay *(a)* rent and *(b)* council tax during a period of in-patient hospital treatment. [19116]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

Liability to pay rent would not normally be reduced during a period of in-patient hospital treatment, unless the landlord specifically agreed to this. Nor does any general reduction from council tax apply in such circumstances. However, if a person moves permanently into a hospital, his or her previous home will be exempt from council tax if it is unoccupied.

HEALTH

Health Authority Modernisation

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place a copy of each health authority's local modernisation review for 2002–03 in the Library as soon as they are received. [14713]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* The purpose of the local modernisation reviews (LMR) is to engage local partners, frontline staff, and patients' representatives in reviewing what needs to be done to deliver national health service priorities locally. The outputs from this year's LMR will inform the annual planning round and the development of the 2002–03 "Service and Financial Frameworks" (SaFFs). These frameworks set out the levels of NHS activity and resources allocated to achieve the local health system's contribution to national targets for the coming year. NHS organisations will sign accountability agreements in relation to delivering their contribution to the 2002–03 SaFF.

LMRs are local planning exercises. The Department itself does not receive copies of these documents. We are unable, therefore, to place copies of LMRs in the Library. External scrutiny to the LMR process has been secured through local peer review and involvement by lay members of the local modernisation boards.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) from what date East Somerset health trust will be included in the modernising NHS hearing aid services project; [15596]

(2) which NHS health trusts will be part of the modernising NHS hearing aid services project for 2002–03. [15597]

Jacqui Smith: There are currently 20 national health service trusts taking part in the modernising NHS hearing aid services project, as listed in the table.

It is too early to say when a specific trust might be involved in the project. Evaluation of the project by the Institute of Hearing Research is on-going. Subject to favourable evaluation, the Department, on advice from the project's implementation team, will make decisions about how best to spread the modernised services. Trusts would be invited to be part of the project on the basis of geographical spread, preparedness to modernise, and the commitment of the local health community to the aims of the project.

NHS trust	*Start year*
Addenbrookes NHS Trust	2000–01
James Paget Healthcare NHS Trust	2000–01
Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital	2000–01
Whipps Cross University Hospital NHS Trust	2000–01
Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust	2000–01
Leeds Teaching NHS Trust	2000–01
City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust	2001–02
Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust	2000–01
Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust	2001–02
Royal United Hospital Bath NHS Trust	2000–01
United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust (children)	2001–02
Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust	2001–02
East Berkshire Community Health NHS Trust	2000–01
Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals NHS Trust	2000–01
Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust	2000–01
Queens Medical Centre University NHS Trust Nottingham	2000–01
The Kings Mill Centre for Healthcare Services NHS Trust	2001–02
Sheffield Children's Hospital NHS Trust (children)	2000–01
University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust	2000–01
Royal Shrewsbury and Princess Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	2000–01

Religious Circumcision

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts make provision for religious circumcision. [15468]

Jacqui Smith: In 1999–2000 205 national health service hospitals in England recorded a total of 21,763 inpatient episodes where the main operation was circumcision. It is not possible to determine whether the procedure was carried out for religious reasons.

Associate Specialists

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that associate specialists in the UK obtain equal treatment to those from the EU *(a)* in gaining entry to the Specialist Register and *(b)* in the appointment of consultant posts. [16198]

Mr. Hutton: Standards for entry to the specialist register in the United Kingdom are the same for all doctors working in the European Economic Area as all doctors have to have completed a period of training recognised by the competent authority. Appointment to consultant posts in the UK is governed by the National Health Service (Appointment of Consultants) Regulations 1996, which apply equally to all EEA doctors.

Statins

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the prescribing of statins; and if he will make a statement. [15792]

Jacqui Smith: The National Service Framework for Coronary Heart Disease, revised in the Chief Medical Officer's Update in February 2001, sets out the policy for the prescribing of statins. The first priority is to ensure that people with established CHD are treated with statins to lower their cholesterol level either below 5.0 mmol/l or to reduce total serum cholesterol by 20–25 per cent., whichever would result in the lowest level. (The equivalent figures for LDL cholesterol would be 3.0 mmol/l or by a 30 per cent. reduction, whichever results in the lowest level.) The next step is the treatment of those without diagnosed CHD but whose risk of a cardiac event is greater than 30 per cent. over 10 years.

This is consistent with the guidance already issued to the national health service by the Standing Medical Advisory Committee and with the Joint British Society Guidelines published in the British Medical Journal.

Health Service Staff (Leicestershire)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses were employed in the national health service in Leicestershire in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2001. [15751]

Jacqui Smith: The number of doctors and nurses employed in the area covered by Leicestershire health authority in 1997 and 2000 (the latest year available) are given in the table. Data relating to 2001 will not be available until February 2002.

National health service hospital and community health services and general and personal medical services: All doctors and nursing staff within Leicestershire health authority area are as at 30 September each year

Headcount

	1997	*2000*
All staff	9,540	9,930
All practitioners (excluding GP retainers)[1, 2]	560	540
of which:		
UPEs[3]	500	500
HCHS medical and dental staff[4]	1,120	1,260
Total nursing staff	7,870	8,140
of which:		
Qualified staff	5,260	5,740
Qualified (HCHS) nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	4,950	5,420
Practice nurses	300	330
Unqualified (HCHS) nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	2,610	2,400

[1] All practitioners (excluding GP retainers) include unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs), restricted principals, assistants, GP registrars, salaried doctors (Para. 52 SFA) and PMS others

[2] As at 30 September 2000 there were eight GP retainers within Leicestershire HA

[3] UPEs include GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs and PMS salaried GPs

[4] Excludes hospital medical practitioners and medical clinical assistants, most of whom are also GPs working part-time in hospitals

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10
2. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts
3. Figures exclude learners and agency staff
4. In 1997, Leicestershire HA comprised of the following organisations: Leicestershire HA, Leicester General Hospital NHS Trust, Leicester Royal Infirmary NHS Trust, Glenfield Hospital NHS Trust, Leicestershire Mental Health Service NHS Trust, Leicestershire Ambulance and Paramedics Services NHS Trust and Fosse Health, Leicestershire Community NHS Trust
5. In 2000 following mergers, Leicestershire HA comprised of the following organisations: Leicestershire HA, Leicestershire and Rutland Healthcare NHS Trust and University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust
6. Practitioner figures were collected as at 1 October in 1997

Sources:

Department of Health non-medical work force census

Department of Health medical and dental work force census

Department of Health general and personal medical services statistics

Nurses' Allowance

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the *(a)* purpose and *(b)* aims of the cost of living allowance for nurses; [16131]

(2) which counties in the *(a)* south west, *(b)* south east and *(c)* eastern parts of England benefit from the cost of living allowance for nurses; [16133]

(3) if accommodation and the cost of living for nurses in Essex is being considered as part of his active review of the cost of living for nurses' allowance; and if he will extend the scheme to Essex; [16130]

(4) if he will make a statement on the reason for the exclusion of Essex in the counties to receive the cost of living allowance for nurses; [16132]

(5) when his Department's review of the cost of living allowances for nurses in the south of England will be complete. [16134]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 20 November 2001]:* Cost of living supplements for qualified nurses and some allied health professionals were introduced in April 2001 as part of a wide ranging strategy to address the low national health service participation rates of these particular staff groups and the associated recruitment and retention difficulties in parts of England.

For 2001–02, eligible staff working in London and in the following health authority areas are entitled to these supplements:

South west

Avon HA

Wiltshire HA

South east

Berkshire HA

Buckinghamshire HA

East Surrey HA

North and Mid Hampshire HA

Oxfordshire HA

Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA (excluding staff working in the Isle of Wight)

Southampton and South West Hampshire HA

West Surrey HA

West Sussex HA

Eastern

Bedfordshire HA

Cambridgeshire HA

East and North Hertfordshire HA

West Hertfordshire HA.

Geographic coverage has been determined by reference to the Market Forces Factor, which is an up to date and objective measure of external labour market pressures on NHS employers. The health authorities in Essex do not meet the current eligibility criteria.

We have not yet finalised decisions on the geographic scope of cost of living supplements for 2002–03. These decisions will be informed by the latest market forces factor data.

We intend to monitor the impact of cost of living supplements more fully before considering options for any significant changes to the structure or scope of the scheme. It is too early to judge the impact of these payments at present but we hope to be able to reach a more considered assessment during 2002–03. As part of this ongoing review, we shall take into account any alternative proposals put to us for assessing the geographic coverage of the scheme.

Blood (Cancer Patients)

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what specific blood substitute therapies will be made available for treating cancer patients with anaemia-related fatigue following the adoption of additional screening; [16348]

(2) if he will introduce into the NHS those *(a)* blood transfusion and *(b)* blood substitute regimes for cancer patients used in overseas hospitals treating NHS patients which are more effective and efficient than UK practices. [16350]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 20 November 2001]:* There are a number of erthropietin drugs licensed to shorten the period of anaemia in patients receiving platinum-containing chemotherapy. These are available for clinicians to prescribe when it is clinically beneficial.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) helps clarify, both for patients and professionals, which drugs are clinically effective and cost-effective. NICE helps the national health service to focus its increasing resources on those treatments that will best improve peoples' health. Criteria have been established by the Department, the National Assembly for Wales and NICE to help determine which interventions are referred to NICE. They have been applied consistently for all NICE guidance to date and are available on the NICE website.

Anti-TNF Drug Treatment

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if NICE will issue interim guidance to health authorities on anti-TNF drug treatment for rheumatoid arthritis. [16684]

Jacqui Smith: No. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is proceeding with its appraisal of anti-TNF drugs for rheumatoid arthritis and it is anticipated that guidance will be published in March 2002.

Head Injury Patients

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to commission further research on provision of services for patients with head injuries. [17263]

Jacqui Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 12 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 549W.

Acquired Brain Injury

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what joint working arrangements are in place with other Government Departments regarding the provision of rehabilitation services for people with acquired brain injury. [17260]

Jacqui Smith: Getting people back to functional independence following illness or injury is a high priority for the national health service. This year, the Department is planning job retention and rehabilitation pilots, together with the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions. £12 million has been invested in the pilots which aim to test the relative effectiveness of different employment and health strategies in helping people with prolonged illness or disability, including head injury, remain in their jobs.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve the provision of rehabilitation services for people with acquired brain injury. [17261]

Jacqui Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 282W.

Cancer

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to improve the five year survival rates for *(a)* lung, *(b)* breast and *(c)* prostate and *(d)* colon cancer sufferers in the Sandwell health authority. [15894]

Jacqui Smith [holding answer 22 November 2001]: The NHS Cancer Plan published in September 2000 identifies two important areas where cancer prevention activity should be focused. Changes in lifestyle related to smoking and diet can significantly reduce chances of getting cancer. With this in mind the NHS Cancer Plan sets out a clear agenda for improving cancer prevention:

In Sandwell, cancer networks have been putting together three year service delivery plans to specify how they are going to meet the range of targets outlined in the NHS Cancer Plan.

Those plans include how they are going to improve overall survival rates including smoking cessation initiatives, extended cancer screening and extension of fruit pilots. The health authority is also currently achieving high standards for urgent referral of patients with suspected cancer. In addition there are a raft of plans in the pan-Birmingham network which are addressing survival rates for all cancers, in which Sandwell health authority is included.

Years of Life Lost

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the use of the Years of Life Lost formula for allocating health service resources; and if he will make a statement. [17779]

Mr. Hutton: The Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation has reviewed the Years of Life Lost index and this will be reflected in 2002–03 health authority allocations which will be announced shortly.

MacFarlane Trust

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many HIV sufferers have received compensation under the MacFarlane Trust since its establishment. [17380]

Ms Blears: Since its establishment, the MacFarlane Trust has made special payments to 1,240 registrants with haemophilia and HIV and 62 others, who are either infected partners or infected children.

Local Bodies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those local bodies which were set up under legislation which is the responsibility of his Department since May 1997. [17593]

Mr. Hutton: 481 primary care groups were established as sub committees of health authorities in 1999. PCG, both individually or together with other PCGs, can become primary care trusts. The first 17 PCTs began operating on 1 April 2000. There are currently 164 PCTs in operation and more are being established to become operational on 1 April 2002. A full list of these organisations has been placed in the Library.

Nurses

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates have been made of the number of NHS employed nurses who work as agency staff during their holidays to supplement their income in *(a)* England and *(b)* the Isle of Wight; and what steps are taken to ensure that leave is taken. [17685]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average annual cost of an *(a)* A, *(b)* D and *(c)* F grade NHS employed nurse is; and what the equivalent cost of an agency nurse at each grade is. [17680]

Mr. Hutton: Information about the estimated annual costs of an A, D and F grade nurse employed in the National Health Service is shown in the table.

£

	2001 average cost
Grade A	[1]15,500
Grade D	[1]22,300
Grade F	[1]28,300

[1] To the nearest £100

Sources:

Department of Health's August 2000 NHS staff earnings survey, pay Advance Letters and paybill figures.

The equivalent cost of an agency nurse at each grade is not centrally available.

Primary Care Groups

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost of establishing primary care groups has been. [17681]

Mr. Hutton: The establishment of primary care groups was funded using moneys released by the abolition of general practitioner fundholding. The previous Government had set aside an annual budget of £180 million to run fundholding. We have used those moneys both to set up primary care groups and to improve services to patients. Approximately £150 million additional moneys was used following the establishment of primary care groups.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the in-patient waiting list was, expressed per 1,000 of weighted population for the Isle of Wight in March *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001. [17686]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is in the table.

As at March	*Size of in-patient waiting list*	*Weighted population*	*In-patient waiting list per 1,000 head of weighted population*
1997	4,229	143,959	29.4
1998	3,864	136,022	28.4
1999	3,552	134,882	26.3
2000	3,522	137,041	25.7
2001	3,392	136,786	24.8

Notes:

1. In April 2001, Isle of Wight health authority merged to form Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA.
2. The data provided refers to the old HA.
3. Population is weighted for age, additional need (over and above that accounted for by age) and variations in the unavoidable cost of providing health care (market forces factor etc.)
4. Populations for 1997, 1998 and 1999 are not directly comparable to those for 2000 and 2001 as unified allocations covering hospital and community health services (HCHS), prescribing and GP infrastructure are included from 2000 onwards.

Source:

QF01 waiting times returns/FD Resource Allocation 2 population data

Social Services

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish his final guidance for local authorities on charging for social services. [17673]

Jacqui Smith: We published final guidance for local councils on charging for non-residential social services on 23 November. The guidance is available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov/scg/homecarecharges.

General Practitioners

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of general practitioner practices in the *(a)* Leigh constituency, *(b)* Wigan borough and *(c)* Greater Manchester are below minimum standards. [16886]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* The information requested is not available centrally. However, at the last inspection visit, all practices in the Wigan and Leigh areas met the minimum standards.

IT Expenditure

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer, of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 243W, on expenditure on IT, if he will publish such information as he has on expenditure. [18234]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* The figures for information technology management are not separately collected across the Directorates. The figures for the Information Policy Unit from its establishment in January 1999 are: 1999–2000—£2.98 million; 2000–01—£2.91 million; 2001–02—£2.09 million. These resources are from The Departmental Vote.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the use of interferon beta and glatiramer in the treatment of multiple sclerosis; and if he will make a statement. [17248]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* We are currently holding discussions with the manufacturers to consider a range of options under which drugs for multiple sclerosis might be made available under the national health service. One option is a 'risk-sharing' scheme which will evaluate their clinical and cost effectiveness, and until these discussions are concluded we cannot provide the information requested.

Dentists

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of dentists providing NHS treatment in Huntingdon; and if he will make a statement. [17480]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* A monthly assessment of the number of national health service dentists in the Huntingdon area is made by Cambridgeshire health authority. This information is made available to members of the public on the NHS Direct website.

In the Huntingdonshire Primary Care Trust area there are 56 general dental practitioners providing NHS treatment. Sixteen of these are currently accepting new NHS dental patients.

In addition, a daily dental service is provided for people in the Huntingdon area who need urgent treatment and are not registered with a dentist.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the adult population in *(a)* England, *(b)* Cornwall and *(c)* the United Kingdom were registered with NHS dentists in (i) 1997-98, (ii) 1998-99, (iii) 1999-2000 and (iv) 2000-01. [19947]

Ms Blears: The percentage of adults registered with a general dental service (GDS) dentist per head of population is shown in the table for England, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly health authority and the United Kingdom for 30 September in each of the years 1997-98 to 2000-01.

The registration rates for September 1997 are not comparable with the later figures as they reflect a 24 month registration period, the later figures reflect a 15 month registration period.

The registration rates for 1999-2000 and 2000-01 are affected by the number of patients now seen in the Cornwall personal dental services (PDS) schemes. During 2000-01 some 13,000 individual adult patients were seen via these PDS schemes, which corresponds to about 3 per cent. of the local population.

General dental service: Percentage of adult registrations[1] per population[2], 1997-98 to 2000-01

September each year	*England*	*Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly HA*	*United Kingdom*
1997-98[3]	[3]51	[3]48	[3]51
1998-99	44	39	44
1999-2000	43	37	44
2000-01	43	37	44

1. Based on the number of adult registrations at 30 September for each financial year.

2. ONS mid year adult population estimates used to calculate percentage of adult patients registered.

3. Registration rates reflect a 24 month registration period rather than 15 months which is the basis of the later figures.

Labels and Leaflets

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent representations he has received from the pharmaceutical industry about compliance with the Labels and Leaflets Directive (Directive 92/27/EEC); [15659]

(2) what steps his Department takes to ensure that patients receive the information required by the Labels and Leaflets Directive (Directive 92/27/EEC) when a prescription medicine is dispensed; [15657]

(3) if he will list the information that is required to be provided to a patient about a prescription medicine when it is dispensed and the form in which that information should be provided; [15660]

(4) what guidance *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies have issued to pharmacists to ensure that they comply with the Labels and Leaflets Directive (Directive 92/27/EEC) when dispensing a prescription medicine; [15658]

(5) what steps he will take to ensure that patients receive the information that is required by the Labels and Leaflets Directive (92/27/EEC) when prescription medicines are dispensed. [18392]

Ms Blears: The Directive was incorporated into United Kingdom law by the Medicines (Marketing Authorisations Etc) Regulations 1994. It is an offence for any person in the course of business to sell or supply a medicine to which the Directive relates without the approved leaflet and appropriate label. Neither the Department nor its agencies have issued guidance to pharmacists.

The information required to be provided to a patient about a prescription medicine when it is dispensed, and the form in which the information should be provided, is set out in the Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations Etc) Regulations 1994 and Directive 92/27/EEC—copies of which are available in the Library.

We receive representations about compliance with the Directive from time to time from the pharmaceutical industry and others.

Smear Tests

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average turnaround time is for cervical smear tests within the NHS in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [18372]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* Guidance from the national health service cervical screening programme states that women should have to wait no longer than six weeks for the written results of their cervical smear test. Results are sent either by the health authority or by the general practitioner according to local practice. Two thirds of health authorities currently send the results directly.

Information on waiting times for screening test results is only available for those areas where the result letters are sent to women by the health authorities. In 2000–01, 60 per cent. of women in these health authorities received their written cervical screening test result within six weeks. 91 per cent. received their written result within 10 weeks[1]. Where the six week target is not achieved, we look to the relevant health authority to address reasons for this.

Bed Blocking

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds were unavailable in the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority to incoming patients as a result of their occupation by *(a)* delayed discharge patients who were awaiting social services funding and *(b)* delayed discharge patients who had fully funded social service packages arranged, in each quarter in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001. [19195]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Dentistry (Fareham)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists accepted NHS patients in Fareham in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996, *(c)* 1997, *(d)* 1998, *(e)* 1999 and *(f)* 2000. [19198]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Prescription Pricing Authority

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for each health authority area, what was the September forecast by the Prescription Pricing Authority, indicating projected overspending or underspending during the present financial year. [19318]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The table sets out the prescribing budgets notified to the Prescription Pricing Authority by each health authority. They are practice level prescribing budgets and do not include any contingency reserves held by the health authority.

Health authority		*Practice budgets as notified to PPA (£)*	*Forecast Outturn (£)*	*Forecast Overspend (percentage)*
Bradford	QDD	49,491,460	53,637,712	8.38
Calderdale and Kirklees	QDT	63,994,855	67,020,545	4.73
County Durham	QDE	70,200,309	72,227,760	2.89
East Riding	QDF	65,741,920	68,719,434	4.53
Gateshead and South Tyneside	QDG	39,769,623	41,583,981	4.56
Leeds	QDH	82,995,925	88,023,114	6.06
Newcastle and North Tyneside	QDJ	51,552,434	54,302,659	5.33
North Cumbria	QDK	36,045,994	38,620,593	7.14
North Yorkshire	QDR	75,304,849	79,101,136	5.04
Northumberland	QDM	35,127,268	36,691,539	4.45
Sunderland	QDN	33,763,329	35,766,265	5.93
Tees	QDP	65,515,468	68,419,994	4.43
Wakefield	QDQ	35,466,500	38,028,472	7.22
Barnsley	QCG	28,065,208	30,244,835	7.77
Doncaster	QCK	36,099,848	38,073,186	5.47
Leicestershire	QCL	93,929,875	98,508,149	4.87
Lincolnshire	QCM	74,145,519	81,394,561	9.78
North Derbyshire	QCH	37,487,465	40,913,705	9.14
North Nottinghamshire	QCN	42,114,993	45,242,065	7.43
Nottingham	QCP	60,499,404	65,661,240	8.53
Rotherham	QCQ	26,979,488	30,045,053	11.36
Sheffield	QCR	53,708,543	58,723,274	9.34
South Humber	QDL	34,371,750	36,546,887	6.33
Southern Derbyshire	QCJ	55,418,649	58,837,770	6.17
Bedfordshire	QA6	54,371,270	57,519,263	5.79
Cambridge and Huntingdon	QER	71,093,206	74,858,157	5.30
Hertfordshire	QEX	99,093,919	106,869,997	7.85
Norfolk	QET	88,487,524	93,431,112	5.59
North Essex	QAX	90,240,070	96,245,777	6.66
South Essex	QAY	69,799,277	75,654,699	8.39
Suffolk	QCF	72,658,297	78,804,162	8.46
Barking and Havering	QAP	38,981,289	40,330,199	3.46
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	QEW	78,202,699	81,639,119	4.39
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	QEY	71,043,576	73,959,182	4.10
Brent and Harrow	QAR	46,755,854	49,904,010	6.73
Camden and Islington	QAT	33,999,268	35,027,373	3.02
Croydon	QAD	28,546,850	29,999,322	5.09
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	QAV	62,062,477	64,367,616	3.71
East London and City	QAW	59,104,397	61,817,578	4.59
Hillingdon	QA2	23,197,100	23,594,295	1.71
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	QA3	29,092,369	30,390,325	4.46

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[1] Statistical Bulletin: Cervical Screening Programme, England: 2000–01

Health authority		*Practice budgets as notified to PPA (£)*	*Forecast Outturn (£)*	*Forecast Overspend (percentage)*
Kingston and Richmond	QAG	30,014,716	30,449,072	1.45
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	QAH	67,128,321	70,605,392	5.18
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	QAJ	55,463,897	58,118,247	4.79
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	QA5	42,510,877	43,711,911	2.83
Berkshire	QA7	70,559,047	75,659,464	7.23
Buckinghamshire	QA8	62,211,041	66,528,772	6.94
East Kent	QAE	71,881,294	75,407,428	4.91
East Surrey	QAK	42,347,787	42,327,096	–0.05
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	QAM	86,909,580	92,331,262	6.24
Isle of Wight and Portsmouth and South East Hants	QEV	70,249,164	75,014,698	6.78
North and Mid Hampshire	QD1	47,210,615	51,029,798	8.09
Northamptonshire	QCC	55,279,066	57,467,162	3.96
Oxfordshire	QCE	54,188,718	57,464,495	6.05
Southampton and South West Hants	QD3	56,973,211	59,875,104	5.09
West Kent	QAF	96,076,221	105,083,957	9.38
West Surrey	QAL	61,468,564	65,429,413	6.44
West Sussex	QAN	84,286,628	88,822,453	5.38
Avon	QD8	92,983,094	97,867,484	5.25
Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly	QDV	59,619,660	62,634,738	5.06
Dorset	QDW	75,175,594	75,847,283	0.89
Gloucestershire	QDY	57,403,791	58,919,964	2.64
North and East Devon	QDX	51,958,609	53,644,999	3.25
Somerset	QD5	50,470,846	53,522,847	6.05
South and West Devon	QD6	66,432,177	70,965,510	6.82
Wiltshire	QD7	59,094,411	62,774,744	6.23
Birmingham	QD9	103,723,220	109,457,523	5.53
Coventry	QEA	32,740,237	35,548,591	8.58
Dudley	QEC	31,604,000	33,745,605	6.78
Herefordshire	QED	16,650,484	17,623,361	5.84
North Staffordshire	QEH	50,863,793	54,359,854	6.87
Sandwell	QEE	34,093,938	34,940,247	2.48
Shropshire	QEF	49,115,312	51,879,277	5.63
Solihull	QEG	23,226,544	23,653,585	1.84
South Staffordshire	QEJ	62,472,831	61,613,956	–1.37
Walsall	QEK	29,181,052	29,868,607	2.36
Warwickshire	QEL	51,744,497	56,531,625	9.25
Wolverhampton	QEM	23,711,980	28,056,977	18.32
Worcestershire	QEN	53,137,664	56,426,316	6.19
Bury and Rochdale	QCT	43,736,081	47,138,170	7.78
East Lancashire	QCX	58,318,642	65,201,689	11.80
Liverpool	QC2	52,164,069	61,443,559	17.79
Manchester	QC3	53,996,448	58,456,213	8.26
Morecambe Bay	QC4	38,391,129	40,220,526	4.77
North Cheshire	QCV	35,905,320	39,047,301	8.75
North West Lancashire	QCY	61,236,621	63,259,424	3.30
Salford and Trafford	QC6	55,963,487	59,628,307	6.55
Sefton	QC7	32,205,042	35,608,958	10.57
South Cheshire	QCW	75,908,512	83,049,782	9.41
South Lancashire	QC1	35,242,497	36,561,473	3.74
St. Helens and Knowsley	QC5	43,837,225	46,927,531	7.05
Stockport	QC8	35,366,700	36,965,543	4.52
West Pennine	QC9	49,785,950	53,164,840	6.79
Wigan and Bolton	QDA	64,247,917	71,330,199	11.02
Wirral	QDC	No Data	44,758,134	—

Health Care (Performance)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of the NHS South East Regional Office's Atlas of NHS and Social Care Performance. [19319]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* A copy of volume I Maps and volume II Ranked Bar Charts and Source Data will be placed in the Library.

Acute Beds

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many acute beds there are per 1,000 residents in *(a)* the Buckinghamshire Health Authority area and *(b)* England. [19315]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of acute beds per 1,000 population in the Buckinghamshire health authority area and England 2000–01

	Total acute beds:	
	located in Buckinghamshire HA area	*for England*
Available acute beds	1,189	107,956
Population	692,891	49,997,089
Acute beds/1,000 population	1.72	2.16

Source: KH03

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients admitted to hospital in October via an accident and emergency department had to wait more than four hours for a bed; and what proportion that figure represents of all patients so admitted to hospital during October. [19321]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The latest figures are for quarter one (April to June 2001). In quarter one, 531,063 patients were admitted to hospital via accident and emergency departments.

Of these, 66,383 (12 per cent.) had to wait more than four hours for a bed.

Children (Local Authority Care)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average time during which looked after children were held in care under the responsibility of local authorities in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the trend. [19203]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The table provides figures on the average number of care days per child, together with the number of children looked after at any time in the year, and the total number of care days provided, for looked after children in years ending 31 March 1996 and 31 March 2000. The figures are broken down according to legal status.

The figures show that the average number of days in care per child in a year has increased.

Long-term trends show that although the total number who are looked after at any time in the year has been increasing in recent years, annual totals for the number who started to be looked after and the number who ceased to be looked after in the previous 12 months have both been slightly decreasing over the same period.

At the beginning of 2001 the Department commissioned the Thomas Coram Research Unit (Institute of Education, University of London) to conduct a tightly focused research study into the reasons that lie behind this increase in the number of children looked after by local authorities.

The research is designed to assess, among other things, the extent to which drug taking, alcoholism, violence and mental health problems within the family may have been significant factors underlying decisions made by Courts and local authorities to look after children.

Number of children looked after at any time during the year, and the number of days of care provided during years ending 31 March 1996 and 2000, England

Number of children looked after at any time during the year, and the number of days of care provided during years ending 31 March 1996 and 2000, England

	1996	2000	1995–2000[1]
Total			
Number of looked after children in year	79,400	81,500	3
Care days provided (thousand)	18,227	20,820	14
Average number of days per child	229	255	11
Full care orders and interim care orders			
Number of looked after children in year	35,500	43,700	23
Care days provided (thousand)	10,494	13,094	25
Average number of days per child	296	300	1
Section 20 of Children Act 1989			
Number of looked after children in year	43,600	37,700	–13
Care days provided (thousand)	7,140	6,977	–2
Average number of days per child	164	185	13
Other legal statuses			
Number of looked after children in year	7,100	8,300	16
Care days provided (thousand)	592	749	27
Average number of days per child	83	91	9

[1] Percentage increase

Notes:

1. Table excludes children looked after under a series of short term placements

2. A child may appear in more than one legal status category in the year, hence sub-totals do not add up to total of all children

Source:

DH annual statistical return SSDA 903

Adoption

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis he judges whether local authority social services departments are adequately providing services related to adoption and adoption support; and whether he proposes to compile performance tables as a result of the Adoption and Children Bill. [19220]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* At present the social services inspectorate inspects services using standards. In November 2000 the social services inspectorate produced an inspection report "Adopting Changes: Survey and Inspection of Local Councils' Adoption Services", a copy of which is available in the Library. The report provides comprehensive and up-to-date information about the current position, examples of good practice and a checklist for councils to use to review their services.

One of the 50 personal social services performance assessment framework indicators directly relates to adoption (the percentage of children looked after adopted during the year, indicator reference C23).

The social services inspectorate assesses each council's performance every year, taking into account evidence from indicators, inspections and other sources. Assessment of adoption services is included as part of this overall assessment. Next year, the overall assessment will be published in the form of a star rating for each council. We are currently developing additional monitoring mechanisms including collecting information on the types of adoption support services made available by councils at present. This is intended to help councils benchmark their services against those of other councils. In addition, the adoption and permanence task force has published an audit tool (available at www.doh.gov.uk/adoption) to help councils review their adoption support services and identify possible areas for development.

These mechanisms will be developed further to monitor the implementation of the Adoption and Children Bill.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what organisations he has met this year to discuss the Adoption and Children Bill. [19297]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* I have met the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, the Associate Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children, and the All Party Parliamentary Group on Adoption. As a member of the Special Standing Committee, I have also heard the views of a wide range of key stakeholders in adoption.

Departmental officials have met with a group convened by the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering on several occasions this year to discuss the Bill. The membership of this group encompasses a wide range of organisations which represent children, adopted adults, adoptive families and birth families. These include the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, the Local Government Association, the National Organisation for Counselling Adoptees and Parents, the Catholic Children's Society (Westminster), After Adoption, the Adoption Forum, Adoption UK, the Family Rights Group and the Law Society.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the likely cost of implementation of the Adoption and Children Bill to *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* voluntary adoption agencies and *(c)* adopting parents. [19209]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The main financial implications of the Adoption and Children Bill for local authorities lie in the provisions on adoption support, the independent review mechanism, access to information, special guardianship, the Adoption and Children Act Register and the new system of placement for adoption. In each case, any additional costs will be proportionate to the improvements in the level of service provided to people affected by adoption.

Voluntary adoption agencies will principally be affected by the provisions in the Bill on the Adoption and Children Act Register, the independent review mechanism and consistent access to information. The regulatory impact assessment describes the expected impact of the Bill on voluntary adoption agencies in more detail. This is not expected to be significant. The Bill will not create any additional costs for adoptive parents and in practice will ensure that many more adoptive families get the financial and other support they need.

We have already made available an extra £66.5 million for adoption over three years. The resources required to implement the Adoption and Children Bill will also be addressed as part of the forthcoming spending review.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on what powers local authorities have to treat attendance allowance as a means-tested benefit for the purpose of social care charges. [19903]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* Councils have discretion under the Health and Social Security Adjudications Act 1983 to decide whether to take Attendance Allowance into account when assessing ability to pay charges for home care and other non-residential social services. Statutory guidance issued to councils on 23 November 2001 expects councils which take attendance allowance into account to undertake a specific assessment of a person's disability-related expenditure, to ensure that any charge is reasonable. This guidance will be implemented by no later than 1 October 2002 for people receiving more than 10 hours home care weekly and no later than 1 April 2003 for all other service users.

Nurses (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many additional nurses can be employed by the Portsmouth hospitals NHS trust as a consequence of the recent award of additional funds to the trust; and what impact he expects this to have on accident and emergency waiting times. [19479]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* The allocation to Portsmouth hospitals national health service trust to fund additional nursing posts in accident and emergency and support the development of the emergency care strategy is £18,321 this year and £75,117 for 2002–03.

Information on how the extra resources are to be used and the expected benefits for accident and emergency services is available from the chairman of the trust.

Waiting Times (Cosham)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting for treatment more than four hours from arrival at the Queen Alexandra hospital at Cosham at the end of each quarter in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [19478]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Accident and Emergency Units (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses were employed in the accident and emergency units run by the Portsmouth hospitals NHS trust at the end of each quarter of *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [19476]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Social Care Charges

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the ability of a local authority to impose social care charges upon an individual living at home who is receiving prescribed medical treatment. [19902]

Jacqui Smith [holding answer 30 November 2001]: Local councils have discretion whether to charge for home care or other non-residential social services for a person living at home. Services for which the national health service has underlying responsibility, are free at the point of use, except where there are specific charging powers, such as those for NHS prescriptions.

Health Authority Funding

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the per capita funding by each health authority in England in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996, *(c)* 1997, *(d)* 1998, *(e)* 1999 and *(f)* 2000. [19475]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* Allocations per weighted head of population for each health authority in England for the financial years 1996–97 to 2000–01 are shown in table 1.

Prior to 1 April 1996 allocations were made to regional health authorities. Allocations per weighted head of population for each regional health authority in 1995–96 are shown in table 2.

Table 1

£

Health authority	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*[1]	*2000–01*
Avon	430	435	466	622	681
Barking and Havering	425	453	468	623	694
Barnet	446	460	491	644	691
Barnsley	414	431	440	612	669
Bedfordshire	402	426	448	606	663
Berkshire	410	415	446	606	666
Bexley and Greenwich	435	470	493	662	729
Birmingham	443	450	464	632	693
Bradford	429	440	450	621	684
Brent and Harrow	445	463	496	649	704
Bromley	406	443	471	626	688
Buckinghamshire	409	428	460	613	668
Bury and Rochdale	420	438	449	622	687
Calderdale and Kirklees	430	445	459	631	687
Cambridge and Huntingdon[2]	415	425	454	321	n/a
Cambridgeshire[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	671
Camden and Islington	486	479	500	651	710
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	424	445	465	643	701
County Durham	419	435	448	613	674
Coventry	425	437	448	607	669
Croydon	417	434	464	621	681
Doncaster	416	434	447	629	688
Dorset	431	447	477	643	701
Dudley	419	437	459	622	677
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	440	453	479	625	688
East and North Hertfordshire	427	437	471	624	679
East Kent	403	431	463	640	705
East Lancashire	429	442	451	624	683
East London and the City	439	433	445	603	666
East Norfolk[2]	421	440	461	633	n/a
East Riding	426	439	454	626	689
East Surrey	432	448	483	641	703
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	404	446	469	642	705
Enfield and Haringey	430	447	471	633	691
Gateshead and South Tyneside	433	448	460	625	682
Gloucestershire	445	450	479	652	708
Herefordshire	435	451	466	628	685
Hillingdon	438	440	464	631	684
Isle of Wight	435	479	504	674	736
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	427	428	443	576	637
Kingston and Richmond	448	469	496	644	706
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	425	445	466	628	705
Leeds	428	444	457	632	694
Leicestershire	414	432	448	613	670
Lincolnshire	431	448	463	632	681
Liverpool	433	448	465	644	702
Manchester	459	469	473	645	704
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	439	457	487	643	700
Morecambe Bay	444	466	485	656	710
Newcastle and North Tyneside	441	452	462	634	696
Norfolk[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	688
North and East Devon	435	454	474	640	697
North and Mid Hampshire	426	452	480	638	693
North Cheshire	459	470	482	639	694
North Cumbria	429	443	463	630	691
North Derbyshire	422	445	465	626	684
North Essex	399	426	453	624	687
North Nottinghamshire	423	439	452	621	672
North Staffordshire	418	439	451	614	678
North West Anglia[2]	419	432	451	616	n/a
North West Lancashire	415	434	447	626	688
North Yorkshire	422	440	464	626	684
Northamptonshire	428	438	466	638	694
Northumberland	422	443	461	629	687
Nottingham	414	432	447	614	673
Oxfordshire	403	424	454	610	672

Table 1

£

Health authority	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*[1]	*2000–01*
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	417	440	468	627	688
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	420	457	484	658	714
Rotherham	419	439	450	626	682
Salford and Trafford	436	444	459	644	701
Sandwell	431	444	460	622	684
Sefton	428	441	468	637	709
Sheffield	441	458	471	640	698
Shropshire	418	438	458	626	678
Solihull	433	451	472	636	690
Somerset	423	443	467	634	691
South and West Devon	431	448	469	641	698
South Cheshire	426	443	465	631	694
South Derbyshire	433	445	459	615	677
South Essex	392	423	450	607	677
South Humber	435	457	477	650	701
South Lancashire	434	461	479	643	702
South Staffordshire	433	450	466	633	686
Southampton and South West Hamptonshire	405	431	464	629	688
St. Helens and Knowsley	422	431	451	627	684
Stockport	415	425	447	631	691
Suffolk	427	444	476	638	694
Sunderland	423	440	450	625	682
Tees	427	432	451	624	682
Wakefield	439	457	471	632	693
Walsall	417	433	446	623	679
Warwickshire	443	464	481	645	699
West Hertfordshire	432	447	476	638	691
West Kent	409	439	472	632	694
West Pennine	419	434	446	618	676
West Surrey	439	450	489	643	706
West Sussex	406	427	463	624	684
Wigan and Bolton	410	427	441	608	667
Wiltshire	444	449	481	639	702
Wirral	424	433	457	642	710
Wolverhampton	422	440	456	622	677
Worcestershire	428	454	475	639	692
England	426	443	464	629	688

[1] Allocations for 1999–2000 onwards are not comparable with those for 1996–97 to 1998–99 which cover hospital and community health services (HCHS) only. 1999–2000 was the first year of unified allocations which cover HCHS, prescribing and discretionary general medical services

[2] Cambridge and Huntingdon, East Norfolk and North West Anglia health authorities merged on 1 April 1999 to form Cambridgeshire health authority and Norfolk health authority

Table 2

£

Regional health authority	*Allocation per weighted head of population*
Northern and Yorkshire	476
Trent	469
Anglia and Oxford	460
North Thames	478
South Thames	464
South and West	472
West Midlands	479
North West	469
England	471

Acute Beds (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many acute beds the Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust had at *(a)* the most recent date for which figures are available, *(b)* 31 December 2000, *(c)* 31 December 1999 and *(d)* 31 December 1998; and how many of those beds were occupied by delayed discharges (i) awaiting social services funding and (ii) with social services funding. [19477]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 30 November 2001]*: The latest available figures are for the financial year 2000–01. Portsmouth Hospitals National Health Service Trust had 1011 average daily number of acute beds in wards open overnight. A count of beds as at 31 December 1998, 1999 and 2000 is not available centrally.

The specific information requested on the delayed discharges affecting these beds is not available centrally. Information on delayed discharges in the Portsmouth area has been placed in the Library.

Motor Racing (Tobacco Sponsorship)

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the Government's policy is on the European Commission's draft proposals relating to tobacco sponsorship of Formula 1 motor racing. [20166]

Jacqui Smith: The current text of the European Commission's proposals for a directive on tobacco advertising and sponsorship includes a provision prohibiting the sponsorship of events taking place in several member states or having similar cross-border effects if such sponsorship is with the aim of promoting a tobacco product.

The current text provides for implementation up to two years after a directive is adopted. The date for adoption is at present uncertain.

In 1998 we agreed with our European partners that global sporting events should have until 1 October 2006 to phase out tobacco sponsorship, provided first that they do not sign new contracts with tobacco companies and secondly that they phase out the current sponsorship that they receive. This remains our view.

NICE Review

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards establishing the review of NICE; when the review will commence; who will conduct the review; what the terms of reference are; what arrangements there will be for consulting interested parties; and when he expects the review to be concluded. [20161]

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he intends to conduct a fundamental review of NICE; and if he will make a statement. [20287]

Jacqui Smith: The report of the Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry makes some far-reaching recommendations on the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE). We are therefore considering how these will affect the review of NICE. We will also need to take into account the recent announcement that the Health Select Committee is to hold a short inquiry into the progress NICE has made in achieving the key goals envisaged in A First Class Service.

Non-tobacco Goods

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made of the value of the UK market for non-tobacco goods which share tobacco branding. [20164]

Jacqui Smith: We have not made any such assessment.

Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the Government's response to the Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry; and if he will make a statement. [20163]

Jacqui Smith: The Government's response to the Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry will be published shortly.

NHS Direct

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), 27 November Ref 19267 2001, *Official Report,* Columns 859-60W, how many inquiries have been received by NHS Direct since its inception; what proportion of those inquiries come from rural areas; and what proportion of those inquiries required *(a)* a visit to the doctor and *(b)* treatment in a hospital. [20032]

Ms Blears: Since NHS Direct was launched in March 1998 it has handled over 8,000,000 calls. This calendar year alone it has handled over 4,500,000 calls, averaging 90,000–100,000 calls a week. NHS Direct call volume data are collected as a figure for the total population area covered by a particular site and not by rural/urban split. Out of the 4,500,000 calls made to NHS Direct this calendar year, 38 per cent. of callers were advised to see their general practitioner, and 11 per cent. advised to visit a hospital.

NHS Direct has not been set up to merely reduce demand on other health services. It is about making sure that patients get to the right service at the right time, and giving people reassuring clinical advice so that they can look after themselves if that is the appropriate thing to do.

Preserved Rights

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been allocated to local authorities in England for 2002–03 in relation to the transfer of responsibility for preserved rights cases from 8 April 2002; of that sum, how much relates *(a)* to the sum that is transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions relating to what would have been paid through income support and *(b)* to the costs of the shortfall between the preserved rights income support rates and existing care homes as stated in the draft guidance to local authorities regarding the abolition of preserved rights; on what basis the sum allocated to cover the shortfall referred to in (b) has been allocated between local authorities; and whether the basis for the sum allocated to cover the shortfall referred to in (b) reflects the variations in shortfall between local authorities. [17250]

Jacqui Smith: Local authorities in England will receive additional funding of £614 million in 2002–03 because of the transfer to them from 8 April next year of responsibility for people with preserved rights. Of this sum, £528 million is a transfer from the Department for Work and Pensions. It represents the difference between what the DWP estimate they would have spent on income support, attendance allowance and disability living allowance on preserved rights residents under the current arrangements and what they estimate will be spent on Income Support for such residents under the new system. The remaining £86 million is intended to meet the cost to authorities of carrying out care assessments and the estimated shortfall between preserved rights income support rates and the care home fees of the residents concerned. We shall announce as part of the Local Government Finance Settlement how we intend to allocate these resources between individual local authorities.

Older People

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to implement the National Service Framework for Older People, with particular reference to Standard Six on falls and osteoporosis. [20183]

Jacqui Smith: The National Service Framework for Older People sets a standard and associated milestones for the development and introduction of integrated falls services across all health and social care systems by April 2005. Annual milestones are set from April 2003. Early planning and supporting work has begun on implementation and the National Institute for Clinical

Excellence has been asked to develop clinical guidelines for the assessment and prevention of falls including recurrent falls in older people, with an associated clinical audit dataset, database and methodology.

Carers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance he plans to give to people who take the responsibility of looking after elderly family members and are not able to work. [19358]

Jacqui Smith: Through the National Strategy for Carers, we are making resources available to help carers. We introduced the Carers Grant in 1999, the sole purpose of which is to enable local councils to enhance provision of community care and children's services and in particular to enable carers to take a break from their caring role. To reach the NHS Plan target of ensuring that 75,000 more carers receive a break by 2004, the Carers Grant will increase from £70 million this year to £100 million in financial year 2003–04.

The Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000, which came into force in April, gives local councils further duties and powers to help carers.

In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions announced a package of measures last Autumn that will provide over £500 million extra support for carers over three years, from which more than 300,000 carers could benefit financially.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance he will give pensioners to help with the costs of long-term care. [19354]

Jacqui Smith: The NHS Plan announced that an additional £1.4 billion a year would be made available for improving services and standards of care for older people by 2003–04. Over £400 million of the £1.4 billion represents funds for a range of reforms to the long-term care system which we have introduced. These reforms will assist pensioners with the costs of long-term care and many of them have already been enacted. Free nursing care in nursing homes for current self-funders was introduced from October, as has a system of deferred payments to avoid people having to sell their homes when they first enter residential care. Since April the value of a property has been disregarded for 12 weeks when undertaking the residential care means test.

Care for the Elderly

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the costs of home care for the elderly and what choice old people have in what service they receive. [19357]

Jacqui Smith: Councils have discretion under the Health and Social Services and Social Security Adjudications Act 1983 whether to charge for home care or other non-residential social services. The Department issued statutory guidance, "Fairer Charging Policies for Home Care and other non-residential Social Services", to councils on 23 November 2001.

The Department published for consultation draft National Minimum Standards for Domiciliary Care on 31 October 2001. Standards 7 and 9 concern the need to respect service users' choices.

Local "Better Care, Higher Standards" charters for long-term care are expected to set out the ways in which individuals' views about their care will be sought and respected.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on *(a)* primary and *(b)* intermediate care for the aged. [19356]

Jacqui Smith: Older people can expect the same rights of access to primary care as any other patient group. In addition, in recognition of the specific health needs of older people, patients over 75 are entitled to an annual health check from their general practitioners on request and, since 2000, all people aged 65 and over have been offered free immunisation against influenza.

The NHS Plan makes clear that intermediate care is a priority service for older people. This was reinforced in the National Service Framework for Older People. Intermediate care has an important role to play in tackling delayed transfers of care. A recent survey indicates that good progress is being made towards meeting the NHS Plan targets for intermediate care—by 2004 an extra 5,000 intermediate care beds and 1,700 supported places, together benefiting an additional 150,000 older people.

CT/MRI Scanners

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the allocation of the next 50 CT and MRI scanners; and if he will state *(a)* when allocations will be announced and *(b)* what consultations will be held with health authorities on this distribution. [19907]

Jacqui Smith: The allocation of the 50 CT and 50 MRI scanners outlined in the NHS Cancer Plan is likely to be announced in the summer of 2002. Criteria for their distribution have yet to be decided. These scanners are due for installation in 2003–04.

Databases of current equipment and regional provision as well as local information, such as the cancer networks facilities and equipment strategies, will be used to help formulate criteria for allocation. When allocations are considered they will be discussed with the new strategic health authorities before they are finalised with individual NHS trusts.

Young Carers

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to ensure that the current information campaign for carers' rights will include young carers. [19987]

Jacqui Smith: Information for carers has been made accessible through telephone helplines, publications by the Government and voluntary organisations, carers centres and on-line services such as the Government carers website.

We are committed to addressing the needs of young carers as set out in both the Quality Protects programme launched in 1998 and the National Strategy for Carers published in 1999. The views and comments of young carers are taken into consideration when developing policy for the Quality Protects programme.

We currently fund the Children's Society to take forward "The Young Carers Initiative" which involves consulting directly with young carers about their views and needs. The information obtained from the consultation will be used as a basis for producing a practice guide and resource pack. These packs will contain information on how best to deliver the needs of young carers and to encourage better partnership working within agencies.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to ensure the needs of young carers will be targeted as part of his Department's funding of mental health services. [19986]

Jacqui Smith: A target has been set for mental health services that by March 2002 all regular carers of people on enhanced Care Programme Approach (CPA), including young carers, will have their own written support plans which will address their caring, physical and own mental health needs. These support plans will be implemented by October 2002.

Diabetes

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the Diabetes National Service Framework; and if he will make a statement. [19560]

Jacqui Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1046W.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 4 December 2001

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Export Credits

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Government's policy on the provision of export credits for military equipment. [18608]

Ms Hewitt: Export credits for the sale of all goods and technology controlled for strategic reasons are subject to an export licence being issued by the Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation. All export licence applications are scrutinised rigorously and considered on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria.

Export credit support for defence sales to 63 of the poorest developing countries is not generally available. New export credits extended by ECGD to these countries have been restricted to "productive expenditure" that would benefit economic and social development. The OECD Statement of Principles on Official Export Credit Support to Heavily Indebted Poor Countries limits the productive expenditure criteria to the 41 HIPC's.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what were the outstanding amounts of ECGD guarantees in respect of defence equipment broken down by country for the financial years *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01. [18750]

Ms Hewitt: The breakdown of the amount outstanding at the close of each of the financial years on ECGD guarantees for defence equipment and services was as follows:

£ million

Market	*Amount outstanding*
Financial year 1999–2000	
Algeria	97.8
Brazil	27.8
Brunei Darussalam	441.0
Chile	18.9
Egypt	46.1
Greece	20.8
India	13.1
Indonesia	745.5
Iran, Islamic Republic of	1.3
Italy	4.2
Jordan	253.8
Kenya	16.7
Korea, Republic of	68.9
Kuwait	167.9
Lithuania	2.9
Malaysia	251.5
Nigeria	145.4
Oman	486.7
Qatar	151.4
Saudi Arabia	1,000.0
Singapore	6.3
Spain	38.1
Sweden	5.0
Thailand	20.0
Turkey	332.9
United Arab Emirates	2.2
United States	61.8
Zimbabwe	3.0

£ million

Market	*Amount outstanding*
Financial year 2000–01	
Algeria	95.5
Brazil	22.3
Brunei Darussalam	344.1
Chile	17.6
Egypt	43.0
Greece	62.6
India	10.7
Indonesia	729.4
Iran, Islamic Republic of	1.3
Italy	4.2
Jordan	252.7
Kenya	10.8
Korea, Republic of	57.4
Kuwait	90.8
Lithuania	1.4
Malaysia	158.3
Nigeria	145.4
Oman	387.2
Qatar	91.8
Saudi Arabia	1,000.0
Singapore	4.3
South Africa	839.4
Spain	23.0
Sweden	5.0
Thailand	1.3
Turkey	285.7
United Arab Emirates	1.3
United States	59.0
Zimbabwe	0.9

Note:

Amount outstanding includes future maturities plus unrecovered claims.

Small Businesses

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will respond to the recommendation of the National Audit Office (HC329) that small business panels should be set up to give feedback on regulatory proposals; and if she will make a statement. [20682]

Nigel Griffiths: I welcome the NAO report and its recommendations as they relate to the Small Business Service. The SBS is already taking action to meet the recommendations of the report as they relate to the SBS, including the use of small business panels such as focus group in order to consult small businesses on regulatory proposals.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the number of people employed in manufacturing industry in *(a)* Worcestershire and *(b)* Herefordshire. [20654]

Alan Johnson: The DfES Labour Force Survey—August 2001 indicated that:

(a) 67,000 people (23.7 per cent. of the labour force) were employed in the manufacturing sector in Worcestershire.

(b) 15,000 people (18.9 per cent. of the labour force) were employed in the manufacturing sector in Herefordshire.

Office of Science and Technology

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what role the Minister of Science will play in the new structures within her Department; [18278]

(2) what plans she has to reconstruct the Office of Science and Technology, and if she will make a statement; [18275]

(3) what role a Director General of Science, Technology and Innovation will play in directing blue skies research; and if she will make a statement; [18277]

(4) what plans she has for the role of the Director General Research Councils. [18276]

Ms Hewitt: The responsibilities of the Office of Science and Technology (OST), which are cross-Government, will remain largely unchanged. The new Director General of Science, Technology and Innovation in the DTI will work closely with the Director General of Research Councils and with the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser and Head of the OST to integrate the Department's policy-making on science, technology and innovation with its productivity agenda.

One of the new Director General of Science Technology and Innovation's key objectives will be to maximise the Government's significant investment in science by providing a stronger focus on technology transfer within my Department. He or she will be recruited from outside the Department and will work with the Minister for Science and Innovation in carrying out their functions.

Departmental Review

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will appoint the new Director of Science, Technology and Innovation. [18274]

Ms Hewitt: This post has been created as an outcome of the review of my Department, the conclusions of which I announced on 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 396W. The post will be filled by an external open competition. I would expect the appointment to be made in spring 2002.

Research Councils

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the outcome of the second stage of the Quinquennial Review of the six grant-awarding research councils will be announced; and what its principal conclusions are. [21320]

Ms Hewitt: I am pleased today to announce the outcome of the second stage of the Quinquennial Review of the six grant-awarding Research Councils. I shall be placing a copy of the stage 2 report in the Libraries of both Houses.

Quinquennial reviews are conducted in two stages. I announced the outcome of stage 1 on 19 July. It concluded that the six grant-awarding Research Councils should continue to be executive non-departmental public bodies.

I welcome the thrust of the stage 2 report and its recommendations and accept the review's main conclusions that:

the Research Council system is working reasonably well;

to deal with the increasing pace of scientific change and complexity of national and international arrangements, the Councils need to be capable of acting and speaking as one, and of promoting new and increasingly multidisciplinary science;

they also need to do business with their key stakeholders in more convergent ways and in line with modernising Government principles;

there should be a new strategy group comprising the Council chief executives and the Director General of the Research Councils to achieve these aims, and to provide a framework for cross-Council working at all levels;

with a clearer identity and mission, the Councils as a group will be able to develop closer links with the other major science funders, including the Funding Councils, Government Departments and the major charities;

they will also be able to work more closely with other key stakeholders, including the universities and the business and public service organisations which use their research and trained people;

to capitalise on these stronger relationships and closer working, and to ensure delivery of key objectives, the Research Councils and DTI need to develop a stronger strategic framework for science and a long term strategic 'road map' towards which the full range of players in science can direct their efforts.

It will be for the Research Councils, working closely with my Department, to implement the review's detailed recommendations. Once this is completed, I am confident that the effectiveness of science budget expenditure will be enhanced.

I am grateful to all those who contributed to this Quinquennial Review, in particular the members of the review steering group, working groups, and Research Council staff.

UK Online Annual Report

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she plans to publish the UK Online annual report 2001. [21323]

Ms Hewitt: The second UK online annual report has been published today, and copies have been placed in the House Libraries.

Employment Agencies

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employment agencies specialise in recruiting *(a)* nurses, *(b)* secretaries, *(c)* IT professionals and *(d)* generalists. [19869]

Alan Johnson: A detailed breakdown for the private recruitment industry by particular specialist areas is not available, since many agencies and employment businesses provide work-finding services for a number of occupations. However, we estimate that there are about 20,000 employment agencies establishments, of which around 900 are licensed nurse agencies and some 2,000 specialise in IT.

Equal Pay

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information she has collated on the private sector companies that have carried out gender pay audits as recommended by the Code of Practice on Equal Pay 1997 to assess their compliance with the Equal Pay Act since 1997. [16140]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 21 November 2001]:* The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) Code of Practice on Equal Pay aims to provide practical guidance and to recommend good practice to employers. There is no legal obligation on employers to carry out gender pay audits under the Equal Pay Act.

Many employers have stated publicly that they have carried out, or are planning to carry out a pay review while others prefer to keep this information confidential. Information has not therefore been collated on private sector companies that have carried out gender pay audits.

A programme of action is under way to promote the practice of pay reviews in line with the EOC code of practice. We are funding the EOC to prepare a model for voluntary pay reviews which will offer a technical example for employers in how to review the pay of their male and female employees. Extra funding has been made available to trade unions for training representatives in equal pay issues in the workplace. We plan to introduce annual awards for employers which will recognise excellence in addressing equal pay and related issues.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her priorities are for inclusion in the European Community forthcoming draft directive on equal pay. [16135]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 21 November 2001]:* No proposal to amend the Equal Pay Directive (75/117/EEC) has been made by the Commission nor are we aware that the Commission has laid down any firm timetable for doing so. If a proposal to amend the Equal Pay Directive is forthcoming, the Government will consider it very carefully, in the light of case law since the Directive came into force in 1975 and the results from the current process of amending the Equal Treatment Directive (76/207/EEC).

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in revising the employment tribunal regulations concerning the hearing of equal pay cases, as outlined in the consultation document "Towards Equal Pay for Women". [16137]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 21 November 2001]:* Two proposals outlined in the consultation document "Towards Equal Pay for Women" have been implemented already. These are: simplifying multiple cases by requiring just one application (IT1 form) and one response from the employer (IT3 form) which has been given effect in the Employment Tribunals (Constitution and Rules of Procedure) Regulations 2001 that came into force in July 2001; and the Burden of Proof Regulations, which implement the Burden of Proof Directive 97/80/EC, which were laid 20 July and came into force on 12 October. The proposal to introduce a questionnaire procedure into the Equal Pay Act has been included in the Employment Bill that was introduced on 7 November 2001. The Government intend to implement those changes that can be done by tribunal regulations when the Employment Bill has received Royal Assent and others will be carried out when parliamentary time permits.

Jodrell Bank

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future funding of Jodrell Bank Observatory. [18446]

Ms Hewitt: Jodrell Bank Observatory is owned and operated by the University of Manchester, who are responsible for its funding and operation. It has successfully applied for and received a rolling grant from the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council (PPARC) for a number of years for astronomical research. That grant was last reassessed in September 2001, and PPARC awarded Jodrell Bank Observatory just over £2 million for the four years until September 2005. The grant will next come up for reassessment in September 2003. Jodrell Bank Observatory also co-ordinates the MERLIN network of radio telescopes, for which it receives a separate grant from PPARC of approximately £2.2 million per year. This grant is due to expire in 2003. It is currently being reassessed.

Departmental Funding and Initiatives

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list all *(a)* funding sources and *(b)* initiatives available from her Department to (i) the private sector, (ii) the voluntary sector and (iii) local authorities. [18487]

Ms Hewitt: Information on my Department's funding sources and initiatives can be found in table C1 and in the text of my Department's 2001 Expenditure Plans Report (Cm 5112), a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Departmental spending relating specifically to local authorities can be found in table B8 of this report.

Many of the Department's programmes are not sector specific and we do not keep centrally information on involvement with particular sectors. This information cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost. However, my Department does supply funding to the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB) and Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) to support the work of the Citizens Advice Service and its volunteers. This financial year my Department provided NACAB with £16.9 million grant in aid (£16.4 million for 2000–01) and CAS with £2.8 million (£2.225 million in 2000–01).

Ilisu Dam

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has made to the Government of Turkey regarding the future of the Ilisu Dam. [19382]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* I have made no representations to the Government of Turkey regarding the future of the Ilisu Dam.

Following Balfour Beatty's announcement that it had withdrawn from the project there is no longer an application for ECGD support and therefore no UK government involvement.

Local Bodies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list those local bodies which were set up under legislation which is the responsibility of her Department since May 1997. [17608]

Ms Hewitt: The Department has established no local public spending bodies.

Retail Motor Fuels Industry

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on the continuance of an independent retail motor fuels industry; and if she will make a statement. [18465]

Ms Hewitt: Consumers benefit from a continuing competitive market in motor fuels, in which independent retailers have a part to play.

Motor Industry

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people are employed in the retail motor industry in the United Kingdom. [18464]

Ms Hewitt: Approximately 600,000 people are employed in the retail motor industry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the terms of reference and composition are of the Automotive Innovative Growth Team; and if she will make a statement. [18466]

Ms Hewitt: The Automotive Innovation and Growth Team (AIGT) was established in April 2001 under the chairmanship of Sir Ian Gibson. The remit of the AIGT is to:

Understand and evaluate the factors that will drive the automotive sector globally, identifying the opportunities and threats to the UK as a market and supply base;

Formulate a vision of what the industry in the UK could be in five to 15 years' time;

Stimulate frank debate about where the UK's sources of competitive advantage lie and how best to exploit these to drive positive long-term changes;

Develop, co-ordinate and promote a new strategy to ensure the long-term competitiveness of the automotive sector;

Make recommendations to Government, industry and others for specific action including changes in both policies and processes.

The Members of the AIGT Strategy Team are as follows:

Chairman

Sir Ian Gibson

Members

Mike Baunton, Perkins Engines

Jonathan Browning, formerly of Jaguar

Hugh Chambers, Prodrive

Richard Clowes, GKN

John Cushnaghan, Nissan

Tod Evans, Peugeot

Sir Ken Jackson, AEEU

Professor Dan Jones, University of Cardiff Business School

Mike O'Shea, DTI

Graham Smith, Toyota

Willy Rickett, Department of Transport Local Government and the Regions

Philip Rutnam, HM Treasury

Alex Stephenson, Advantage West Midlands.

Further details of the AIGT's work can be found in the interim report published in October, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the WTO dispute settlement mechanism. [17920]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

The WTO dispute settlement understanding was a major achievement of the Uruguay round of trade negotiations.

Experience has shown a need for some improvements to, and clarifications of, that understanding: I therefore welcome the agreement last month at Doha on negotiations to that end.

World Trade Rules

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 590W, on world trade rules, if she will set out the areas of *(a)* agreement and *(b)* disagreement she has had with the collective proposals put forward by NGOs in respect of world trade rules. [19876]

Clare Short: We agree that trade rules must help to eliminate poverty, and that poor countries need a fair and effective rules-based international trading system. We agree on the need for capacity building, and for an approach that recognises more explicitly that WTO members are at different stages of development. However, we disagree with some NGOs on some WTO issues. For example, we believe that the recent campaigning against the GATS has been very misleading. Our position on all these issues is set out in a series of Background Briefing Notes on Trade and Development which I am placing in the Library.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) how many letters she has received in 2001 on third world debt from residents of the Buckingham constituency; [16905]

(2) how many letters she has received in 2001 on overseas aid from residents of the Buckingham constituency. [16906]

Clare Short: So far in 2001 I have received four letters from residents of the Buckingham constituency through the hon. Member, three of which were on the subject of third world debt or overseas aid. I am unable to provide information on letters received independent of the hon. Member as details of such correspondents are not kept.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will estimate the total unallocated funds within her departmental expenditure limit *(a)* at the start of the financial year and *(b)* to date; and what was the month seven forecast on outturn underspend against her departmental expenditure limit in (i) real and (ii) percentage terms. [19445]

Clare Short: DFID's Departmental Report for 2001 (CM 5111) contains the Departmental Unallocated Provision (DUP) set for the present financial year in Annexe 1, Table 2. There has been no draw down of the Department's DUP to date.

Outturn against six month forecast for each Request for Resources will be published in the winter Supplementary Estimates Summary Request for Supply as usual.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Freedom of Information Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what date her Department established a working group of officials to prepare her Department for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and on what dates this committee has met since it was set up. [14767]

Dr. Howells: My Department is fully aware of its responsibilities under the forthcoming legislation, not only on its own account but also in respect of its sponsored bodies. No formal working group has been established but a number of responsible officials in DCMS meet as necessary, and will ensure that all appropriate action is taken to prepare both the Department and its NDPBs for implementation.

We wrote to our NDPBs in June to ensure they were aware of the then timetable and will do so again shortly in respect of the changes announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor on 13 November. Plans are currently being developed for training throughout the Department, the creation of written guidance and the development of a departmental publication scheme.

Millennium Dome

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many companies took part in the bidding process for the public relations contract with NMEC (New Millennium Experience Company) for the Millennium Dome; and who was on the panel for appointing the consultancy firm. [18659]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* Cardew and Co. were appointed by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) in September 2000, a time of very high press interest. NMEC needed the services of a press agency which had previous experience of corporate rescue situations and experience of complex financial matters. NMEC considered that Cardew and Co. met the requirements. The arrangements for the appointment were in line with NMEC's procurement rules covering the situation where insufficient time existed for a competitive process.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is the value, per annum, of the contract held between the New Millennium Experience Company and Cardew Consultancy; what sum in total has been paid to Cardew Consultancy by the New Millennium Experience Company since Cardew were employed by NMEC; what period the present contract between the New Millennium Experience Company and Cardew runs for; what services Cardew presently provides for the New Millennium Experience Company; what assessment he has made of those services; and if she will make a statement. [18658]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* The new Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) retains Cardew and Co. to provide external press support. Cardew and Co. are paid on an hourly rate, per job, when required. The total sum which has been paid since October 2000 is £339,655. Cardew and Co.'s contract will cease when NMEC has completed the solvent liquidation process. I have not made any assessment of the services provided by Cardews which is a matter for NMEC.

Church Repairs

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what was the English Heritage budget for church repairs for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2003–04; and if she will make a statement. [19346]

Dr. Howells: English Heritage's budget for repairs to all listed places of worship for 1997–98 to 2003–04 is:

	£
1997–98	7,127,000
1998–99	9,550,000
1999–2000	10,169,000
2000–01	11,042,000
2001–02	9,049,000
2002–03	10,370,000
2003–04	12,220,000

English Heritage's planned expenditure for 2002–03 and 2003–04 also includes grants to cathedrals, as the individual elements of their planned grants programme have yet to be finalised.

My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts today launched the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, which will offset the cost of VAT on repairs and maintenance to listed buildings which are used as places of worship. The scheme has been welcomed by those responsible for these important parts of our heritage as it represents significant additional new funds.

Channel 5

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which areas of the country are able to access the transmission signal of Channel 5 via a terrestrial television; what plans she has to increase the coverage of Channel 5; and if she plans to upgrade the television transmitters unable to broadcast Channel 5's signal. [19620]

Dr. Howells: Analogue terrestrial Channel 5 services reach around 80 per cent. of the UK population and coverage details can be found on Channel 5's website at: www.channel5.co.uk. There are no plans to extend analogue Channel 5 services, as the provision of digital terrestrial television now has priority in the use of scarce spectrum. Channel 5 is carried on all digital platforms. Digital terrestrial coverage information is available on the Digital Television Group website at: www.dtg.org.uk. The Government's aim is to ensure that the main free-to-view analogue channels are available in digital form to those who can currently get these analogue channels.

Parliamentary Ombudsman

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the answer of 28 November 2001, Ref. 18772, on the Parliamentary Ombudsman, on which date the notification was received; and on which date a response was made. [20098]

Mr. Caborn: In the case mentioned in my earlier reply, notification was received on 2 November 2000 and a response made on 12 December 2000.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to the answer of 28 November 2001, Ref. 18772, on the Parliamentary Ombudsman, what formal notices *(a)* have been received and *(b)* have been responded to since 31 March. [20097]

Mr. Caborn: My Department has received no formal notices from the Ombudsman since 31 March 2001.

Creative Partnerships

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of Creative Partnerships; and if she will make a statement. [19614]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* Creative Partnerships will be launched in April 2002, when funding of £40 million becomes available. This is a new initiative which will give young people opportunities to work alongside arts and cultural organisations and individuals to develop their artistic and creative skills. Alongside the initiative, the Arts Council of England will undertake an extensive evaluation and research programme.

Deprivation Criteria (Sports Funding)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will publish the constituency deprivation criteria for bids to the new opportunities fund for sport bids; and if she will make a statement. [20541]

Mr. Caborn: Under the new opportunities for PE and sport programme, the new opportunities fund has allocated funding to each local education authority (LEA) area. The allocations have been determined on the basis of the size of the school population and the number of people living in deprived wards in the area.

It is for local partnerships, led by LEAs, to decide what the needs and priorities are in local areas, within the context of the new opportunities fund's programme guidance. A key criterion in the assessment of bids will be that projects meet the aim of promoting social inclusion.

Government Indemnity Scheme

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many indemnity undertakings were given under section 16 of the National Heritage Act 1986 for the six month period ended 30 September; and what the value was of *(a)* any contingent liabilities in respect of such undertakings given at any time under that section which remain outstanding as at 30 September, *(b)* non-statutory Government indemnities in respect of loans handled by the Government art collection which remain outstanding as at 30 September and *(c)* non-statutory undertakings to Her Majesty in respect of loans from the royal collection which remain outstanding as at 30 September. [21007]

Dr. Howells: The provision for the Government indemnity scheme is made by the National Heritage Act 1980. The scheme facilitates public access to loans of works of art and other objects for public display made to museums, galleries and other such institutions by private owners and non-national institutions. It does this by indemnifying lenders against loss or damage to their loan. Loans covered by the scheme must be for public benefit. The scheme also covers loans of such objects for study purposes within borrowing institutions where this would contribute materially to the public's understanding or appreciation of the loan. Examples of this are enhancing interpretation or explanation to the public of objects or bringing into the public domain the conclusions of any study.

In the six month period ended 30 September, the following undertakings to indemnify were given under section 16 by the relevant Departments for objects on loan to national and non-national institutions:

	Number
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	601
Scottish Executive Education Department	238
The National Assembly for Wales	111

The value of contingent liabilities in respect of undertakings given at any time under section 16 and which remained outstanding as at 30 September is:

	£
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	2,935,420,221
Scottish Executive Education Department	455,246,280
The National Assembly for Wales	50.621,348

The value of non-statutory Government indemnities to cover loans handled by the Government Art Collection and which remained outstanding as at 30 September is:

Value: £6,000,000.

The value of non-statutory undertakings given to Her Majesty in respect of loans from the royal collection and which remained outstanding as at 30 September is:

Value: £209,522,345.

SCOTLAND

Drug Misuse

5. **Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on drug misuse in Scotland. [17491]

7. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the Home Office on drug-related matters. [17493]

Mrs. Liddell: We continue to work closely with the Scottish Executive and with the Home Office on the UK strategies to tackle drug misuse. In particular my hon. Friend the Minister of State is playing a direct role in the legislation currently before the House to strengthen court powers to confiscate assets of drug dealers and other criminals.

Skye Toll Bridge

6. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations she has received in respect of the Skye toll bridge. [17492]

Mr. Foulkes: I have received four representations on this issue since August 2001.

Issues related to the Skye bridge project are a devolved matter for the Scottish Executive.

Child Poverty

8. **Mr. Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement about the number of children living in poverty in Scotland since 1997. [17494]

Mr. Foulkes: We are making good progress on child poverty. Detailed information can be found in "Opportunity for All", published by the Government, and in the Scottish Executive's Annual Social Justice Report, a Scotland where everyone matters.

Scotrail

9. **Mr. Francois:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she will next meet officials from Railtrack to discuss Scotrail and Railtrack. [17495]

Mrs. Liddell: I hope to meet with Railtrack senior management shortly to discuss a range of matters.

Scottish Parliament

10. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations she has made to the Boundary Commission for Scotland on the distribution of seats for the Scottish Parliament. [17496]

Mrs. Liddell: None. However I wrote to Lady Cosgrove, Deputy Chairman of the Boundary Commission for Scotland, on 6 November to inform her that I would shortly be launching a consultation on the size of the Scottish Parliament.

PIU Energy Review

11. **Anne Picking:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with the coal industry in Scotland on the status of coal in the PIU energy review. [17497]

Mr. Foulkes: I represent the Scotland Office on the PIU Energy Review Advisory Group. I have met with a wide variety of individuals and organisations with an interest in energy issues, including representatives of the coal industry in Scotland, to discuss their views on the matters covered by the review.

Manufacturing Industry

12. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the state of manufacturing industry in Scotland. [17498]

Mrs. Liddell: Manufacturing industry continues to be very important to the economy of Scotland employing some 300,000 in June 2001 and supporting a further 185,000 jobs in the Scottish economy. Manufacturing exports amounted to £19.3 billion in the year to 2001–02 according to Scottish Executive figures, an increase of 8.6 per cent. compared with the previous four quarters. The sound policies of economic management, which this Government are pursuing, continue to deliver the best platform for the manufacturing sector to deal with current difficult global trading conditions.

Winter Fuel Payment

13. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pensioners in Scotland will receive the winter fuel payment in this financial year. [17499]

Mr. Foulkes: We expect almost one million people aged 60 and over to receive a winter fuel payment in Scotland this financial year. The estimated total expenditure in Scotland in this area is around £150 million.

Drug Dealers (Confiscated Assets)

14. **Mr. MacDougall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps are being taken to confiscate the assets of drug dealers in Scotland. [17500]

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department and I are working closely together on the Proceeds of Crime Bill. This legislation, which is currently before the House, will strengthen court powers to confiscate the assets of drug dealers and other criminals.

Visit Scotland

15. **Pete Wishart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive concerning the re-structuring of Visit Scotland. [17501]

Mr. Foulkes: I am in regular contact with ministerial colleagues in the Scottish Executive about a range of issues. The re-structuring of Visit Scotland is a matter for the Visit Scotland Board and the Scottish Executive.

Tourism

16. **Rosemary McKenna:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on her action to promote tourism in Scotland in co-ordination with other parts of the United Kingdom. [17502]

Mrs. Liddell: I am in regular contact with the British Tourist Authority and its partners to ensure that Scotland and the whole of the UK is promoted as a tourist destination. Tomorrow evening I shall be speaking at a BTA reception which has been organised to introduce Scottish MPs to the BTA and give them an opportunity to see how Scotland and their own areas are promoted by the BTA.

I am also working closely with the BTA and Visit Scotland on my new initiative to make connections with friends of Scotland across the world.

Afghanistan

17. **Mr. Tom Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action she has taken to explain the Government's policy in relation to the war in Afghanistan to Scotland's Muslim community. [17503]

Mrs. Liddell: I visited the Islamic Centre and Glasgow Central Mosque on 9 November, where I spoke to over 100 people including around 30–40 leaders of the Muslim community from throughout Scotland.

I made clear this Government's policy on the war against terrorism and offered our continued support to Scotland's Muslim community as respected members of our society.

Scottish Regiments

18. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met the Secretary of State for Defence to discuss plans for the future involvement of Scottish regiments in combating terrorism; and if she will make a statement. [17504]

Mrs. Liddell: Although I see my right hon. Friend on a regular basis I have not yet had the opportunity to discuss plans for the future involvement of Scottish regiments in combating terrorism. I hope to do so in the near future.

National Minimum Wage (Uprating)

19. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland benefit from the uprating of the national minimum wage. [17505]

Mr. Foulkes: The increase in the adult national minimum wage to £4.10 per hour and the youth rate to £3.50 from October 2001 is benefiting around 135,000 people across Scotland. The national minimum wage is having a direct and beneficial impact on the pay of the lowest paid workers in Scotland; is helping to close the gap between the highest and lowest earners; and is helping reduce the differential between men's and women's pay. This has been achieved without any discernible adverse impact on the economy.

Barnett Formula (Teachers' Pay)

20. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of the cost of teachers' pay in Scotland for the purposes of determining the funding allocation under the Barnett formula. [17506]

Mrs. Liddell: The Barnett Formula provided the Scottish Executive with a population-based share of increases in comparable spending of UK Government Departments in the 2000 Comprehensive Spending Review. Within its overall departmental expenditure limit it is for the Scottish Executive to decide how to allocate its budget, including the funding of teachers' pay in Scotland.

Economic Trends

21. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met the chairman of Scottish Enterprise to discuss trends in the Scottish economy; and if she will make a statement. [17507]

Mrs. Liddell: I last met the Chairman of Scottish Enterprise on 27 November and we discussed a range of issues. While Scotland cannot remain immune to the effects of a global slowdown, the tough decisions that this Government have taken mean that the economic fundamentals in the UK and in Scotland remain sound. The Scottish economy, as part of the UK economy, is better placed than ever before to cope with the effects of a global downturn in demand.

24. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what economic modelling has been undertaken to determine the prospects for the Scottish economy up to 2005. [17510]

Mrs. Liddell: Neither the Scotland Office, nor the Scottish Executive, publish forecasts for the Scottish economy. We do, however, monitor several independent forecasts on the Scottish economy.

Former Miners (Compensation)

22. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she next expects to meet the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to discuss compensation, on disability grounds, for former miners. [17508]

Mrs. Liddell: I have frequent discussions with my right. hon Friend. We are making good progress with the coal health compensation scheme in Scotland. So far the Government have paid out a total of £19 million in relation to respiratory diseases and £25.8 million in relation to Vibration White Finger.

Employment Trends

23. **Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on employment trends in Scotland since September. [17509]

Mrs. Liddell: Latest figures show that there are 2.381 million people in work in Scotland, a fall of 0.5 per cent. over the previous three months but a rise of 3,000 over the same period a year ago. The number of people out of work and claiming benefit rose by 800 in October, but remains at its lowest level for a quarter of a century.

Rail Congestion

25. **John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action the Government are taking to reduce rail congestion in east central Scotland. [17511]

Mr. Foulkes: The Scottish Executive has taken a leading role in researching the potential for development of rail infrastructure in Scotland.

I understand that they are to conduct a Central Belt railway capacity study, which aims to assess the likely costs and benefits of potential improvements to existing, and new, passenger services, and infrastructure enhancements in central Scotland.

Barnett Formula

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was, in real terms and for each year since 1999 *(a)* the annual charge to moneys paid into the Scottish Consolidated Fund as a result of the operation of the Barnett Formula and *(b)* the total annual sum received by the Scottish Executive from the Scottish Consolidated Fund. [12558]

Mrs. Liddell: Information on the grant paid to the Scottish Consolidated Fund since 1999 is published in the Scotland Office Estimates and the Scotland Office Departmental Report. The grant is a block grant and is not disaggregated or hypothecated.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much public money, in real terms, was received in each year since 1979 by the *(a)* Scottish Office, *(b)* Scotland Office and *(c)* Scottish Executive that was external to the block grant and Barnett Formula; and what was for each year (i) the single largest item of such expenditure and (ii) the total amount of such expenditure. [12557]

Mrs. Liddell: This information is not readily available. Moreover, coverage of the block grant arrangements has changed since 1979, which makes comparisons over this period difficult. However, information on Scottish public expenditure back to 1995–96 was published in chapter 8 of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses in April 2001. Information for earlier years was published in previous editions of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was, in real terms and for each year between 1979 and 1999 *(a)* the annual change to the budget of the Scottish Office arising from the operation of the Barnett Formula and *(b)* the total annual expenditure of the Scottish Office. [12559]

Mrs. Liddell: This information is not readily available. Moreover, coverage of the block grant arrangements has changed since 1979, which makes comparisons over this period difficult.

Community Banking

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with the First Minister on the development of Community Banking in Scotland. [14526]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with the First Minister on a wide range of issues.

The first community banking agreement in the UK is being piloted between the community of Wester Hailes in Edinburgh and the Bank of Scotland. Funding for the scheme has been provided by the Bank of Scotland and the Scottish Executive through the West Edinburgh Pathfinder initiative.

E-Business Access Programme

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many businesses in Scotland, broken down by sector, have benefited from the First Steps e-business access programme. [16559]

Mrs. Liddell: This is a matter for the Scottish Executive. However, I understand that the First Steps into E-Commerce workshop was delivered by Scottish Enterprise to almost 1,700 in Scotland between February 2000 and August 2001. The programme has since been redeveloped to address customer feedback. First Steps now consists of four separate workshops allowing companies to attend the most appropriate session/s based on their current level of e-business adoption. Since 10 September 2001 almost 400 delegates have attended one of the four workshops in the First Steps workshop series. Scottish Enterprise do not hold details of company sector for past attendees. However they are looking at capturing that information for future events.

Civil Aviation Industry

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to her answer of 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 94, if she will make a statement on the outcome of her meeting with senior representatives of the Civil Aviation Industry. [17718]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 23 November 2001]:* The meeting which I hosted yesterday allowed the airlines, the airport operators, business representatives and development agencies, to express their views on the current climate for business for the aviation industry in Scotland and beyond, and also the best way in which the industry can go forward.

It proved to be an extremely useful forum, which led to open and informative discussion from all those who were involved.

We are reviewing all the issues raised and will take these forward.

Sub-post Offices

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many sub-post office closures have been reversed during the statutory period following closure in each year since 1990. [20699]

Mr. Foulkes: The Government are committed to maintaining a national network of post offices and foresees them helping customers to access a wide range of public services both electronically and over the counter. I am informed by Post Office Ltd. that historical data on the numbers of post office openings and closures are not maintained separately. During the period April 2000 to March 2001 the number of net post office closures in Scotland was 55. This is very close to the average for the UK during the same time period.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many sub-post offices have closed in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Dumfries and Galloway and *(c)* Galloway and Upper Nithsdale constituency in each year since 1990. [20700]

Mr. Foulkes: The Government are committed to maintaining a national network of post offices. It is especially keen to prevent all avoidable closures of rural post offices because they are the focal point for community life in rural areas. Various rate relief schemes apply to many rural post offices. The Government foresee post offices helping customers access a wide range of public services both electronically and over the counter. I understand that Post Office Ltd. do not keep records of the number of post office closures in each parliamentary constituency and consequently such information as the hon. Member requested cannot readily be compiled. During the period April 2000 to March 2001 the number of net post office closures in Scotland was 55. This is very close to the average for the UK during the same time period.

Aggregates Tax

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of the impact the Scottish economy of the implementation of the aggregates tax. [20698]

Mrs. Liddell: All revenues from the aggregates levy will be recycled back to business via a cut in employers national insurance contributions and a new sustainability fund. Scotland stands to benefit from some £3 million raised by the aggregates levy, and it will be for the Scottish Executive to decide how to use this money.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many jobs in Scotland are dependent on the industries which will be subject to the imposition of the aggregates tax. [20697]

Mrs. Liddell: In 1999 there were 2,667 people employed in mineral extraction in Scotland. This information is taken from the National Statistics publication, Mineral Extraction in Great Britain (Business Monitor PA1007).

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Jandoo Report

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Advocate-General what assessment she has made of the implications for her Department of the conclusions of the Jandoo report. [17515]

The Advocate-General: This is a matter for the Scottish Executive and not for my Department. I know that the Lord Advocate and the Minister for Justice and their officials are actively engaged in considering this.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Appointments Commission (Chairman)

48. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Council how many days per month the chairman of the House of Lords Appointments Commission devotes to his duties. [17539]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I understand that the Chairman of the House of Lords Appointments Commission has since his appointment on average devoted seven days a month to his duties. He was recruited on the basis that the time commitment for the Chairman was expected to settle down to around 8–10 days a year, although in the first few months, as the Commission established its working practices, it was expected to be more than this. The Chairman has waived his entitlement to remuneration from public funds.

Life Peers (Compulsory Redundancy)

52. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the President of the Council if he will take powers to provide for compulsory redundancy of life peers as part of his plans for the reform of the House of Lords; and if he will make a statement. [17543]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The White Paper "The House of Lords—Completing the Reform" suggests that the Royal Commission recommendation that current life peers should retain their membership of the House of Lords for life be accepted. Life peers would, however, be enabled to retire if they wished and the Government have said that they welcome views on the possibility of some sort of winding-up and resettlement grant for those peers who choose to take advantage of this new facility.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

50. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the President of the Council to ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if the House of Commons Commission has consulted the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges on the workload and future staffing requirements of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. [17541]

Mr. Kirkwood: The Commission is in correspondence with the Chairman of the Committee on this subject.

David Winnick: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a statement on the duties of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. [17538]

Mr. Kirkwood: The principal duties of the Commissioner are set out in Standing Order No. 150. In essence they are:

Providing advice on a confidential basis to individual Members and to the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges about the interpretation of the Code of Conduct and about questions of propriety.

Receiving and investigating complaints about the conduct of Members (whether related directly to alleged breaches of the Code or not) and reporting the results of investigations to the Committee.

Maintaining and monitoring the operation of the Register of Members' interests.

Preparing guidance and providing induction courses for new Members on matters of conduct, propriety and ethics.

Monitoring the operation of the Code of Conduct and, where appropriate, proposing possible modifications of it to the Standards and Privileges Committee.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), representing the House of Commons Commission, pursuant to the answers to the hon. Members for Lewes (Norman Baker) and for Walsall, North (David Winnick), of 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 484W, on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, how many days a week the first Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards was paid for in each year of his term of office. [19818]

Mr. Kirkwood: The first Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards was paid throughout his appointment on the basis of working four days a week.

Select Committee Witnesses

51. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals to amend the rules governing the taking of evidence from witnesses in Select Committees. [17542]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My right hon. Friend has no such proposals but would consider any suggestions made by interested parties, such as the Liaison Committee.

Select Committees (Scrutiny)

53. **Ms Christine Russell:** To ask the President of the Council what plans he has to propose changes to the House's scrutiny of the Government and the working of Select Committees. [17544]

54. **Ms Buck:** To ask the President of the Council what proposals he has made to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons to improve the scrutiny of Government by Select Committees. [17545]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My right hon. Friend confirmed on 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 197W, that he intends to present a strategy paper to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons in the very near future.

Modernisation of the House

Ms Coffey: To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on recent progress on modernisation of the House. [17532]

Mr. Robin Cook: It is hoped that the Modernisation Committee will be able to bring forward its first report on the role of Select Committees early in the new year.

I shall be putting proposals to the Modernisation Committee next week on the wider agenda of reform, including more effective scrutiny of legislation. The intention is that these proposals will be available to all Members in order that their views can inform the work of the Modernisation Committee in preparing recommendations for the House.

Pre-legislative Scrutiny

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals to extend pre-legislative scrutiny. [17536]

Mr. Robin Cook: We have increased the number of draft bills published and opened up the process of pre-legislative scrutiny. Pre-legislative scrutiny should improve legislation, but demands more effort from all those involved. I hope to see a steady increase in its use until it occurs with the majority of bills, but that will take time to develop.

Members' Computer Equipment

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the President of the Council what has been the average time taken to *(a)* deliver and *(b)* install standard computer equipment to hon. Members' offices in (i) the House of Commons and (ii) constituency offices; and if he will make a statement. [20696]

Mr. Robin Cook: The information the hon. Member has requested is not held in this form. It is being collated, and a substantive answer will be given as soon as possible.

HEALTH

Elective Surgery

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what progress has been made towards setting up the fast-track elective surgery centres he announced in February; and if he will make a statement; [13490]

(2) if he will set up a dedicated fast-track elective surgery centre in the North Kent area. [13491]

Ms Blears: We announced plans for 26 diagnostic and treatment centres (DTCs) in February. This put us well on course to exceed the target of 20 schemes developed by 2004 (with eight operational) which we set out in the NHS Plan. Work on the schemes is progressing and we are confident that at least eight of them will be receiving patients by 2004.

We are now looking at ways to extend the DTC programme, including in the south-east, and if possible to bring it forward. We will consider suitable proposals which stand to benefit even more patients.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Public Service Agreement target for March for the connection of GP surgeries using clinical computer systems to the NHSnet was met. [14906]

Ms Blears: The Public Service Agreement between the Department and Her Majesty's Treasury which formed part of the spending review 2000 did not include a specific target for connection of general practitioner surgeries to NHSnet.

The Government's information management and technology strategy for the national health service, "Building the Information Core—Implementing the NHS Plan", published in January 2001 gave the target of 95 per cent. of GP practices in England to be connected to NHSnet by end of March 2001.

At that date 93.6 per cent. of practices in England had an NHSnet connection; over 95 per cent. were connected by the end of May 2001, and at the end of October 2001, over 97 per cent.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress towards meeting the Public Service Agreement target for the connection of GP surgeries which use clinical computer systems to the NHSnet by March 2002. [14905]

Ms Blears: The Public Service Agreement between the Department and Her Majesty's Treasury which formed part of the spending review 2000 did not include a specific target for connection of general practitioner surgeries to NHSnet.

The Government's information management and technology strategy for the national health service, "Building the Information Core—Implementing the NHS Plan", published in January 2001 gave the target for all GP practices in England to be connected to NHSnet by March 2002.

At the end of October 2001, over 97 per cent. of GP practices in England were connected to NHSnet. It is expected that by March 2002, nearly all GP practices will be connected.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress in meeting the Public Service Agreement target of savings from action on contractor fraud between 1999–2000 and 2001–02. [14930]

Ms Blears: The two Public Service Agreement targets for savings from action on contractor fraud are:

(a) to recover £6 million lost to fraud by contractors, in pharmaceutical services, by the end of 2001–02, and

(b) to prevent the loss of £9 million of national health service funds to contractor fraud, again in pharmaceutical services by the end of 2001–02.

The NHS counter fraud service (NHSCFS) inherited these targets on its formation in late 1998. Among the wide range of activity undertaken in countering fraud in the NHS they have made excellent progress in achieving these PSA targets.

The first target to recover £6 million lost to fraud by contactors in the pharmaceutical service has already been exceeded. The NHSCFS has, as at the end of October, agreed recoveries totalling £7.47 million.

The second target was to prevent the loss of £9 million of NHS funds lost to contractor fraud in the pharmaceutical service. By mid January 2002 the NHSCFS will have hard figures for the loss to fraud in this area and for the losses that have been prevented as a result of the work that has taken place.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress in meeting the Public Service Agreement target of a 50 per cent. reduction in prescription charge evasion by 2002–03. [14899]

Ms Blears: On its formation in late 1998 the national health service Counter Fraud Service (NHSCFS) inherited the PSA target to reduce patient prescription charge fraud by 50 per cent. by 2002–03.

The progress of the NHSCFS has made against the target has already shown a reduction in losses to fraud in this area of 41 per cent. (£48 million) by the end of 2000–01.

Acupuncture

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what additional funds are made available to general practitioners for the provision of acupuncture services as part of the treatments administered at their surgeries; [15118]

(2) how many GPs in the NHS provide acupuncture for their patients within their practice. [15019]

Ms Blears: General practitioners are not required to provide acupuncture as part of either general or personal medical services. They are, however, able to provide acupuncture services under arrangements agreed local with the their health authority or primary care trust. They may also themselves treat patients in this way if they believe it is appropriate and they are qualified to do so. The Department does not, however, collect data on the provision of acupuncture services by general practitioners.

Derriford Hospital

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the *(a)* income and *(b)* number of patients treated by Derriford hospital, Plymouth, in the last financial year. [15289]

Ms Blears: The total income of Plymouth hospitals national health service trust in the financial year 2000–01 was £188,822,000. In the same year there were 35,494 non-elective and 52,912 elective finished consultant episodes and 307,101 outpatient attendances at the trust.

Prescription Charging

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the Prescription Pricing Authority monitors patient compliance with the prescription charging arrangements. [15325]

Ms Blears: The Compliance Unit of the Prescription Pricing Authority (PPA) is responsible for carrying out a number of checks on those patients who claim exemption from prescription charges on grounds such as age, certain medical conditions, low income or receipt of certain tax credits or benefits (such as income support). Appropriate organisations are contacted to confirm entitlement to exemption. Where the patient provides additional information to confirm their entitlement, no further action is taken. However, if it is found that a patient has incorrectly claimed exemption from prescription charges, the PPA recovers the outstanding charges and may impose a penalty charge.

Benzodiazepines

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients *(a)* have been prescribed benzodiazepines and *(b)* were considered to be clinically dependent upon them during each year since 1971; [15588]

(2) what advice his Department issued with regard to the *(a)* daily dosage, *(b)* time limit of dosage, *(c)* possible

side-effects and *(d)* tendency to addiction of those prescribed benzodiazepines during the last 25 years; and what assessment he has made of such advice issued by medical advisory bodies; [15586]

(3) what recent assessment his Department has made of the impact on NHS patients of prescribing benzodiazepines; [15590]

(4) what assessment he has made of the impact of medical practice to prescribe benzodiazepines to some patients with a spectrum of mental health disorders in respect of *(a)* recovery from illness, *(b)* worsening of illness, *(c)* onset of known side-effects and *(d)* addiction to these drugs; [15587]

(5) how many *(a)* benzodiazepine doses have been administered and *(b)* prescriptions for benzodiazepines have been written for each year since 1971. [15591]

Ms Blears: The numbers of prescriptions for benzodiazepines from 1980 to 2000 are listed in the tables. However the number of prescriptions cannot be used to determine the number of patients receiving benzodiazepines. Information is not available on the number of patients considered to be clinically dependent upon benzodiazepines.

Information on the daily dosage, time limit of dosage, possible side effects and tendency to addiction of benzodiazepines is present in the Summary of Product Characteristics, and the Patient Information Leaflet, which is produced by the manufacturer and approved by the Licensing Authority. The Committee of Safety of Medicines, and previously the Committee on the Review of Medicine have issued advice on all these aspects in relation to benzodiazepines use to healthcare professionals in the United Kingdom on a number of occasions in the drug safety bulletin "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance" and in the *British Medical Journal*. These publications are listed and copies will be placed in the Library.

Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance 1978—thrombophlebitis associated with diazepam.

British Medical Journal, 1980: 910–912. Systematic review of benzodiazepines.

Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance 1981—Unexpected severe psychotic effects with Halcion.

Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance 1985—Respiratory depression and hypotension with Midazolam (Hypnovel).

Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance 1988—Benzodiazepines, dependence and withdrawal symptoms.

Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance 1995—Side effects may impair driving.

Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance 1997—Avoid benzodiazepines during pregnancy and lactation as they may cause side effects in the exposed babies.

Mental Health Foundation 1994 "Guidelines for the Prevention and Treatment of Benzodiazepine Dependence".

Department of Health 1999 "Drug misuse and dependence—guidelines on clinical management".

British National Formulary 2001.

We are not aware of any audit of the impact of such advice.

No recent assessment has been made of the impact on national health service patients of prescribing any particular group of psychiatric drugs. Volume of benzodiazepine prescribing in the community is monitored and the measure has been included as a high level performance indicator.

No assessment has been made of the impact on medical practice of prescribing benzodiazepines, nor has any assessment been made of the impact of the information and advice provided on medical practice.

The number of prescriptions dispensed in the community for benzodiazepines in England since 1980 is given in the tables. Data prior to 1980 are not available. Information about drugs prescribed and dispensed in hospitals is not available.

Number of prescriptions dispensed in the community for benzodiazepines: 1980–2000—England

Prescriptions (thousand)

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Temazepam	1,014	1,709	2,431	2,896	3,378	5,133	5,802	6,242	6,129	5,946	5,985
Diazepam	7,300	6,604	5,812	5,147	4,449	4,374	4,217	4,071	3,622	3,331	3,147
Nitrazepam	7,362	6,910	6,596	5,912	5,368	5,001	4,657	4,383	3,850	3,523	3,188
Lorazepam	2,033	2,487	2,928	2,957	2,736	2,590	2,607	2,395	1,756	1,452	1,227
Chloridiazepoxide	1,834	1,694	1,516	1,294	1,112	1,007	893	816	697	604	548
Oxazepam	587	675	654	612	561	609	646	621	511	406	399
Lormelazepam	—	32	163	346	442	122	160	191	194	169	163
Clonazepam	40	48	55	72	77	93	99	107	111	111	127
Loprazolam Mesylate	—	—	—	2	50	19	71	125	127	144	160
Clobazam	275	330	381	378	396	109	42	39	48	59	53
Triazolam	402	795	855	782	906	1,200	1,468	1,576	1,635	1,530	1,513
Alprazolam	—	—	—	127	261	63	—	—	—	—	—
Bromazepam	—	—	9	76	151	32	—	—	—	—	—
Clorazepate Dipotassium	945	930	971	971	1,016	216	—	—	—	—	—
Flunitrazepam	—	—	7	86	188	54	—	—	—	—	—
Flurazepam Hydrochloride	1,885	1,833	1,860	1,700	1,628	376	—	—	—	—	—
Ketazolam	37	105	135	138	118	27	—	—	—	—	—
Medazepam	198	176	159	140	108	25	—	—	—	—	—
Prazepam	—	—	12	55	55	12	—	—	—	—	—
Total	23,912	24,329	24,544	23,962	22,999	21,062	20,662	20,565	18,680	17,274	16,510
Annual change (percentage)	—	1.7	0.9	–2.4	–4.0	–8.4	–1.9	–0.5	–9.2	–7.5	–4.4

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Temazepam	6,428	6,914	6,651	6,345	6,063	5,540	5,252	5,043	4,878	4,697
Diazepam	3,254	3,225	3,220	3,288	3,411	3,600	3,798	3,989	4,108	4,293
Nitrazepam	3,186	3,074	2,902	2,721	2,582	2,539	2,426	2,333	2,210	2,095
Lorazepam	1,137	1,018	932	867	818	785	758	743	728	715
Chloridiazepoxide	542	503	467	449	438	428	423	414	402	384
Oxazepam	378	352	328	311	300	304	306	300	289	272
Lormelazepam	181	215	218	208	201	234	249	252	246	210
Clonazepam	137	144	152	160	168	181	196	213	231	253
Loprazolam Mesylate	195	239	230	219	213	221	215	211	200	191
Clobazam	66	67	67	68	70	74	74	82	85	93
Triazolam	1,123	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Alprazolam	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bromazepam	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Clorazepate Dipotassium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Flunitrazepam	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Flurazepam Hydrochloride	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ketazolam	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Medazepam	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Prazepam	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	16,626	15,751	15,167	14,638	14,266	13,905	13,698	13,580	13,378	13,204
Annual change (percentage)	—	−5.3	−3.7	−3.5	−2.5	−2.5	−1.5	−0.9	−1.5	−1.3

Notes:

1. The prescription information was obtained from the Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) system. Please note that the data up to 1990 are not strictly consistent with data from 1991 onwards. Figures for 1980–90 are based on fees and on a sample of 1 in 200 prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors only. Figures for 1991 onwards are based on items and cover all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists, appliance contractors dispensing doctors and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered. Also included are prescriptions written in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man but dispensed in England. The data do not cover drugs dispensed in hospital or private prescriptions.

2. Benzodiazepines are those drugs defined within the British National Formulary sections 4.1.1, "Hypnotics", 4.1.2. "Anxiolytics", and 4.8. "Antiepileptics".

A and E

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the average waiting times in each accident and emergency unit in Oxfordshire in each of the last five years. [16021]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not available centrally.

Home Helps

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authority home helps there have been in each of the last 15 years. [16094]

Jacqui Smith: The number of home helps (excluding home help organisers) employed by local authorities in England in each of the last 15 years is in the table. Details of the number of contact hours of home help/home care and the households receiving this care are available in the publication "Community Care Statistics 2000: Home help/home care services for adults, England" available at www.doh.gov.uk/stats/hh2000.htm.

Home helps at 30 September

whole time equivalent

	Number
1985[1]	51,959
1986[1]	53,706
1987[1]	56,336
1988[1]	57,004
1989[1]	56,613
1990[1]	55,805
1991[1]	54,708
1992[1]	54.254
1993	50,744
1994	52,683
1995	49,811
1996	47,750
1997	46,316
1998	42,883
1999	39,774
2000	35,285

[1] Figures prior to 1993 include family aides staff.

Source:

Department of Health staffing return SSDS001

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the United Kingdom academic research groups with experience in reviewing the risks associated with depleted uranium. [16282]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 November 2001]:* The Department knows of four academic groups which have been active in reviewing the risks from depleted uranium, the Royal Society Depleted Uranium Working Group, the British Geological Survey, the University of Bristol Department of Earth Sciences and the Southampton Oceanic Centre.

Strokes (Risk)

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the increased risk of strokes among members of *(a)* Asian and *(b)* African-Caribbean ethnic groups; and what plans he has to commission further research. [16691]

Jacqui Smith: The 1999 Health Survey for England commissioned by the Department investigated the health of minority ethnic groups. This found that after adjusting for age, rates of stroke among black Caribbean men were over two-thirds higher than in the general population. Indian men also had higher rates than the general population. Among women, Chines women had low rates of stroke, while all other groups did not differ significantly from the general population. Details of the survey can be found at: http//www.official-documents.co.uk/document/doh/survey99/houses-00.htm.

The Department has funded a number of literature reviews on ethnicity and health, carried out by the national health service Centre for Reviews and Dissemination (CRD), University of York. One of the reviews looked at stroke in south Asian and African-Caribbean groups. This concluded that south Asian and Afro-Caribbean populations experience significantly raised rates of cardiovascular disease. In particular south Asian groups are at higher risk of coronary heart disease, and Afro-Caribbeans are at greater risk of stroke. The details of these reviews can be found on the CRD website at: http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/welcome.htm.

The Department is currently funding a study entitled 'The South London Stroke Register: The Incidence, Outcome and Ethnic differences of aetiological subtypes of stroke'. This study will compare incidence of stroke between ethnic groups and compare survival, recurrence and functional status between subtypes and ethnic groups.

The Department has no specific plans to commission further research in this area, but stroke will continue to be considered as one of the priorities within the developing research and development strategy that supports the National Service Framework for Older People.

Ministerial Visit (Buckingham)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to visit the Buckingham constituency to meet patients. [16903]

Ms Blears: Ministers have no plans to visit the Buckingham constituency at present.

Ritalin

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions for Ritalin have been issued in each year since 1992. [16888]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is in the table.

Number of prescription items and net ingredient cost of methylphenidate hydrochloride dispensed in the community, 1992 to 2000

England

Year	*Prescription items (Thousand)*	*Net ingredient cost (£000)*
1992	2.6	16.5
1993	3.5	25.7
1994	6.0	52.3
1995	14.7	253.0
1996	47.9	811.7
1997	92.1	1,636.5
1998	126.6	2,402.8
1999	158.0	3,100.3
2000	186.2	3,757.6

Number of prescription items and net ingredient cost of methylphenidate hydrochloride dispensed in the community, 1992 to 2000

England

Notes

1. The data cover all prescriptions dispensed in the community, ie by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors, and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered in England.

2. The data do not cover drugs dispensed in hospital or private prescriptions.

3. The net ingredient cost is the basic cost of a drug and does not take account of discounts, dispensing costs, fees or prescription charges income.

Smoking Cessation

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the budget for smoking cessation services from April 2002. [17456]

Jacqui Smith: Decisions on the level of funding for smoking cessation services in 2002–03 form part of the work on health authority allocations. An announcement on health authority allocations for 2002–03 will be made shortly.

The NHS Plan sets out the provision of a comprehensive smoking cessation service. The success of this programme will mean that by 2010, at least 1.5 million smokers will have given up smoking.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to support *(a)* smoking cessation campaigns and *(b)* campaigns to divert smokers into less dangerous ways of ingesting nicotine. [16891]

Jacqui Smith: We will continue to use publicity campaigns designed to persuade smokers to give up. This publicity forms part of a comprehensive strategy including national telephone helplines and local cessation support which can include the provision of nicotine replacement therapy where appropriate. Nicotine is an addictive substance and we have no plans to encourage its use other than in the controlled circumstances of smoking cessation.

Patient Advocacy and Liaison Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the patient advocacy and liaison services that exist. [16846]

Ms Blears: A list of current patients advice and liaison services is as follows:

Patient advice and liaison services—list of pathfinders as at 22 November 2001

Addenbrooke's NHS Trust
Ashford and St. Peter's NHS Trust
Ashford PCG
Barts and the London NHS Trust
Bassetlaw Hospital
Bath and NE Somerset PCT
Berkshire Healthcare NHS Trust
Bexhill and Rother PCT
Birmingham Specialist Community Trust
Birmingham Women's Healthcare Trust
Bishop Auckland General Hospital
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley NHS Trust
Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust
Bootle and Litherland PCT
Bournemouth PCT, Poole Bay PCT, Poole Central and North PCT and Dorset Ambulance Trust
Brighton and Hove PCG
Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust
Buckinghamshire Mental Health Trust
City Hospital Trust
City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust
Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology NHS Trust
County Durham and Darlington Priority Services NHS Trust
Craven PCG
Crawley PCG
Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley PCT
Dartford, Gravesham NHS Trust
Dewsbury Healthcare NHS Trust
Doncaster and Bassetlaw Hospitals NHS Trust
Easington PCG
East Cheshire NHS Trust
East Devon PCT
East Gloucestershire Trust
East Kent Hospitals Trust
Eastbourne and County Healthcare NHS Trust
Eastbourne Hospital NHS Trust
Eastern Wakefield PCT
Epping Forest PCT
Exeter PCT
Fenland PCT
Frimley Park NHS Trust
Gateshead Health NHS Trust Education Centre
George Eliot Hospital and Warwickshire Ambulance Trust
Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust
Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust
Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital NHS Trust
Hambleton and Richmondshire PCG
Harrogate Health Care NHS Trust
Hartlepool NHS PCT
Hastings and Rother NHS Trust
Heatherwood and Wrexham Park NHS Trust
Herefordshire PCT
High Weald PCG
Hillingdon PCT
Homerton Hospital NHS Trust
Hull and East Yorkshire Community Health NHS Trust
Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust
Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust
Kettering General Hospital NHS Trust
King's Healthcare NHS Trust
Kingston Hospital NHS Trust
Langbaurgh PCT
Luton and Dunstable Hospital
Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells
Manchester Mental Health Partnership
Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust
Medway and Swale PCG
Medway Maritime Hospital
Mid Surrey, East Elmbridge and East Surrey PCGs
Mid Sussex NHS Trust
Middlesbrough and Eston NHS PCG
Milton Keynes Central Hospital
Newham PCT
North Bristol Trust
North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust
North Durham Healthcare NHS Trust
North East Lincolnshire PCT
North East London Mental Health NHS Trust
North Hampshire Hospital NHS Trust
North Hants PCT
North Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust
North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust
North Tees NHS PCT
Northallerton Trust
Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust
Northern and Yorks Region Learning Alliance
Northern General Hospital
Northumberland Mental Health Trust
Nottinghamshire Health Authority
Nuffield Orthopaedic NHS Trust
Ouse Valley PCG
Oxford Learning Disabilities Trust
Oxford Radcliffe Hospital NHS Trust
Oxleas NHS Trust
Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust

Pinderfields and Pontefract Hospitals NHS Trust
Plymouth PCT
Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust
Preston Acute Hospital NHS Trust
Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust
Priority Healthcare Wearside NHS Trust
Queen Victoria Hospital NHS Trust
Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospital NHS Trust
Royal Cornwall Hospitals Trust
Royal Devon and Exeter Trust
Royal Hallamshire Hospital
Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospital NHS Trust
Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital NHS Trust
Royal Surrey County NHS Trust
Royal United Hospital Bath
Rushmoor and Hart PCG
Salisbury Healthcare Trust
Scarborough and NE Yorkshire Healthcare NHS Trust
Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale PCG
Selby and District A.V.S.
Sheffield Health Authority
Sheffield Teaching Hospitals
Shropshire Hospitals
Slough PCT
Somerset Health Community PALS
South Buckinghamshire Trust
South Derbyshire Acute NHS Trust
South Devon Healthcare Trust
South Downs Health NHS Trust
South Humber Health Authority
South London and Maudsley Mental Health NHS Trust
South Manchester University Hospital Trust
South Stoke PCT
South Tees Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
South Tyneside Health Care Trust
South Wiltshire PCT
Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust
Southern Derbyshire Community and Mental Health Trust
St. Catherine's Hospital
St. George's Healthcare NHS Trust
St. Helens and Knowsley NHS Trust
St. Mary's House
St. Richards Hospital, Chichester
Stepping Hill Hospital
Stockport NHS Trust
Sunderland West NHS PCT
Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust
Surrey Hants Borders Mental Health
Surrey Oaklands NHS Trust
Sussex Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Swindon and Marlborough Trust
Tees and NE Yorks NHS Trust
Tees, East and North Yorkshire Ambulance Service
Teeside and North Yorkshire Ambulance Service
Thames Gateway NHS Trust
The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust
The Walton Centre
Tower Hamlets PCT
Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust
United Bristol Hospitals Trust
University College London Hospitals NHS Trust
University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust
Vale of Aylesbury PCT
Wakefield and Pontefract Community Healthcare NHS Trust
Wakefield West PCT
Walsall Hospitals Trust
West Hertfordshire NHS Trust
West Kent Mental Health Trust
West Norfolk PCT
West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust
West Sussex Partnership Trust
West Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Service NHS Trust
Whittington Hospitals NHS Trust
Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust
Worthing and Southlands Hospital NHS
Wythenshawe Health Centre
York Health Services NHS Trust.

Hyperbaric Disorders

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many English patients were treated in Scotland for hyperbaric disorders in each of the last five years. [16844]

Jacqui Smith: Information on English patients treated in Scotland for hyperbaric disorders is not collected centrally.

Hospital Cleanliness Audit

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the score for each element in the external audit of cleanliness for each NHS hospital; [16841]

(2) if he will publish the external audit of cleanliness for each NHS hospital in each of the 14 specified elements. [16843]

Ms Blears: On 31 October 2001, the Department published the results of the most recent assessments of cleanliness for national health service hospitals. These results reflect the overall standard of the patient environment. The publication of these results is in line with the commitment we gave in the NHS plan to place this information in the public domain.

The score for each element of the external audit of cleanliness for NHS hospitals has been reported to the NHS trusts concerned. The scores must be interpreted in the context of the written recommendations of the patient environment action teams (PEATs). The publication of the score for each individual element alone will not provide a rounded assessment of standards within each hospital.

NHS trusts are still working to complete the implementation of their 2001–02 patient environment action plans and we expect to see continued improvements throughout the coming months. NHS trusts must incorporate the recommendations of the PEATs within their existing patient environment action plans, as a means of delivering further improvements. These improvements will be reflected in raised scores for each element of the inspection process by April 2002.

Glivec

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pending the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's appraisal of Glivec for chronic myeloid leukaemia patients, what guidance he has given health authorities on prescribing Glivec *(a)* to those who have been on Novartis' extended access programme, *(b)* to those who are on the current trial of the drug and *(c)* to those who have been diagnosed with CML recently and fall under neither *(a)* or *(b)*. [17160]

Jacqui Smith: A letter about the future provision of Glivec, agreed by Ministers and signed by both Neil McKay, the chief operating officer, and Professor Mike Richards, the national cancer director, was sent on 24 October to all national health service regional directors.

Novartis, the manufacturers of Glivec, are making a limited free supply available for those patients on the Extended Access Programme (EAP). It will then be for health authorities and trust to discuss the funding of the treatment. However, as the letter of 24 October makes clear, there is no question of treatment being withdrawn from patients on funding grounds once EAP supplies end. Treatment should cease only on clinical grounds.

Those patients involved in trials of Glivec will continue to have their treatments funded by Novartis.

For new patients, as with all newly licensed treatments in advance of a NICE appraisal, the Department's advice is that funding authorities should consider the clinical evidence available for a specific treatment before making any decision.

It is expected that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) will publish guidance on Glivec in August 2002.

Emergency Admissions (North-west)

Mr. Go[illegible] Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage change in emergency admissions has occurred in NHS trusts in the north-west between 2000 and 2001 to date; and if he will make a statement. [16895]

Jacqui Smith: In the first seven months of 2001, there was an increase of 0.3 per cent. in emergency admissions in national health service trusts in the north-west region compared with the same period in the previous year.

Public Bodies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list those public bodies to which his Department appoints members and which are not listed in Public Bodies 2000; [17591]

(2) if he will list those public bodies which are the responsibility of his Department and which are not listed in Public Bodies 2000. [17592]

Ms Blears: Public Bodies 2000 sets out the information on non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), certain public corporations (including nationalised industries) and national health service bodies. There are four types of NDPB: executive NDPBs; advisory NDPBs; tribunal NDPBs; and boards of visitors to penal establishments. The next edition of Public Bodies will be published around the end of the year. Information about task forces, annual reports and ad hoc advisory groups is set out in the annual report, published by the Cabinet Office. Copies of Public Bodies 2000 are in the Library and this publication may be accessed via the Cabinet Office's website (http:/www.official-documents.co.uk/document/caboff/pb00.htm). Copies of the annual report on task forces and similar bodies have also been placed in the Library and the annual report is also being made available on the Cabinet Office's website.

The following public bodies have been established since the publication of Public Bodies 2000. All the bodies listed are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State who is responsible for all the public appointments made to their boards.

Advisory NDPBs

- Advisory Committee on Tissue Banking
- Independent Advisory Group on Teenage Pregnancy
- Independent Review Panel on the Classification of Borderline Medicines
- Social Care Institute for Excellence
- Specialist Advisory Committee on Antimicrobial Resistance

Executive NDPBs

- General Social Care Council

Tribunal NDPBs

- Prescription Price Control Tribunal

Special Health Authorities

- Health Development Agency (replacing the Health Education Authority)
- National Care Standards Commission
- National Clinical Assessment Authority
- National Patient Safety Agency
- National Treatment Agency
- National Health Service Appointments Commission
- Retained Organs Commission.

The Department is also responsible for local NHS trusts, health authorities, and primary care trusts, individual details of which are not listed in Public Bodies. Non-executive appointments to these bodies are now a matter for the NHS Appointments commission. Details of all these local NHS bodies as at 1 April 2000, including their non-executive members, are given in the Department of Health Public Appointments Annual Report, a copy of which is in the Library. A copy of the 2001 Public Appointments Annual Report, giving information as at 1 April 2001, will be sent to all hon. Members as soon as it is available. 14 NHS trusts and 25 primary care trusts have been established since 1 April 2001.

Nurses

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the health service spent on hiring agency nursing staff *(a)* in total and *(b)* broken down by NHS trust, in (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97, (iii) 1997–98, (iv) 1998–99, (vi) 1999–2000 and (vi) 2000–01; and what the figures were at the latest date for which figures are available. [20184]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The information requested has been placed in the Library.

The tables contain data that outline the expenditure on non-national health service nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (by NHS trust, health authority and primary care trust) in England, 1995–96 to 2000–01. The non-NHS staff figures include all nurses, midwives and health visiting staff not directly employed by the trusts. We are unable to disaggregate agency nurses. The 2000–01 figures are the latest available and are provisional.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many *(a)* NHS employed and *(b)* agency nurses were employed on the Isle of Wight in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, (iv) 2000 and (v) 2001; [17682]

(2) how much money was spent on agency nurses on the Isle of Wight in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001. [17683]

Ms Blears: The number of national health service nurses employed by the Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Trust is as follows:

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS) qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff within the Isle of Wight health authority area as at 30 September each year

Year	*Whole time equivalents*
1997	570
1998	600
1999	630
2000	670

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10
2. Figures exclude learners and agency staff

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

2001 data are not yet available.

Information is not collected centrally on the numbers of agency nurses used or the cost incurred.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing vacancies there are in the NHS in the Buckingham constituency. [17854]

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing vacancies there are in the NHS in Arundel and South Downs. [18319]

Ms Blears: The information is not available in the format requested.

Private Hospitals

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of NHS in-patients were treated in private hospitals in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001 on the Isle of Wight; and what was the respective yearly cost to the NHS of the treatment. [17684]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not available centrally.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been diagnosed with tuberculosis in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1990. [17858]

Ms Blears: Information on statutory notifications of tuberculosis (excluding chemoprophylaxis) is available from the Public Health Laboratory Service.

The Department collects information on tuberculosis as part of the hospital episode statistics (HES) system, which contains details of patients admitted to and treated in national health service hospitals in England. The numbers of patients in Buckinghamshire health authority are shown in the table.

	Number
1990–91	24
1991–92	44
1992–93	51
1993–94	34
1994–95	27
1995–96	21
1996–97	21
1997–98	20
1998–99	21
1999–2000	33
2000–01	26

Notes:

1. A finished consultant episode is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider.
2. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within a year.
3. The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis field in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.
4. The table uses ICD9 codes: 010–018 (1990–91 to 1994–95) and ICD10 codes A15-A19 (1995–96 to 2000–01).
5. Data in this table are grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data, except for 1998–99 to 2000–01 which are ungrossed.

Source:

Hospital Episodes Statistics (HES) Department of Health

MMR Inoculations

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of children aged *(a)* one to two, *(b)* two to three and *(c)* three to four years have been given MMR inoculations in the Arundel and South Downs constituency. [18615]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of children aged *(a)* one to two, *(b)* two to three and *(c)* three to four years have been given MMR inoculations in the Buckingham constituency. [17860]

Ms Blears: The information available about children immunised against measles, mumps and rubella is contained in the Statistical Bulletin "NHS Immunisation Statistics, England: 2000–01". A copy of the bulletin is in the Library and can also be found on the Department of Health website www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0121.htm.

MRSA

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is *(a)* the level in the last 12 months and *(b)* the trend of the incidence of MRSA; what the average incidence per trust area has been in the last five years; which six trust areas have the highest and at what level of incidence; what action is being taken to tackle MRSA (i) in the above average trusts and (ii) generally; and if he will make a statement. [18078]

Mr. Hutton: Information is not available in the format requested.

The tables give aggregate data on trends and numbers of incidents of methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) voluntarily submitted by national health service trusts for specialist microbiological tests since 1995. These data are currently available on a regional basis only. Data on staphylococcus aureus bacteraemias (blood infections) showing the proportion resistant to methicillin in England and Wales are published quarterly by the Public Health Laboratory Service in the Communicable Disease Report. Copies are available in the Library.

More comprehensive information about bacteraemias, including MRSA, has been collected from all acute trusts since 1 April 2001 and this will be published showing individual trust data from 1 April 2002.

Instructions to the NHS have been issued to ensure that hospital acquired infection is being tackled throughout the organisation. All acute trusts are required to adhere to national standards for infection control and to have specialist infection control teams whose primary responsibility is for all aspects of surveillance, prevention and control of hospital infection including MRSA.

Evidence based, multi-professional guidelines on the general principles for preventing hospital acquired infection were developed with the support of the Department and were published in January this year.

Incidents of MRSA between 1995–2000

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*
Anglia and Oxford	142	237	297	223
North Thames	566	539	544	289
North West	65	176	259	215
Northern and Yorkshire	90	150	224	202
South and West	80	206	254	101
South Thames	377	421	385	220
Trent	52	99	123	109
West Midlands	128	121	102	69
Wales	116	158	176	169
Total	1,616	2,107	2,364	1,597

	1999	*2000*
Eastern	80	60
London	290	170
Northern and Yorkshire	170	70
North West	180	90
South East	170	100
South West	40	10
Trent	100	30
West Midlands	30	50
Wales	130	40
Total	1,190	620

Notes:

For 1995 and 1996 and the first half of 1997 data have been amalgamated to the approximate boundaries of the new regional office areas. This allows for comparison with subsequent years.

An incident is three or more patients infected or colonised by the same strain of MRSA in the same month from the same hospital.

The criteria for submission of isolates of MRSA (and other isolates of staphylococcus aureus) to the PHLS for specialist tests have been revised twice since 1996 (in January 1998 and in January 2000).

These revised criteria have led to a fall in the number of incidents of MRSA that were reported to the PHLS.

Volunteers' Charter

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will establish a volunteers' charter to address the rights of volunteers. [20346]

Jacqui Smith: We already have in place an agreement to respect and promote the rights of volunteers under the Volunteering Code of Good Practice. This code forms part of the Compact agreement between all Government Departments and the voluntary sector. The code was launched in October 2001 and the Department is represented on the implementation group. This group recently met for the first time to agree on methods for the promotion of the principles and good practice set out in the code.

Health Spending

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis his Department has calculated the European average for health spending as a percentage of GDP; and what are the relevant figures for each country. [20687]

Mr. Hutton: The European average is calculated using the arithmetic mean of the member countries health expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product. The relevant figures are provided in the table for the most recent data available.

Total expenditure on health

1998	*Percentage gross domestic product*
Austria	8
Belgium	8.6
Denmark	8.3
Finland	6.9
France	9.3
Germany	10.3
Greece	8.4
Ireland	6.8
Italy	7.7
Luxembourg	6
Netherlands	8.7
Portugal	7.7
Spain	7
Sweden	7.9
United Kingdom	6.8

Source:

Copyright OECD health data 2001

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what figures for expenditure on health care in the UK from different sources his Department bases its figures for health spending as a percentage of GDP. [20688]

Mr. Hutton: Total expenditure on health care in the United Kingdom as a percentage of gross domestic product is based on the following.

(i) UK gross NHS expenditure in cash terms—based on figures from the Department of Health and the devolved Administrations,

(ii) Private health care expenditure—projections based on data published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and,

(iii) Gross domestic product on a cash basis—provided by Her Majesty's Treasury.

Registered General Practitioners (Criminal Convictions)

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will require registered practitioners in England and Wales to disclose any criminal conviction in any jurisdiction. [17397]

Mr. Hutton: Regulations under sections 29A, 29B and 43D of the National Health Service Act 1977 were made, and laid before the House, on 22 November 2001 that will require general medical services general practitioners in England to disclose all criminal convictions anywhere in the world.

The regulations are:

the National Health Service (General Medical Services) Amendment (no. 4) Regulations 2001 (S.I. 3742);

the National Health Service (General Medical Services Supplementary List) Regulations 2001 (S.I. 3740).

Similar measures will be introduced for doctors in personal medical services pilots shortly.

General practitioners in Wales are a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

WORK AND PENSIONS

New Deal

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what his estimate is of the number of people eligible for new deal 50 plus who are also entitled to claim the employment credit; [15837]

(2) what his estimate is of the number of people eligible for new deal 50 plus. [15847]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We estimate that over 3 million people are eligible for new deal 50 plus. Those who move into work and have an overall gross income of under £15,000 per annum, having been on an eligible benefit for six months or more, will be eligible for the employment credit. In the first 18 months of national operation over 51,000 people went back to work with the help of the employment credit.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what campaigns have been undertaken to promote awareness of the new deal 50 plus among employers; [15844]

(2) what campaigns have been undertaken to encourage greater participation in the new deal 50 plus. [15839]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We are currently building on last autumn's successful new deal 50 plus TV advertising campaign with a regional and local marketing campaign. Provisions are made within local budgets for strategic and innovative campaigns, and activities include local/regional press advertising, mailshots, and Jobsfairs.

In addition, people who are over 50 and registered unemployed for six months or more will have new deal 50 plus drawn to their attention through their Jobcentre. New incapacity benefit claimants receive a mailshot about the programme when they become eligible.

We are also developing proposals to increase the participation of employers on new deal 50 plus through the involvement of organisations from various employment sectors.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many new deal 50 plus participants are in receipt of the employment credit; and how many new credits have been recorded in each of the last 12 months; [15846]

(2) if he will make a statement on progress with the new deal 50 plus; [15840]

(3) how many people receive support from the new deal 50 plus; and how many starts to the scheme have been recorded in each of the last 12 months. [15841]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The new deal 50 plus blend of personal advice, jobsearch help and in-work financial support has proved very successful at helping people over 50 move off benefits and back into work.

Starts on the programme are currently measured by the number of people who have moved into work and claimed the programme's in-work financial support, the employment credit. In the first 18 months of its national operation over 51,000 people have returned to work with the help of the employment credit. Currently we estimate that over 30,000 people are in receipt of the credit. Many people will also have benefited from the advice and jobsearch help that is available through the programme, although numbers are not available at present.

The numbers of employment credit starts for each of the last twelve months are in the table.

	Number
October 2000	3,285
November 2000	3,403
December 2000	2,664
January 2001	2,186
February 2001	2,717
March 2001	3,284
April 2001	2,605
May 2001	3,293
June 2001	3,203
July 2001	2,921
August 2001	3,163
September 2001	3,011

Breast Feeding Mothers

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what benefits and allowances are available to breast-feeding mothers; and what plans he has to introduce further measures targeted at this group. [11666]

Malcolm Wicks: There is a wide range of benefits which may be available to all new mothers including maternity benefit, child benefit and income support.

We are improving maternity benefits as part of our drive to help women achieve a better balance between paid work and their family life. Statutory maternity pay and maternity allowance will be raised to £75 a week from April 2002. In 2003 the payments will be increased further to £100 a week and the payment period will be extended from 18 to 26 weeks.

Sure Start maternity grants are also available to mothers, or their partners, who receive qualifying benefits. These grants are currently worth up to three times as much as the maternity payments they replaced and provide more help to the neediest families. We have announced a further increase in the grant from next April to £500 for each child.

Since 1997 the rate of child benefit has increased by 26 per cent. in real terms. The current rates from April 2001 are £15.50 for the first child and £10.35 for all other children.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which report by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate was *(a)* most satisfactory and *(b)* least satisfactory with respect to the Government's housing benefit policies. [11818]

Malcolm Wicks: It is not possible to identify individual local authorities in this way. Inspections have revealed that each authority has a mixture of strengths and weaknesses across a wide range of different administrative and counter-fraud activities. Inspections can vary in approach according to the circumstances of each local authority. The information available in the reports does not, therefore, enable such comparisons to be made.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what financial support is available to local authorities which experience a significant rise in housing benefit administrative costs as a consequence of large scale redundancies. [17868]

Malcolm Wicks: The amount of subsidy paid to each authority is calculated annually using a formula agreed in consultation with the local authority associations. The formula takes account of the caseload and complexity of housing benefit cases, with elements for accommodation and staffing costs. Once annual allocations have been set, they cannot be altered in-year. However, any changes in caseload would be reflected in the following year's allocation.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which 20 local authorities took the longest to pay housing benefit in the UK in the last three years; and what was the average lengths of time it took these local authorities to pay. [16102]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 19 November 2001]:* The information is not available.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many local authority housing benefit managers he has met since he took responsibility for housing benefit; [12944]

(2) how many visits he has made to local authority housing benefit offices since he took responsibility for housing benefit. [12945]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* Information is not available in the format requested. However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and other Ministers meet periodically with housing benefit managers at conferences and on visits to individual local authorities. Such recent occasions have included question and answer sessions at conferences hosted by the Chartered Institute of Housing (June 2001) and the Institute of Ratings Revenue and Valuation (February and October 2001). Visits have also been made to the London Boroughs of Camden, Hackney and Croydon housing benefit departments. Further visits are being planned.

Pensioners (Buckingham)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to visit the Buckingham constituency to meet pensioners. [18797]

Mr. McCartney: My right hon. Friend has no plans to visit the Buckinghamshire constituency in the near future, but we do meet pensioners regularly in the course of our duties.

Severe Disability Allowance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will set out from the first quarter of 1998–99 to the most recent figures available *(a)* how many people were awaiting an appeal for severe disability allowance at the end of each quarter, *(b)* the average time it took to process the appeal and *(c)* the average time it took to process the original claim. [16786]

Maria Eagle: The number of appeals outstanding for severe disablement allowance at the end of the first quarter of 1998–99 to the first quarter of 2001–02 are shown in table 1:

Table 1

Year/quarter	*Number of appeal outstanding at the end of each quarter*
1998–99	
1	1,569
2	1,613
3	1,508
4	1,347
1999–2000	
1	761
2	932
3	623
4	711
2000–01	
1	775
2	855
3	735
4	712
2001–02	
1	716

Note:

All figures are provisional

Source:

100 per cent. download of the Generic Appeals Processing System.

The average times in weeks from lodgement of a severe disablement allowance appeal with the Benefits Agency to the appeal being decided from the end of the first quarter of 1998–99 to the first quarter of 2001–02 is shown in table 2:

Table 2

Year/quarter	*Time in weeks from:* *lodgement of the appeal with the Benefits Agency to the appeal being received by the Appeals Service*	*receipt of the appeal by the Appeals Service to the appeal being heard at tribunal for the first time*	*the appeal being heard for the first time at tribunal to the appeal being decided*[1]	*Overall "end-to-end" clearance time in weeks*
1998–99				
1	11	26	26	37
2	7	26	27	34
3	7	27	30	37
4	7	25	28	35
1999–2000				
1	11	31	36	47
2	12	20	26	38
3	14	23	32	46
4	13	22	33	46
2000–01				
1	12	16	23	35
2	13	15	21	34
3	12	16	22	34
4	11	15	21	32
2001–02				
1	11	15	22	32

[1] Includes appeals, which have been adjourned.

Note:

All figures are provisional

Source:

100 per cent. download of the Generic Appeals Processing System.

The average time in working days taken to process a severe disablement allowance claim for the period from the end of the first quarter of 1998–99 to the second quarter of 2001–02 is shown in table 3:

Table 3

Year/quarter	*Number of working days taken to process a claim for severe disablement allowance*
1998–99	
1	64
2	57
3	58
4	56
1999–2000	
1	62
2	68
3	66
4	65
2000–01	
1	64
2	60
3	63
4	69
2001–02[1]	
1	76
2	104

[1] Severe disablement allowance ceased to be payable as a new benefit from April 2001.

Notes:

1. All figures are provisional.
2. All data from Central Data Unit.

Preserved Rights Residents

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 145W, on preserved rights residents, if he will give comparable figures for the last three years for which figures are available. [17933]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is in the tables.

Income support claimants with preserved rights in residential care/nursing homes as at May 1998

	All preserved rights cases		*Residential care*		*Nursing homes*	
	Number (thousand)	*Percentage*	*Number (thousand)*	*Percentage*	*Number (thousand)*	*Percentage*
All cases	103.7	100.0	59.3	100.0	35.1	100.0
Fees equal to or below IS	57.8	57.1	38.6	56.3	19.2	54.6
Fees above IS	45.9	44.3	30.0	43.7	15.9	45.4
of which above IS by:						
£0.01 to £14.44[1]	16.4	15.8	8.1	11.9	8.3	23.6

Income support claimants with preserved rights in residential care/nursing homes as at May 1998

	All preserved rights cases		Residential care		Nursing homes	
	Number (thousand)	Percentage	Number (thousand)	Percentage	Number (thousand)	Percentage
£14.45-£20.00	3.5	3.4	2.2	3.2	1.3	3.6
£20.01-£30.00	4.3	4.1	2.7	4.0	1.6	4.4
£30.01-£40.00	4.0	3.9	2.7	3.9	1.3	3.7
£40.01-£50.00	2.2	2.1	1.4	2.1	0.7	2.1
£50.01-£60.00	1.6	1.6	1.1	1.6	0.5	1.4
£60.01-£70.00	1.4	1.3	1.0	1.4	[2]0.4	[2]1.1
£70.01 and over	12.6	12.1	10.7	15.6	1.9	5.4
of which:						
£70.01-£80.00	1.4	1.3	1.1	1.7	[2]0.2	[2]0.6
£80.01-£90.00	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.8	[2]0.2	[2]0.6
£90.01-£100.00	1.0	0.9	0.7	1.1	[2]0.2	[2]0.6
£100.01-£110.00	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.8	[2]0.2	[2]0.5
£110.01-£120.00	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.8	[2]0.1	[2]0.2
£120.01 and over	8.2	7.9	7.2	10.5	1.0	2.9

[1] Below the personal expenses allowance of £14.45

[2] Are subject to a high degree of sampling error and should be used as a rough guide to the current situation only

Note:

1. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling error.
2. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 100 and are expressed in thousands.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, May 1998.

Income support claimants with preserved rights in residential care/nursing homes as at May 1999

	All preserved rights cases		Residential care		Nursing homes	
	Number (thousand)	Percentage	Number (thousand)	Percentage	Number (thousand)	Percentage
All cases	86.3	100.0	58.3	100.0	26.9	100.0
Fees equal to or below IS	49.2	56.1	33.4	56.3	15.8	58.8
Fees above IS	37.0	42.9	25.9	43.7	11.1	41.2
of which above IS by:						
£0.01 to £14.74[1]	11.6	13.5	6.6	11.2	5.0	18.6
£14.75-£20.00	2.8	3.3	1.7	2.8	1.1	4.2
£20.01-£30.00	3.8	4.4	2.3	3.9	1.4	5.3
£30.01-£40.00	2.7	3.1	2.0	3.4	0.6	2.4
£40.01-£50.00	1.9	2.2	1.4	2.3	0.6	2.1
£50.01-£60.00	1.2	1.4	0.8	1.3	[2]0.4	[2]1.5
£60.01-£70.00	1.3	1.5	0.9	1.6	[2]0.3	[2]1.3
£70.01 and over	11.7	13.6	10.2	17.1	1.5	5.7
of which:						
£70.01-£80.00	1.0	1.1	0.8	1.4	[2]0.1	[2]0.5
£80.01-£90.00	1.1	1.3	0.9	1.6	[2]0.2	[2]0.7
£90.01-£100.00	0.7	0.8	0.6	1.0	[2]0.1	[2]0.3
£100.01-£110.00	[2]0.4	[2]0.4	[2]0.3	[2]0.5	[3]—	[3]—
£110.01-£120.00	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.8	[2]0.1	[2]0.5
£120.01 and over	7.9	9.2	7.0	11.8	0.9	3.5

[1] Below the personal expenses allowance of £14.75

[2] Are subject to a high degree of sampling error and should be used as a rough guide to the current situation only

[3] Denotes nil or negligible

Note:

1. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling error.

2. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 100 and are expressed in thousands.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, May 1999.

Income support claimants with preserved rights in residential care/nursing homes as at May 2000

	All preserved rights cases		*Residential care*		*Nursing homes*	
	Number (thousand)	*Percentage*	*Number (thousand)*	*Percentage*	*Number (thousand)*	*Percentage*
All cases	74.3	100.0	52.7	100.0	21.6	100.0
Fees equal to or below IS	40.2	54.1	27.6	52.4	12.6	58.4
Fees above IS	34.1	45.9	25.1	47.6	9.0	41.6
of which above IS by:						
£0.01 to £15.44[1]	11.1	15.0	7.0	13.2	4.2	19.3
£15.45-£20.00	2.1	2.9	1.1	2.0	1.0	4.8
£20.01-£30.00	2.9	4.0	2.0	3.9	0.9	4.2
£30.01-£40.00	2.4	3.2	2.0	3.8	[2]0.3	[2]1.6
£40.01-£50.00	1.4	1.9	0.9	1.8	[2]0.5	[2]2.2
£50.01-£60.00	1.2	1.6	1.0	1.8	[2]0.2	[2]0.9
£60.01-£70.00	1.2	1.6	0.9	1.7	[2]0.3	[2]1.5
£70.01 and over	11.8	15.8	10.2	19.4	1.5	7.1
of which:						
£70.01-£80.00	0.9	1.2	0.7	1.3	[2]0.2	[2]0.7
£80.01-£90.00	1.1	1.5	0.9	1.8	[2]0.2	[2]0.7
£90.01-£100.00	0.6	0.8	0.5	1.0	[2]0.1	[2]0.4
£100.01-£110.00	[2]0.5	[2]0.6	[2]0.4	[2]0.7	[2]0.7	[2]0.4
£110.01-£120.00	0.5	0.7	[2]0.4	[2]0.8	[2]0.1	[2]0.6
£120.01 and over	8.2	11.1	7.3	13.8	0.9	4.3

[1] Below the personal expenses allowance of £15.45

[2] Are subject to a high degree of sampling error and should be used as a rough guide to the current situation only

Note:

1. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling error.
2. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 100 and are expressed in thousands.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, May 2000.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 145W, on preserved rights residents, if he will give figures on the same basis for top-ups of *(a)* £70.01 to £80, *(b)* £80.01 to £90, *(c)* £90.01 to £100, *(d)* £100.01 to £110, *(e)* £110.01 to £120 and *(f)* £120.01 and over. [17934]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is shown in the table.

Income support claimants with preserved rights in residential care/nursing homes as at May 2001

	All preserved rights cases		*Residential care*		*Nursing homes*	
	Number (Thousand)	*Percentage*	*Number (Thousand)*	*Percentage*	*Number (Thousand)*	*Percentage*
All cases	65.1	100.0	47.6	100	17.4	100
Fees equal to or below IS	35.2	54.1	24.8	52.1	10.4	59.4
Fees above IS	29.9	45.9	22.8	47.9	7.1	40.6
Of which above IS by:						
£0.01 to £16.04[1]	8.3	12.7	5.1	10.8	3.1	18.0
£16.05 to £20.00	1.8	2.8	1.4	3.0	[2]0.4	[2]2.3
£20.01 to £30.00	2.6	4.1	1.9	3.9	0.8	4.5
£30.01 to £40.00	2.1	3.2	1.6	3.4	[2]0.5	[2]2.6
£40.01 to £50.00	1.2	1.9	0.8	1.7	[2]0.4	[2]2.5
£50.01 to £60.00	1.1	1.7	0.9	1.9	[2]0.2	[2]0.9
£60.01 to £70.00	1.0	1.5	0.8	1.6	[2]0.2	[2]1.3
£70.01 to £80.00	1.1	1.7	0.9	1.8	[2]0.2	[2]1.3
£80.01 to £90.00	0.7	1.1	0.6	1.3	[2]0.1	[2]0.6
£90.01 to £100.00	0.5	0.8	[2]0.4	[2]0.8	[2]0.1	[2]0.6
£100.01 to £110.00	0.6	0.9	0.5	1.0	[2]0.1	[2]0.6
£110.01 to £120.00	[2]0.5	[2]0.7	[2]0.3	[2]0.7	[2]0.1	[2]0.7
£120.01 and over	8.4	13.0	7.6	16.0	0.8	4.8

[1] Below the personal expenses allowance of £16.05.

[2] Subject to a high degree of sampling error and should be used as a rough guide to the current situation only.

Notes:

1. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling error.
2. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest hundred and are expressed in thousands.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, May 2001

Income-related Benefits

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of those on income related benefits are subject to the tariff incomes schedule; and what plans he has to review the coverage of the schedule. [15616]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table:

	Number
Income Support (IS) (including Minimum Income Guarantee)	136,000
Jobseeker's Allowance (income-based) (JSA(IB))	9,000
Housing Benefit (HB) only	20,000
Council Tax Benefit (CTB) only	170,000
HB and CTB	170,000

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. IS and JSA(IB) figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling error.
3. HB and CTB figures are based on a 1 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling error.
4. Of those receiving IS and JSA(IB), 10,000 were also receiving HB, 50,000 were receiving CTB and 60,000 were receiving both HB and CTB.
5. HB/CTB figures refer to households, which may be a single person, a couple or a family.

Sources:

IS Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, May 2000.

JSA Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, May 2000.

HB and CTB Management Information System, annual 1 per cent. sample, May 2000.

We keep the rules on the treatment of capital in the income-related benefits under review. We will shortly announce reforms of the treatment of capital for the pension credit.

Unemployment Benefits

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the trends in the numbers of those receiving benefits relating to unemployment in the last 12 months. [19395]

Malcolm Wicks: During the last 12 months unemployment has fallen below 1 million for the first time since 1975. The latest figures, for October 2001, show the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance at 951,100. Although this is 4,300 higher than in September, the labour market is still in a better position than a year ago, with claimant unemployment 95,700 lower than in October 2000.

Child Care Grant

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the child care grant payable to full-time students is classed as income for housing benefit and income support claimants. [19481]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* The child care grants payable by the Department for Education and Skills are disregarded as income for those full-time students who are eligible to claim housing benefit and income support, as are the child care grants paid by the Scottish Executive.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many employers are contributing to stakeholder pensions; and what information he has collated about the levels of contribution in relation to wage levels. [11407]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not yet available. Provisional estimates of contributions to stakeholder pensions by employers are scheduled to be available in early 2002. Information on the earnings bands of stakeholder pension contributors is not yet available. However, recently published research from the Association of British Insurers found that the majority of those intending to take out a stakeholder pension in the 12 months following the research had an individual annual income of less than £25,000.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reasons *(a)* a claimant who applies after his 65th birthday is not exempt from vehicle excise duty and *(b)* a claimant who claims before his 65th birthday continues to receive an exemption afterwards; and if he will make a statement. [18304]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

As a matter of law and policy, entitlement to the VED exemption in respect of disability, is linked to receipt of

(a) the higher rate mobility component of disability living allowance (DLA), or

(b) the war pensioners mobility supplement paid under the war disablement pensions scheme, or

(c) an invalid tricycle or small car issued by the Department of Health or the Scottish Executive.

The effect of the policy is that a licence is issued without charge, where evidence of receipt of any of the above is produced at vehicle licensing.

The Government have adopted this course because it ensures well defined criteria for entitlement which, in the main targets the exemption on people who become disabled before they reach the age of 65 and, through restricted mobility, may face a lifetime of limited opportunities to work, earn and save compared with their able-bodied counterparts. To introduce different criteria for entitlement VED exemption would be to add further to bureaucracy.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates

33. **David Taylor:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent representations he has received from members of the Magistrates Association about future changes in their role. [17521]

Mr. Wills: The only recent representations received have been in response to Sir Robin Auld's Review Report. So far five magistrates have responded, although not all of these may be members of the Magistrates Association. The period for public comment runs until the end of January.

Small Claims Courts

34. **Harry Cohen:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has for reform of the small claims courts. [17522]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are no plans at the moment for the reform of the small claims procedure within the county courts in England and Wales. The current procedure has been in place for two and a half years and the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Court Service are now looking to evaluate the effectiveness of these procedures.

Local Magistracy

35. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he next expects to meet representatives of the lay justice to discuss the administration of local magistracy. [17524]

Mr. Wills: Each magistrates courts committee is responsible for the efficient and effective administration of the magistrates courts in its area. This will include allocating administrative responsibility among its staff and providing training for magistrates, to ensure justice is administered throughout the local area.

I continue to have meetings with various representatives of the magistrates courts community on a variety of issues.

Electoral Register

37. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has to make the marked electoral register more readily available to political parties. [17526]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Access to marked electoral registers is provided by the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery. The terms of access are agreed with the Speaker, in accordance with powers under the Representation of the People Act 1983. I understand there are no plans to change the arrangements at present.

Family Law Act

38. **Margaret Moran:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has to introduce third party orders under section 60 of the Family Law Act 1996. [17527]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government are concerned to ensure that the range of remedies available to survivors of domestic violence provides sufficient support and protection. We will therefore be conducting a short research project in the New Year, fully to assess the implications and benefits of introducing third party orders as provided under Section 60 of the Family Law Act 1996. We will work closely with stakeholders and interest groups to ensure that the project addresses the diverse needs of all those who need to use the court system.

Criminal Justice Review for Northern Ireland

39. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on her proposed functions under the criminal justice review for Northern Ireland, indicating the changes from her present functions. [17528]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government's response to the Criminal Justice Review Report in Northern Ireland has been published in a detailed Implementation Plan and related draft Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill.

When the Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill receives parliamentary approval and the Government are satisfied that the devolved institutions are working effectively, those functions of the Lord Chancellor which relate to judicial appointments in Northern Ireland will pass to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and a new Judicial Appointments Commission. The most senior judicial appointments will be made on the advice of the Prime Minister. Other functions of the Lord Chancellor in relation to court sittings and membership of Court Rules Committees will be transferred to the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland. The Lord Chief Justice will also have a new role in relation to the handling of complaints against the judiciary. The Lord Chancellor is also currently responsible for the Northern Ireland Court Service. The Bill anticipates the abolition of the Court Service as a separate and distinct Civil Service and the transfer of its functions and staff, most probably to the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Dispute Resolution

40. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what measures her Department is taking to promote alternative dispute resolution. [17529]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Work is currently in hand to promote the use of ADR across Government, following the Government's pledge that all Departments and agencies will use ADR in suitable cases wherever the other party accepts it. Guidelines on the use of ADR, including the provision of appropriate clauses in standard procurement contracts, are currently being drawn up by the Office of Government Commerce, in collaboration with this Department. Last month my Department also organised a conference for Government lawyers on the use of ADR. In December the Lord Chancellor will launch a mediation scheme based at Birmingham civil justice centre.

Access Orders

41. **Paddy Tipping:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will introduce measures to enable parents without care to enforce access orders more effectively. [17530]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Children Act 1989 replaced the notion of access with that of contact. The Children Act Sub-Committee of the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Board on Family Law published a consultation paper on the facilitation of contact and the enforcement of contact orders on 22 March 2001. The committee is currently considering the responses and hopes to submit a report on the outcome of consultation to the Government in early 2002. The Government will consider the committee's report carefully and respond in due course.

Durham Magistrates Bench

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the political balance in percentage terms is of the Durham Magistrates Bench. [19453]

Mr. Wills: The political balance of the Durham Bench is as follows: Conservative voters 11.4 per cent, Labour voters 38.6 per cent., Liberal Democrat voters 4.5 per cent., uncommitted or voters for other parties 43.2 per cent. and not known 2.3 per cent.

TREASURY

Regional Competitiveness

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he had made of the trend in the competitiveness gap between the best-performing and worst-performing United Kingdom regions since May 1997; and what estimate he had made of how this trend will change over the course of the Parliament; [17739]

(2) what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry regarding the regional competitiveness trends since May 1997 contained in the latest edition of the United Kingdom Competitiveness Index. [17737]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry jointly published our assessment of the causes and effects of the significant and persistent differences in economic performance between and within UK regions on 27 November 2001, in the document "Productivity in the UK: 3—The Regional Dimension". The document also sets out the policies and institutions the Government have put in place to tackle these imbalances.

Regional Investment

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government have conducted a regional impact assessment of public expenditure with respect to any Government Department; and if he will make a statement. [18519]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The joint HMT/DTI document "Productivity in the UK: 3—The Regional Dimension", published on 27 November 2001, set out our long-term regional economic ambition to reduce the gap in performance between regions.

London Underground

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date his Department told *(a)* London Underground and *(b)* the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions that some more expensive elements of the London Underground PPP scheme should be scheduled for the later years of the scheme. [18401]

Mr. Andrew Smith: HM Treasury has given no such instructions to either London Underground, or the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

Tom Brake: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action the Treasury has taken in relation to the public-private partnership for London Underground in the last three months. [20284]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Treasury, DTLR and London Underground officials are in regular contact about various aspects of the PPP. London Underground are responsible for negotiating the PPP contracts.

Churches (VAT)

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the information and guidance available to the *(a)* parishes with listed churches and *(b)* Customs and Excise VAT Department on the recovery mechanisms for VAT paid on repairs to listed places of worship since April. [19345]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor announced in Budget 2001 that he was to introduce a UK-wide grant scheme to help congregations with the VAT cost of the repair and maintenance of listed buildings which are used as places of worship. The effect of the grant is to reduce the VAT cost on eligible repairs from 17.5 to 5 per cent.

This grant scheme, known as the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, is being launched today by the Minister for the Arts. Documentation relating to the new scheme is now available, and may be obtained through the scheme's telephone hotline (0845 601 5945—calls charged at local rate), website (www.lpwscheme.org.uk) or by writing to:

Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, PO Box 609, Newport NP10 8QD.

Customs and Excise do not deal with the Scheme and refer callers to the DCMS hotline and web page.

Pensioners (Benefits and Allowances)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost is of each *(a)* tax allowance and *(b)* benefit given to pensioners in the current financial year; and what assessment he has made of the cost of each retirement allowance and benefit for future years (i) at current prices and (ii) in total as a percentage of gross domestic product. [19779]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimated costs of tax expenditures and reliefs are given in Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs, published on 27 November 2001. This is available in the Library of the House.

The information on benefits can be found in the following table:

£ billion (cash prices)[1]

	UK figures		
	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Basic state pension (including non-contributory)	37.3	39.1	40.6
SERPS	5.6	6.2	6.9
Minimum income guarantee/pension credit[2]	4.7	4.5	5.4
Winter fuel payments[3]	1.7	1.7	1.8

£ billion (cash prices)[1]

		UK figures	
	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Free TV licences	0.3	0.4	0.4
Total pensioner benefits as percentage of GDP	5.0	5.0	5.0

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[1] To nearest £100 million

[2] MIG/PC and winter fuel payments are available to some non-pensioners, ie men aged 60–64.

Excise Duty

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much excise duty was raised from the sale of *(a)* petroleum and *(b)* diesel at petrol stations in the local government ward of Crossmaglen in the financial year 2000–01. [19806]

Mr. Boateng: HM Customs and Excise does not collect information on the destination of petroleum or diesel after it passes the duty point, which is normally a refinery or storage facility.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much excise duty was raised from the sale of *(a)* diesel and *(b)* heating oil in (i) Northern Ireland and (ii) the rest of the United Kingdom for the last financial year for which records are available. [19807]

Mr. Boateng: HM Customs and Excise does not collect information on the destination of diesel or heating oil after it passes the duty point, which is normally a refinery or storage facility.

Estimates of the volumes of oils delivered in Northern Ireland and in the rest of the Unite Kingdom are published by the Department of Trade and Industry in the Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics Table 3.9.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he proposes the FSA should take to prevent company executives failing to inform *(a)* their own auditors and *(b)* the FSA of major solvency decisions. [19634]

Ruth Kelly: From 1 December 2001, under FSMA rules, authorised firms are required to co-operate with their auditors (and appointed actuary) in the discharge of their duties.

Under FSMA, firms are required to report regularly to the FSA on their financial condition and their compliance with regulatory requirements including the requirement to maintain a solvency margin and to maintain adequate assets.

In addition, firms are required to deal with the regulator in an open and co-operative way and to tell the FSA anything of which the FSA would reasonably expect notice. Breach of these requirements may give rise to sanctions, including fines.

The chief executive (and other senior executives) of a firm must be an Approved Person under FSMA. Approved individuals may be liable to sanctions, including fines, if they are guilty of misconduct under FSMA which includes being knowingly concerned in a rule breach. Further protection against improper failure to disclose is available by virtue of the whistleblowing provisions of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what FSA regulations apply to the activities of Irish European Reinsurance Company when reinsuring UK companies; [19632]

(2) what responsibilities non-UK EU reinsurance companies have to inform the FSA of major changes in the solvency of UK companies. [19640]

Ruth Kelly: None. The FSA does not have any power to make rules governing the behaviour of companies which do not carry on business in the UK.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how regularly the FSA communicates with its Irish counterpart; and by what means. [19631]

Ruth Kelly: There is a wide variety of communications, on both a regular and ad hoc basis, between the FSA and its Irish counterpart. The precise form and frequency of that communication is a matter for the FSA.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what discussions the FSA has had with its Irish counterparts about Irish European Reinsurance Company's *(a)* activities and *(b)* reinsurance of Independent Insurance; [19639]

(2) if the FSA conducted an investigation into all reinsurance contracts held with UK companies by the Irish European Reinsurance Company following the disclosure of its reinsurance of Independent Insurance; [19637]

(3) what action the FSA took when it was informed of Irish European Reinsurance Company's involvement in reinsuring Independent Insurance. [19638]

Ruth Kelly: The FSA's dealings in respect of individual firms, and the details of its contacts with overseas regulators, are kept confidential between the parties concerned.

Illegal Meat Imports

Andrew George: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with other Government departments on the *(a)* level of illegal meat imports to the UK and *(b)* effectiveness of port controls and enforcement measures to tackle illegal meat imports, in respect of his role in assessing the work of HM Customs and Excise. [19544]

Mr. Boateng: Treasury Ministers regularly have discussions with ministerial colleagues across Government on a wide variety of matters.

Customs officials frequently consult officials in other Government Departments, particularly the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, about the operation and effectiveness of controls on meat imports.

In accordance Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information it would be inappropriate to provide details of such inter-departmental discussions.

VAT

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will explain the VAT treatment given to VAT invoices rendered for work done for the Treasury by outside contractors. [19137]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* Invoices in relation to taxable supplies of goods or services should include the appropriate amount of VAT.

Port Officials

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements exist for *(a)* Customs and Excise and *(b)* immigration officials to be present at a port which does not have a permanent presence of such officials when a request is made for foreign tourists to disembark at that port; and if he will make a statement on what restrictions geography imposes on such officials being present. [18924]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* HM Customs and Excise conducts risk assessments of all traffic and locations in the United Kingdom. Resources are deployed flexibly to address that risk. The absence of a permanent presence at a location does not mean that Customs does not deploy there to address specific risks.

Immigration officers routinely attend ports which do not have a permanent presence, in order to examine passengers arriving on services originating from outside the European economic area. Other services are closely monitored and carriers are required to fax passenger manifests to a designated local immigration office. Immigration officers also make regular unannounced visits to unmanned ports in order to ensure that the correct procedures are being followed.

Customs and Immigration maintain close links, sharing intelligence and undertaking special exercises where these are appropriate.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the total unallocated funds within his departmental expenditure limit *(a)* at the start of the financial year and *(b)* to date; and what was the month seven forecast on outturn underspend against his departmental expenditure limit in (i) real and (ii) percentage terms. [19441]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Treasury's Departmental Unallocated Provision (DUP) set for the present financial year is tabulated on page 162 of its departmental annual report for 2001–02 (Cm 5116). Draw-down of the DUP has been reported to Parliament in Supplementary Estimates. Outturn against six-month forecast for each Request for Resources will be published in the Winter Supplementary Estimates Summary Request for Supply as usual.

Railtrack

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implications for the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement for financial years *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03 of Railtrack remaining in administration; and if he will make a statement. [19607]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Loans made to the administrator by DTLR of £1.17 billion so far, and any additional lending in the future, will not score on the Public Sector Net Borrowing. Such loans will add to the Public Sector Net Cash Requirement when given, and reduce it when repaid. Repayment is anticipated before the end of this financial year.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in receipt of one or more of the various components of working families tax credit have a final income of *(a)* more than twice, *(b)* more than two and half times and *(c)* more than three times their initial net income. [19833]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* It is estimated from the Family Resources Survey that, under the working families tax credit regime applying to awards starting from June 2001, the numbers of such families are about *(a)* 70,000, and *(b)* 40,000. The sample size is too small to yield a reliable estimate for *(c)*.

Notes:

1. Estimates are derived from 1999–2000 FRS with incomes projected forward to 2001–02 and assuming the 2001–02 regimes for income tax and national insurance contributions. They are subject to sampling error.

2. Survey results are calibrated to the number of families on maximum WFTC awards yielded by administrative data.

3. Final net income is as projected, including estimated entitlement to WFTC, housing benefit (HB) and council tax benefit (CTB). Initial net income is this less the estimated entitlement to WFTC, plus any consequent increase in estimated entitlement to HB and CTB.

Family Credits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how many families are *(a)* eligible for and *(b)* receiving (i) the children's tax credit and (ii) the working families tax credit, at the latest date for which figures are available. [20128]

Dawn Primarolo: The numbers of recipients of working families tax credit (WFTC) are shown in the WFTC Quarterly Enquiries, copies of which are in the Library. No reliable estimate of the number of families eligible for WFTC can be attempted until the Family Resources Survey for 2000–01 is available for analysis.

It is estimated that around 5 million families are eligible for the children's tax credit (CTC). About 3.6 million application forms have been received at the latest count. A large number of families eligible for the CTC will be able to claim it via self assessment.

Teenage Pregnancies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many girls resident in the Buckingham constituency registered *(a)* the conception and *(b)* the birth of a child before the age of 16 years in each year since 1997. [20133]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. John Bercow, dated 30 November 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on the number of girls resident in Buckingham that registered the conception and birth of a child before the age of 16 years, in each year since 1997. I am replying in his absence (19389).

There is no requirement to register conceptions in England and Wales. Estimates are however produced by the Office for National Statistics, based on registrations of births and notifications of abortions performed under the Abortion Act (1967). the available figures for estimated conceptions and registered livebirths under 16 for residents of Buckingham Parliamentary Constituency since 1997 are given in the table below:

Numbers of conceptions and livebirths under age 16: Residents of Buckingham parliamentary constituency: 1997–2000

	Conceptions under 16	*Livebirths under 16*
1997	3	0
1998	9	0
1999	3	0
2000	[1]—	0

[1] Figures not yet available

Source:

Office for National Statistics

Specialist Tobacconists

Mr. Barron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many specialist tobacconists there are in the UK, defined as a shop selling tobacco products, more than half of whose sales on the premises in question derive from the sales of cigars, snuff, pipe tobacco and smoking accessories; and what proportion of total UK sales as a percentage of turnover are sold through these shops. [20165]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Kevin Barron, dated 30 November 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the number of specialist tobacconists in the UK, and the proportion of total UK sales through these shops. I am replying in his absence (20133).

The number of businesses classified to retail sale of tobacco products, as their principal activity, is 11,760. These businesses account for 10.7% of the total UK turnover from sales of tobacco-related products.

Research and Development (Tax Credits)

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to publish a consultative note on research and development tax credits for large companies. [21111]

Dawn Primarolo: The Treasury is today publishing "Designs for Innovation", which seeks views on the details of a version of a volume based research and development tax credit. Copies have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

Reviews and Consultations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is the forecast *(a)* cost and *(b)* completion date of the consultation on competition in the annuities market; [20474]

(2) what his target date for completion of the consultation on road haulage taxation is; and how much he expects the consultation to cost; [20468]

(3) what is the forecast *(a)* cost and *(b)* publication date for the new analysis of Britain's regional productivity challenge, referred to in CM 5318, page 6; [20475]

(4) what he expects the cost of the Wanless report to be; and when he expects it to be completed; [20458]

(5) what his target date for the completion of consultation on motorcycle vehicle excise duty is; and how much he expects the consultation to cost; [20469]

(6) what he expects to be the cost of Sir Howard Davies' review of enterprise in schools and further education; [20485]

(7) what are *(a)* the terms of reference and *(b)* the intended participants for the analysis of Britain's regional productivity challenge, referred to in CM 5318, page 6; [20476]

(8) what is the forecast *(a)* cost and *(b)* completion date of the review of the Inland Revenue's links with business; [20480]

(9) what was the cost of the Carter report into payroll burdens. [20457]

Dawn Primarolo: The reviews and consultations have been, and are being, conducted at modest cost and within departmental expenditure limits. The Government have requested responses by 8 February 2002 to the consultation documents "Modernising the Taxation of the Haulage Industry" and "Reforming Motorcycle Vehicle Excise Duty". The Government's analysis of Britain's regional productivity challenge was published on 27 November in "Productivity in the UK: 3—The Regional Dimension". The review of Inland Revenue links with business has been completed and the report was published on 27 November. The Government intend to consult on promoting competition in the annuities market in the first quarter of 2002. Mr. Wanless will produce a final report to the Chancellor before the conclusion of the 2002 Spending Review.

Firearms

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many firearms intended for illegal importation were seized by HM Customs and Excise in each year since 1990. [20539]

Mr. Boateng: The following table sets out the number of firearms seized by customs since 1990. It includes all complete weapons falling within the definition of a firearm in the Firearms Act 1968.

Number of illegal firearms seized by HM Customs and Excise

Year ended 31 March	*Hand guns*	*Rifles*	*Shotguns*	*Self defence sprays*	*Stun guns*	*Total*
1990	1,489	144	44	414	301	2,392
1991	253	535	49	1,132	48	2,017
1992	176	126	82	692	53	1,129
1993	138	41	39	2,580	427	3,225
1994	304	349	68	6,266	216	7,203
1995	261	49	111	7,221	79	7,721
1996	82	61	122	5,464	177	5,906
1997	264	268	32	3,452	120	4,136
1998	333	174	362	4,248	344	5,471
1999	83	106	51	2,343	106	2,689
2000	417	95	129	1,169	101	1,911
2001	163	48	44	2,428	114	2,697

Fuel Prices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has collated on the *(a)* pump price and *(b)* levels of tax and duty of unleaded petrol and diesel in each EU country. [20552]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested can be found in the HM Customs and Excise "Hydrocarbon Oils Factsheet".

Small Businesses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his specific target for reducing the compliance costs of small businesses with reference to paragraph 3.36 of CM 5318; and how he intends to measure progress. [20481]

Dawn Primarolo: Details of the consultation announced in paragraph 3.36 of CM 5318, the pre-Budget report 2001, were given in the pre-Budget report press notice REV/C&E 1 "Boosting investment and growth for small businesses". Ministers will consider the wider implications for small companies when considering any proposals to simplify the corporation tax computation that arise from the consultation.

RenewCo

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer against what criteria the ONS was determining the treatment of RenewCo in the national accounts. [18775]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mrs. Theresa May, dated 4 December 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question concerning against what criteria the ONS was determining the treatment of RenewCo in the national accounts. I am replying in his absence. (18775).

The criteria ONS used in determining the national accounts treatment of Renewco are those specified in the international statistical manuals, namely the 1995 European System of Accounts and the 1993 System of National Accounts. Within the European Union, member states' implementation of these guidelines is subject to scrutiny by Eurostat (Commission) and national accountants in other member states.

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice the ONS gave the Treasury on the treatment of RenewCo in the national accounts. [18774]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mrs. Theresa May, dated 4 December 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question concerning what advice the ONS gave the Treasury on the treatment of RenewCo in the national accounts. I am replying in his absence. (18774)

ONS is responsible for the UK's national accounts, and, therefore, for the classifications of institutions and transactions within them. The Treasury applies the same classifications within public sector finances.

In the case of RenewCo, the Treasury consulted the ONS, at various times, on how ONS would classify the institution within the national accounts. The ONS provided the following advice, on the following dates.

On 3 April 2001 provisional advice was given, based on the provisional information provided to ONS, that RenewCo would be classified as a private sector institution.

Following the lifting of confidentiality restrictions the case was examined by the ONS's Public Sector Classification Committee, which on 14 June 2001 confirmed the earlier provisional advice.

On 27 July 2001 advice was given that RenewCo's planned receipts from the Strategic Rail Authority would be scored under the National Accounts heading "other capital transfers".

On 26 September 2001 advice was given that, based on new information HM Treasury had provided on changes to the contract, the case would need to be re-examined.

On 5 October 2001 provisional advice was given, based on the provisional information provided, that borrowing by RenewCo (now referred to as NGCL) would be classified as public sector borrowing.

Copies of the letters giving advice are available from the Library of the House.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the involvement of the Office for National Statistics in negotiations between the Strategic Rail Authority, the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions and Railtrack about Renewco. [20416]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Chris Grayling, dated 4 December 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to answer your question about the classification of RenewCo. I am replying in his absence. (20417)

I have already given details of the advice given and the dates in my reply to Theresa May MP, which appeared in Hansard.

Pensions

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many members of group personal pension plans there are in the age groups *(a)* 18 to 35, *(b)* 36 to 45, *(c)* 46 to 50, *(d)* 51 to 55, *(e)* 56 to 60 and *(f)* 61 to 74 years. [18602]

Mr. McCartney: I have been asked to reply.

Information on the ages of members of group personal pension plans is not recorded separately from that of all personal pensions.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many group personal pension plans there were in 2000–01; and how many individual members of them there were. [18601]

Mr. McCartney: I have been asked to reply.

Information on the number of group personal pension (GPP) plans is not recorded centrally as no distinction is made between different types of personal pension.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Zimbabwe

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the cases of terrorist acts against the holders of British citizenship in Zimbabwe in each of the past five years. [13399]

Mr. Bradshaw: While we continue to be concerned by the high level of violence and intimidation in Zimbabwe, we have no record of any terrorist acts against British citizens in Zimbabwe in the past five years.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations *(a)* his Department and *(b)* international organisations have made to the Government of Zimbabwe on (i) the eviction of black farm workers from their homes as a result of land reform policy and (ii) the recent attacks on and arrests of opposition MDC supporters in Matabeleland; what representations his Department has made to SADC countries concerning sending election observer missions to Zimbabwe for the presidential election; what steps he is taking to ensure that a free and fair presidential election will be held in Zimbabwe; and what conditions the UK Government have set for recognising the outcome of the Zimbabwe presidential election relating to the action of the Government of Zimbabwe in ensuring a free and fair election. [18214]

Mr. Bradshaw: We continue to encourage the Government of Zimbabwe to abide by the undertakings they made at the Abuja meeting on 6 September, including restoration of the rule of law, an end to violence and intimidation and illegal land occupations. During these representations we regularly draw attention to the plight of farm workers. The British High Commission in Harare made a public statement condemning political violence following the recent politically motivated violence in Bulawayo.

We continue to encourage the Government of Zimbabwe to create a climate conducive to free and fair elections. The presidential election process will be raised as part of the EU consultations with the Government of Zimbabwe under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement. We are in regular dialogue with South African Development Community—SADC—countries on election observers and other issues related to Zimbabwe's electoral process. We are also discussing Zimbabwe's electoral process with Commonwealth partners, the US and others. The credibility of the presidential election will be questioned by the UK and the international community if the process is not demonstrably free and fair.

Public-Private Partnerships

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the projects in his Department which have been considered as potential public-private partnerships since 1997 which have not been undertaken because the public sector comparator had a lower net present value than the public private partnership proposed; and if he will make a statement. [13432]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 607W.

It is a matter of policy, that at an early stage in the options appraisal process we consider whether a public-private partnerships approach is likely to deliver value for money. It would involve disproportionate cost to list all projects where the public-private partnership approach was considered and rejected in favour of conventional procurement.

September 11

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what have been the costs of operations undertaken by his Department in connection with events following the 11 September terrorist attacks on the United States; and if these costs will be met from his Department's budget. [16563]

Mr. Bradshaw: Since the events of 11 September, the FCO has had to react immediately to sizeable changes in the global environment. This has had a significant effect on the FCO's budget, forcing us to re-prioritise. We have incurred extra expenditure on: vital physical security for our overseas missions and the staff working in them; evacuating British citizens at risk from increased tension and violence in Pakistan; dealing with British victims of the destruction of the World Trade Centre and assisting their families; the considerable diplomatic effort to seek out and bring those responsible to justice, and to build on international coalition against terrorism; and a rapid increase in BBC World Service broadcasting in local languages in and around Afghanistan.

Current estimates put the additional cost of the crisis to the FCO this financial year around £40 million. Fee income from visas and passports may well suffer with the downturn in international travel. The last spending review significantly increased the resources of the FCO for this financial year. We are seeking to absorb as much as possible of the new requirements through re-prioritisation as well as efficiency measure. We are in discussion with the Treasury to address the shortfall in resources the FCO faces.

Iraq

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessments his Department has *(a)* made and *(b)* received of links between Iraq and the bin Laden organisation. [17254]

Mr. Bradshaw: Al-Qaeda has contacts in several countries outside Afghanistan. We have no convincing information that any regime other than the Taliban supports al-Qaeda.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many public appointments he has made since 7 June; and if he will list them. [18736]

Mr. Bradshaw: FCO Ministers have made six new public appointments since 7 June 2001. These are as follows: Mr. Elfyn Llwyd MP, Mr. Patrick Smith and Mr. Michael Aaronson to the Westminster Foundation for Democracy; Sir Frank Berman and Andrew Bache to the Diplomatic Service Appeals Board; and Mr. Abdul Fazal Bhanji to the Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission.

Osama bin Laden

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the regimes which his Department suspects of having given *(a)* active and *(b)* passive aid to the bin Laden organisation. [18259]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are not speculating that any regimes other than the Taliban support al-Qaeda. There are other countries where terrorists are able to operate. We are developing a broad counter-terrorism strategy for such countries covering diplomatic measures, counter-terrorism and law enforcement assistance, development aid, public information and media messages and intelligence.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on what discussions his Department had prior to 11 September with Pakistan Government officials regarding Osama bin Laden. [19413]

Mr. Bradshaw: Prior to 11 September, we regularly raised our concerns about Osama bin Laden with the Pakistanis. On 13 June, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met Pakistani Foreign Minister Sattar where he urged Pakistan to use their influence over the Taliban to comply with United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1267 and 1333 which inter alia calls for Osama bin Laden to be handed over to justice.

Gibraltar

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Chief Minister of Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement. [18734]

Peter Hain: I last met the Chief Minister of Gibraltar in London on 28 November. As I said in my speech in Westminster Hall on 7 November 2000, *Official Report,* column 91WH, both I and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary have worked hard to enable the Gibraltar Government to join the meetings under the Brussels Process. At the ministerial meeting of the Brussels Process held in Barcelona on 20 November, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Spanish Foreign Minister reiterated their invitation for the Chief Minister of Gibraltar to attend future Brussels Process ministerial meetings. As previously stated the Government will continue to stand by their commitments to the people of Gibraltar as set out in the preamble to the Gibraltar Constitution.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role he played in arranging the meeting between Spanish officials and the First Minister of Gibraltar in Madrid; and if he will make a statement on these discussions. [20441]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs played no direct role in arranging the meeting between Spanish officials and the Chief Minister of Gibraltar. However, building on the climate of confidence established by the re-launch of the Brussels Process, I encouraged both parties to talk and meet, which they did.

Israel

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what conditions attach to exports from Israel arising from agreements with the EU for *(a)* goods manufactured or produced in Israel and *(b)* goods manufactured or produced in Israeli settlements in the occupied territories of Palestine; and if he will make a statement. [18865]

Peter Hain: The EU/Israel Association Agreement provides for preferential access to EU markets for products originating in Israel, provided such exports meet the requirements set out in the agreement. The EU has made clear that, for the Union as well as for the international community, Israel does not include the occupied territories. The EC/PLO Interim Agreement applies to the territory of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. East Jerusalem remains covered by the preferential trade agreement unilaterally granted by the European Community in 1996.

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action has been taken to prevent Israel from labelling goods exported to the UK which have been made or produced in settlements in Palestine as manufactured or produced in Israel; and if he will make a statement. [18866]

Peter Hain: The EU has made clear to Israel, most recently at the EU-Israel Association Council on 20 November, the importance the union attaches to the correct application of all the provisions of the association agreement, including its territorial scope. The EU will continue to do its best to find a sustainable solution to the rules of origin issue, in accordance with the provisions of the agreement. Further expert discussions with Israel are likely, to address the issues involved.

On 23 November the European Commission published a notice to importers in the EC Official Journal advising importers presenting documentary evidence of origin with a view to securing preferential treatment for products originating in Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and Golan Heights to take all necessary precautions.

Yemen

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of terrorist organisations based in Yemen. [19131]

Mr. Bradshaw: I cannot comment on intelligence material. The Yemeni Government have acknowledged that the Islamic Army of Aden (IAA) is based in Yemen. The IAA is a proscribed organisation under the Terrorism Act 2000.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Yemen concerning the *(a)* international coalition against terrorism and *(b)* policy of the Government of Yemen towards terrorist organisations. [19128]

Mr. Bradshaw: I met the President's envoy, Dr. Iriyani, when he visited London in October. We discussed the international coalition against terrorism and the Yemeni Government's view towards terrorism. I welcomed the Yemeni Government's swift and strong condemnation of the attacks in the USA. Dr. Iriyani said that Yemen would do all it could in the fight against terrorism.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 a Minister in his Department visited Yemen; when these visits took place; where was visited; and what discussions took place during these visits. [19129]

Mr. Bradshaw: The then Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), visited Sana'a in October 2000 and met President Saleh and Prime Minister Iriyani. They discussed bilateral issues, including counter-terrorism co-operation, consular matters, trade and developmental assistance and also regional issues.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens are held in prisons in Yemen; on what date they were imprisoned; and, in each case, what the duration of the sentence handed down to them was. [19130]

Mr. Bradshaw: There are currently five Britons imprisoned in Yemen. They were imprisoned between 28 December 1998 and 27 January 1999. One is serving three years, two are serving five years, and two are serving seven years.

Indonesia (West Papua)

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he has made to the Indonesian Government to seek a halt to military operations in the Papua province of the country; [19334]

(2) what representations he has made to the Indonesian Government to *(a)* set up an independent commission to investigate recent atrocities in West Papua and *(b)* encourage the army and police security forces to collaborate fully with it; [19333]

(3) what assessment he has made of the involvement of special forces within the Indonesian police and army in the assassinations and murders reported in West Papua in recent weeks; [19332]

(4) what representations he has made to the Indonesian Government following reports of anti-civilian attacks by the Brimob force of the Indonesian police; [19336]

(5) what assessment his Department has made of the activities of the Brimob force within the Indonesian Police in West Papua; and if he will make a statement. [19335]

Mr. Bradshaw: There are frequent allegations of human rights abuses by the Indonesian security forces. HMG monitors events closely and raises concerns with the Indonesian authorities whenever necessary. We have repeatedly stressed to the Government that security forces should operate within the law and with strict regard to human rights. Through the Global Conflict Prevention Pool, HMG are pursuing a security sector reform strategy, working with the Indonesian authorities and civil society to nurture debate about democratic control, transparency and accountability of the security forces, and to encourage greater respect for human rights.

HMG respect Indonesia's territorial integrity and believe that long-term solutions to its regional problems will be achieved only through political negotiation, not violence.

The circumstances surrounding the recent death of Theys Eluay, the pro-independence leader, are not clear. HMG have expressed concern and urged the Indonesian authorities to conduct a full and thorough investigation. The Indonesian Government has stated that they are committed to this. The National Commission for Human Rights (Komnas HAM) has also announced that it will carry out an independent investigation once the results of the police investigation have been made public.

Nepal

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Nepal; what assistance he has given to Nepal in the last 12 months; and what advice is being given to tourists visiting Nepal. [18903]

Mr. Bradshaw: We strongly condemn the return to violence by the Maoists in Nepal, and urge them to cease violence and return to dialogue. We understand the reasons behind the declaration of a state of emergency in Nepal, and hope that the Nepalese Government will quickly be able to bring peace to the country.

We have strongly supported the peace process in Nepal, including mobilising local and international opinion in favour of the peace effort. DFID development assistance to Nepal is currently in the region of £20 million a year and is likely to increase. The MOD has supplied training and other support to the Royal Nepalese Army as well as significant infrastructure assistance to Nepal's UN peacekeeping training centre.

We are advising British tourists to exercise extreme caution when travelling in Nepal. We are also advising those who are planning a trip to Nepal to monitor events carefully, and to consult the FCO travel advice for Nepal (available on the FCO website: www.fco.gov.uk) regularly.

Laeken European Council

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the main objectives of the European Council's summit at Laeken. [18896]

Peter Hain: The agenda for the European Council has not yet been finalised. But we expect it to discuss the situation in Afghanistan, and the EU follow up to the events of 11 September; review the situation in the western Balkans; debate the future of Europe and establish a convention to examine the options for the IGC in 2004; welcome progress on EU enlargement; adopt a presidency report on European defence; review progress on the Tampere justice and home affairs agenda; and note preparations for the launch of Euro notes and coins.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement *(a)* on the membership of the convention due to be established at Laeken and *(b)* what the Government hope to achieve at the Laeken summit. [18895]

Peter Hain: Final decisions on the composition of the convention will be taken at the Laeken European Council. The convention will include representatives from national Governments, national Parliaments, the European Parliament and the Commission. The candidate states will be fully represented.

The Government expect that Laeken will thus launch the European level debate about the Future of Europe. It was agreed at Nice that this debate should consider how to improve and monitor the democratic legitimacy and transparency of the EU and its institutions, in order to bring them closer to the citizens of the members states. The Government welcome this.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the European Commission on the Laeken European Council. [19091]

Peter Hain: The Government meet members of the Commission on a regular basis to discuss these and other issues.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister also discussed issues to be addressed by the Laeken European Council with the President of the Commission on 15 November.

European Houses

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* funding and *(c)* activities of European Houses in the UK. [19584]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the then Minister of State to the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 24 January 2000, *Official Report*, column 34W.

European Bodies

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the activities in the United Kingdom of *(a)* Sources d' Europe, *(b)* the Jacques Delors Information Centre and *(c)* CIDE: Information and Documentation Centre, as identified in Com (2001) 354; and what recent representations he has received from these bodies. [19590]

Peter Hain: The FCO has not received any recent representations from these bodies. Any activities that they undertake are a matter for the bodies themselves.

"Your Britain, Your Europe"

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the planned activities of the "Your Britain, Your Europe" roadshow. [19593]

Peter Hain: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office regularly reviews and updates its information activities and has now discontinued the use of the "Your Britain, Your Europe" label. Activities to increase support for and a better understanding of the European Union will of course continue, in line with the FCO's Public Service Agreement (as set out at www.fco.gov.uk).

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy towards maintaining political impartiality in the "Your Britain, Your Europe" programme. [19578]

Peter Hain: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Public Service Agreement, available at www.fco.gov.uk commits the Government to promote increased support for and better understanding of the merits of European Union membership. I recently launched a new programme of visits to regions of the United Kingdom to discuss Europe. So far I have visited Cardiff and Edinburgh. I invited members of all the main political parties to participate in events during the course of these visits.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to enter into discussions with Argentina about the future status of the Falkland Islands; and if he will make a statement. [19529]

Mr. MacShane: None, therefore no.

Russia

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to visit Russia. [20254]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited Moscow on 31 October and had talks with the Russian Foreign and Defence Ministers. He met the Russian Foreign Minister again in the margins of the UN General Assembly on 10 November.

He has no immediate plans to visit Russia but remains in regular contact with his Russian counterpart.

School Places

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what help civil servants receive with finding and securing places for their children in state-funded schools when returning from prolonged placements overseas. [20360]

Mr. Bradshaw: UK-based FCO staff returning to the UK from overseas apply for places in accordance with the arrangements established by the local education authorities (LEAs) under the guidance of the Department for Education and Skills. When necessary, the FCO provide LEAs with background information about the officer's circumstances.

European Union Business

Mr. Mike Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for December and *(b)* major European Union events for the period between 31 December and May 2002. [20966]

Peter Hain: The information is as follows:

4 December—ECOFIN meeting—Brussels

1. Adoption of the Agenda
2. Approval of the list of 'A' items
3. Preparation for the Laeken European Council
    - Report on aims and working methods in the field of pensions
    - Report on structural indicators
    - Report on progress concerning the fiscal package
4. Fiscal Package
    - Taxation and savings
    - Directive, including main features of a standardised form for exchanging information
    - Interim reports by the member states concerned on discussions with dependent or associated territories

Code of Conduct

    Progress report from Code of Conduct group

5. (Poss.) VAT invoicing (may become 'A' item)
6. Financial Services
    - (Poss.) Financial Services Action Plan, 5 Progress report from the Commission
    - (Poss.) Proposal for a Directive on financial collateral arrangements

General approach

Prospectus

    Presidency report on progress

Financial conglomerates

    Presidency report on progress

UCTIS

    Adoption

7. Annual report of the Court of Auditors for the financial year 2000
    - Presentation by the Court of Auditors
8. Galileo
    - Progress report
9. Economic situation in the air transport sector (insurance)
    - Report on developments in the situation
10. Preparation for ministerial meeting with the candidate countries
11. Conference on Financing for Development
    - Common Position
12. Other Business

3—Brussels—Employment and Social Affairs Council

4—Bruges—Culture Council (Ministerial Informal)

4—Brussels—Energy Council

5—Brussels—Industry Council

6–7—Brussels—Transport and Telecommunications Council

6–7—Brussels—Justice and Home Affairs Council

10—Brussels—Research Council

10–11—Brussels—General Affairs Council

12–13—Brussels—Environment Council

14—Laeken—ECOFIN

14–15—Laeken—European Council

17–18—Brussels—Fisheries Council

18–19—Brussels—Agriculture Council.

No agendas for the above are available yet.

The following are the principle events in the EU between 1 January and May 2002 (certain relevant events are also included: the list is based on the information available at the date of issue).

Date	*Location*	*Event*
January		
10	Brussels	Fisheries Council
17	Brussels	Budget Council[1]
21 to 22	Brussels	Agriculture Council
21	Brussels	Eurogroup[1]
22	Brussels	ECOFIN
25 to 26	Brussels	Meeting of Employment Ministers[2]
28 to 29	Brussels	General Affairs Council
February		
9 to 10	Brussels	Gymnich[2]
11	Brussels	Eurogroup[1]
14	Brussels	Education and Youth Council
14 to 15	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council[2]
18 to 19	Brussels	General Affairs Council
18 to 19	Brussels	Agriculture Council
22 to 23	Brussels	Telecoms and Information Society Council[2]
28	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
March		
1	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council[1]
1	Brussels	Internal Market, Consumers and Tourism Council
4	Brussels	Eurogroup[1]
5	Brussels	ECOFIN
7	Brussels	Employment and Social Affairs Council
11	Brussels	Research Council
11 to 12	Brussels	General Affairs Council
15 to 16	Barcelona	European Council
18 to 19	Brussels	Agriculture Council
21	Brussels	Environment Council
23 to 24	Brussels	Defence Meeting
25 to 26	Brussels	Transport and Telecom Council
April		
5 to 6	Luxembourg	Migrations Council[3]
8	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council
13 to 14	Luxembourg	ECOFIN[2]
15 to 16	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
22 to 23	Valencia	Euromed Conference
22 to 23	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
25 to 26	Luxembourg	Justice and Home Affairs Council
27 to 30	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council[2]
May		
3 to 4	Brussels	Tourism Council[2]
6	Brussels	Eurogroup[1]
7	Brussels	ECOFIN

Date	Location	Event
9		Europe Day
13	Brussels	General Affairs and Defence Council
17 to 18	Madrid	EU-LAC Summit
21	Brussels	Internal Market, Consumers and Tourism Council
23	Brussels	Culture and Audio-visual Council
24 to 26	Brussels	Environment Council[2]
27 to 28	Brussels	Agriculture Council
30	Brussels	Development Council
30	Brussels	Education and Youth Council
31 to 1 June	Brussels	Transport Council[2]

[1] Evening
[2] Ministerial informal
[3] ASEM Ministerial informal

NORTHERN IRELAND

Oversight Commissioner

Phil Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the latest report received from the Oversight Commissioner. [20914]

Jane Kennedy: In accordance with section 68(4)(a) of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, I have today laid a copy of the Oversight Commissioner's third statutory report for the year 2001 before this House.

Government Law and Order Policy

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the Government's policy is in regard to *(a)* organised crime and *(b)* community policing in Northern Ireland. [16305]

Jane Kennedy: The Government are determined to confront organised crime in Northern Ireland and are leading the fight through the work of the Organised Crime Task Force, which I chair.

The Task Force, launched in September 2000, is a multi-agency initiative, involving the Police Service of Northern Ireland, HM Customs & Excise and others. Work is already well developed and the operational agencies have achieved significant successes. For example, on 8 November, a joint operation by Customs and police resulted in seizure of 42.6 million illicit cigarettes, the largest ever seizure in the United Kingdom.

The Government will not permit the legacy of terrorism to develop into a system of organised crime activity in Northern Ireland. However, there are no short-term fixes. The dismantling of organised crime groups takes time, expertise and commitment.

The Government and the Chief Constable accept the importance of community policing and are committed to ensuring that this is a core function of the police service and the core function of every police station. It is the Government's policy to support, in every way possible, the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, in delivering effective community policing.

Holy Cross Protest

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions his officials had discussions with *(a)* Ardoyne Road and *(b)* Glenbryn Road residents about the Holy Cross protest; and what the outcome of these meetings was. [17233]

Jane Kennedy: The Secretary of State and I along with my officials have had a number of meetings with both sides involved in this dispute. I have also held meetings with members of the Devolved Administration, local community representatives, interest groups, and the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) to discuss how the present situation may be resolved. We welcome the recent decision by the residents to end their protest and now hope the children will be able to continue with their education without fear or threat of intimidation.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the Police Service for Northern Ireland's policing strategy for the Holy Cross protests; and how many times this has been reviewed. [17232]

Jane Kennedy: During the policing of the Holy Cross protest it has been police strategy to:

> Respect and uphold the human rights of all those involved including the children, parents, teachers, protestors, residents and the general community;
>
> Prevent public disorder and to ensure the safety of all those involved;
>
> Minimise the disruption to local communities and those attending Holy Cross Primary School; and
>
> Enforce the law and bring offenders to court.

Protection of the children and their rights has been a paramount factor throughout the protests. In this context, police have sought to work and negotiate with local people from both sides and their representatives in order to ensure the safe passage of the children to their school. The strategy for the operation has been kept under review on a daily basis. In addition there have been six formal meetings to review the strategy.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost has been to *(a)* the Army and *(b)* the Police Service for Northern Ireland of policing the Holy Cross protest. [17230]

Jane Kennedy: Police estimate the additional cost to the police grant of the ongoing operation at Holy Cross to be £18,000 per day arising from increased overtime costs. This equates to a financial cost from September to date of £1.1 million in addition to the human resource effect the operation has on other areas of policing. There have been no additional costs to the Army in supporting the PSNI to police the Holy Cross protest. Any costs incurred are contained within the Army's normal operational budget.

The quoted figures distinguish between the normal costs of policing and the incremental costs (overtime and other expenses) incurred for this specific operation.

Although there may be additional secondary costs to the Army e.g. fuel costs, these are not easily quantifiable. There are no additional manpower costs as the Army does not work overtime.

Violent Offences

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions in each month since April 2000 the police were in receipt of information regarding violence against *(a)* persons and *(b)* property in interface areas; on how many occasions officers were sent to the scene; and on how many occasions charges were subsequently brought against those involved. [17371]

Jane Kennedy: The information requested is not held centrally and would have to be extracted from a number of different sources. To provide the information from April 2000 could be done only at a disproportionate cost. Generally, if information is received by police prior to an incident of public disorder, patrols are briefed accordingly and if necessary additional patrols are tasked.

Paramilitary Crimes

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* Republican and *(b)* Loyalist paramilitary crimes have been committed (i) since the signing of the Belfast Agreement and (ii) during 2001, broken down into *(a)* shootings, *(b)* bombings, *(c)* killings, *(d)* beatings and *(e)* other crimes; and if he will make a statement. [17905]

Jane Kennedy: The information requested is included in following the tables:

Terrorist-related incidents since the Belfast Agreement 10 April 1998 to 22 November 2001

	By Loyalist	*By Republican*	*Unknown*	*Total*
Murders	35	42	0	77
Shooting incidents	540	237	84	861
Bombing incidents	508	80	30	618
Casualties as a result of paramilitary style assaults	317	183	0	500
Casualties as a result of paramilitary style shootings	273	157	0	430

Terrorist-related incidents 1 January to 22 November 2001

	By Loyalist	*By Republican*	*Unknown*	*Total*
Murders	10	3	0	13
Shooting incidents	218	89	11	318
Bombing incidents	269	40	12	321
Casualties as a result of paramilitary style assaults	81	46	0	127
Casualties as a result of paramilitary style shootings	113	61	0	174

Notes:

1. The following types of shooting incidents are included:

Shots fired by terrorists

Paramilitary style attacks involving shootings

Shots heard (and later confirmed)

Other violent incidents where shots are fired (eg armed robbery).

2. An individual bombing incident may involve one or more explosive devices. Incidents recorded include explosions and defusings. Incidents involving hoax devices, petrol bombings or incendiaries are excluded.

3. 2001 statistics are provisional and may be subject to minor adjustment.

DEFENCE

Cardiff International Airport

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the draft plans for the new fixed wing aircraft repair business unit at Cardiff International Airport. [18612]

Mr. Ingram: The consultant's report and other supporting information regarding re-location of the fixed wing business unit to Cardiff International Airport contains commercially sensitive information. I am therefore withholding this information in accordance with Exception 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. The Cardiff Airport option is now not being pursued and a business case to develop the St. Athan site is being developed.

European Technology Acquisition Programme

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what lessons learned from the procurement process of Eurofighter he will apply to the procurement of the European Technology Acquisition Programme; what are the objectives of the ETAP study; when he expects the ETAP study to be completed; what financial commitment he has made to the ETAP study; what expenditure limits he has set for it; and if he will make a statement. [18288]

Dr. Moonie: The European Technology Acquisition Programme (ETAP) is concerned with technologies relevant to a wide range of combat air systems, including manned and unmanned aircraft and cruise missiles. The key lessons from the Eurofighter procurement are reflected in Smart Acquisition principles under which ETAP will be conducted. The two project teams are in close communication to ensure that any appropriate lessons are learnt.

ETAP is a joint technology programme with European industry which will sustain and develop European capabilities for combat air systems over the next two decades. Linked to ETAP is a joint study, reporting in summer 2002, which will give an initial assessment of the miliary capabilities that the six nations' armed forces will need around 2020. Nations will commit funds to the specific technology demonstration programmes within ETAP in which they participate. It is too early to say with precision what UK funding will be required, but we would expect to spend some tens of millions of pounds in the early years of ETAP and more thereafter. All funding will be subject to normal MOD approvals.

Future Offensive Air System

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Future Offensive Air System programme. [18641]

Dr. Moonie: The UK has a requirement to replace, towards the end of the next decade, the strike capability currently provided by the Tornado GR4 strike aircraft. This programme is known as the Future Offensive Air System. The primary roles will be to destroy strategic targets deep in enemy territory and to damage the enemy's ability to wage aerial warfare by disabling aircraft on the ground or by damaging their command and control systems.

To meet the capability required, the MOD is studying a range of options, including manned and unmanned aircraft and cruise missiles. Allied to these studies will be a programme of technology demonstrations, some of which will be collaborative; opportunities are being explored within Europe and with the USA and Australia.

On 19 November, Defence Ministers from France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom signed the European Technology Acquisition Programme declaration. This launched a joint technology programme with European industry which will sustain and develop European capabilities for combat air systems over the next two decades.

Torpedoes

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to place orders to *(a)* upgrade and *(b)* replace torpedoes. [18756]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently three torpedoes in service with Her Majesty's Armed Forces—Sting Ray, Spearfish and Tigerfish. Spearfish is replacing Tigerfish as the Royal Navy's heavy weight torpedo, and significantly enhances its anti-submarine and anti-ship torpedo capability. The production of Spearfish torpedoes is currently running to time and cost. Contracts for Concept work for a mid-life update of the Spearfish torpedo have been placed with QinetiQ and BAE Systems Electronics Ltd. Underwater Weapons Division, Waterlooville.

Sting Ray is the Forces' light weight torpedo and is the main anti-submarine weapon for surface ships, helicopters and the Nimrod Maritime Patrol Aircraft. It is the subject of a comprehensive life extension programme which will, over the coming years, improve its capability against the modern submarine threat.

War Pensions Agency

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) for what years the War Pensions Agency has destroyed records of service men and women who served in the Army Catering Corps; [18847]

(2) for what years the War Pensions Agency has retained records of service men and women who served in the Army Catering Corps; [18848]

(3) which classes of documents fall within the deemed destroyed range of the War Pensions Agency. [18849]

Dr. Moonie: In 1989 the War Pensions Agency carried out a retention and destruction exercise. Files were destroyed where no action had been taken on the case for more than 30 years, no pension was in payment and the claimant was over the age of 80. Files relating to former members of the Army Catering Corps which met these criteria were destroyed as part of the exercise.

Regrettably, in some instances correct procedures were not adhered to and some files were destroyed erroneously.

Major Projects

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what steps his Department is taking to reduce the slippage rate of the 18 major procurement projects outlined in the Major Projects report; [19825]

(2) if he will make a statement on the Major Projects report. [19824]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House following the hearing.

Defence Aviation Repair Agency

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the annual overhead costs of the Defence Aviation Repair Agency of *(a)* RAF St. Athan, *(b)* RAF Sealand, *(c)* Fleetlands and *(d)* Almondbank in (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–2001 expressed in (1) cash terms, (2) real terms and (3) as a proportion of the income of each site. [19421]

Mr. Ingram: The annual overhead costs of the DARA during 1999–2000 and 2000–01 are as follows.

	Financial year 1999–2000		*Financial year 2000–01*	
Establishment	*Cash*	*RAB*[1]	*Cash*	*RAB*[1]
RAF Sealand	8,467	10,578	7,671	13,204
RAF St. Athan	20,900	26,111	18,937	32,603
Fleetlands	13,882	17,342	12,577	21,654
Almondbank	3,712	4,638	3,364	5,791

[1] Resource accounting and budgeting

With regards to expressing these as a proportion of income, this is not possible as DARA was not a trading fund until 1 April 2001 and as such did not generate income from Ministry of Defence work prior to this date.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the repair turn round times in the Defence Aviation Repair Agency, at *(a)* RAF St. Athan, *(b)* RAF Sealand, *(c)* Fleetlands and *(d)* Almondbank in (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–01. [19420]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Aviation Repair Agency has many thousands of items to which measured turn round times (TRTs) apply and it would only be possible to list all of these items and their TRTs individually at disproportionate cost.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel were employed at DARA in *(a)* RAF St. Athan, *(b)* RAF Sealand, *(c)* Fleetlands and *(d)* Almondbank on 1 November. [19418]

Mr. Ingram: The following numbers of personnel were employed at the Defence Aviation Repair Agency sites on 1 November 2001:

Location	*Personnel*
RAF St. Athan	2,521
RAF Sealand	1,114
Almondbank	336
Sealand	1,036

Please note these figures to not include RAF support units at St. Athan or Sealand or other lodger units on sites.

Cluster Bombs

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to encourage an international ban on the use of cluster bombs. [20001]

Mr. Ingram: It would not be appropriate or realistic to take steps to encourage an international ban on the use of cluster bombs. They are a legitimate weapon that provide a capability against certain targets which cannot be effectively achieved in other ways. We are aware of concerns that have been expressed about the humanitarian effort of unexploded cluster bomblets and are exploring in the context of the 1980 UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) how this can be minimised.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to work to implement the recommendations of the International Committee of the Red Cross on the use of cluster bombs. [20234]

Mr. Ingram: The International Committee of the Red Cross have proposed limitations on the use of cluster bombs in the context of their proposal for a protocol on explosive remnants of war to the 1980 UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, for which the review conference will be held on 11 to 21 December. The United Kingdom will work for a positive outcome to minimise the risk to civilians from unexploded weapons, including cluster bombs.

Depleted Uranium

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) for what reason test firing using depleted uranium contaminated gun barrels from Eskmeals was carried out at Shoeburyness; who authorised the transfer of the gun barrels; and if he will make a statement; [18970]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 514W, on depleted uranium, how many rounds were fired in the tests; and how many were recovered; [18968]

(3) what environmental impact assessment was carried out, and by whom, before depleted uranium contaminated gun barrels from Eskmeals were used in test firing at Shoeburyness; [18969]

(4) who was the radiation protection adviser; for which organisation he or she worked; whether the Defence Radiology Protection Service was *(a)* consulted and *(b)* involved; and if he will make a statement. [18967]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* Test firing using depleted uranium (DU) contaminated gun barrels is required as part of the effectiveness and safety trials to determine the effect of firing a variety of rounds through worn barrels. The Challenger II tank worn barrel trial is planned to commence in January 2002. The trial involves firing a range of non-DU based ammunition natures such as high explosive and training rounds. The trial will involve the use of barrels that have not fired DU rounds as well as those that have. More recently, between 20 to 29 November, one gun barrel stored at QinetiQ Eskmeals, that had fired DU in the past, was used in a CHARM 3 Training Round (a non-DU round) trial at the Shoeburyness ranges. Test firing is being carried out at Shoeburyness because it meets the minimum firing distance required and provides a round recovery facility and a suitable cost-effective solution. There is no reason on health and safety grounds why the work cannot be carried out at this site.

No specific authorisation to transfer barrels allocated to support these trials is needed. Each barrel that has fired DU in the past has a record annotated accordingly and is accompanied with appropriate precautionary advice.

In the November trial, 71 rounds were fired and none were recovered. The worn barrel trial in January is planned to use 184 rounds and it is planned to recover some rounds to ascertain any effects on the round's stability and performance. Recovered rounds fired will be monitored for DU.

No environmental impact assessment was undertaken immediately before the CHARM3 training round trial and none is planned for the worn barrel trial. However, a risk assessment for the routine use of DU contaminated barrels was carried out by the Department's Radiation Protection Adviser, the then DERA Radiation Protection Services, in May 2000. Although this assessment concludes that no DU will be released from the barrel, environmental monitoring was conducted at the start, during and after the firings on 20 November. This involved a base line survey taking soil and grass samples and monitoring around the gun, passive air sampling, and a swab sample of the inside of the barrel when firing was complete. The monitoring will also be conducted in support of the worn barrel trial.

The barrels used at Shoeburyness were monitored before transfer. The monitoring in this case showed that the barrels contained less than 10 kilobecquerels of DU and thus confirmed that the material presented very little risk. This conclusion is based on the generic risk assessment conducted in May 2000, which is applicable to all barrels containing less than 10 kilobecquerels of DU.

Gibraltar (Service Bases)

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions have taken place between his Department and the Spanish Government over the *(a)* joint use and *(b)* joint decision making of the (i) naval base and (ii) RAF base at Gibraltar. [20440]

Mr. Ingram: None.

Project SLAM

Mr. Anthony D. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of Project SLAM. [20967]

Dr. Moonie: Project SLAM forms a key part of the Single Living Accommodation improvements for the services that was announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 14 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 600W. The project represents over half of the total programme and primarily covers service establishments in England and Wales. Accommodation in Scotland may be part of SLAM or will be part of the regional prime contract for estate services, and separate projects are dealing with Northern Ireland and overseas.

Four consortiums are bidding for a single prime contract worth £0.5 billion over five years. There will also be an opportunity, subject to satisfactory performance, for the contract to be extended for a further £0.5 billion over five years. An invitation to tender was issued to bidders on 30 November 2001.

The consortiums invited to tender for this work are:

Amec

Carillion

Debut, comprising Bovis Lend Lease and Unicorn

Prime Solutions, a large consortium led by CITEX.

We expect to award the contract in autumn 2002.

Project Whirlwind

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with Project Whirlwind; and if he will make a statement. [19417]

Mr. Ingram: Project Whirlwind is an initiative in integrated supply chain management for the repair of aircraft capital spares items.

A Heads of Agreement document was signed by DARA and BAE Systems on 15 August 2001, which included an intention to investigate moving towards a formal partnering agreement. Discussions on the terms of a partnering agreement continue.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Custody Arrests

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many custody arrests were made in *(a)* Chorley and *(b)* Skelmersdale in the last three years. [9038]

Mr. Denham: Information on the number of arrests for notifiable offences is collected centrally at police force area level only. Available information shows that in 1999–2000 there were 37,535 arrests for notifiable offences within the Lancashire police force area. Information for earlier years is not available on a consistent basis. Figures for 2000–01 will be available in due course.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been detained for more than seven days in the last two years in Northern Ireland; and on what grounds these individuals were detained. [18857]

Angela Eagle: The available information relates to persons detained under Immigration Act powers as at 30 June 2001. As at that date, there were less than five persons who had sought asylum at some stage who had been detained for more than seven days in Northern Ireland.

I regret that information on the grounds for detention of individual detainees, and the requested information on asylum seekers detained for more than seven days in the last two years in Northern Ireland is not available and could only be obtained by examining individual case files at disproportionate cost. However, in general terms detention would have been on the grounds that the persons concerned were in the process of being removed from the United Kingdom, their identities and the basis of their claim needed to be established, or it was believed that they would not comply with the terms of temporary admission or release.

Communications Data

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what analysis he has conducted to ensure the provisions relating to retention and use of communications data traffic are consistent with the provisions of the *(a)* Data Protection Act 1998, *(b)* Telecommunications (Data Protection and Privacy) Regulations 1999 and *(c)* Human Rights Act 1998; and if he will make a statement. [20443]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I am satisfied that the code of practice relating to the retention of communications data as provided for in the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill will be drafted in such a way as to be fully compliant with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998, the Telecommunications (Data Protection and Privacy) Regulations 1999 and the Human Rights Act 1998. We will consult the Information Commissioner to help ensure that this is achieved.

Access to communications data will in future be regulated by Chapter 2 of Part 1 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, which requires that access be necessary and proportionate.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what extent the voluntary Code of Practice proposed in clause 11 of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill will provide protection for the UK communications provider industry against challenges under the Data Protection Act 1998. [20442]

Mr. Blunkett: The code of practice and agreements proposed in part 11 of the Anti-Terrorism Crime Security Bill will be drafted in a way which is compatible with data protection and human rights legislation. For the code to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998, data retained under it should only be kept for a period which is necessary and proportionate to the purposes for which it is kept.

We will consult the Information Commissioner to help ensure that the drafting of the voluntary code is fully compliant with the Data Protection Act.

Auld Report

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the proposal in the Auld report that evidence of a defendant's previous convictions will ordinarily be admissible in criminal proceedings. [17518]

Mr. Keith Bradley: In the report of his review of the criminal courts, Lord Justice Auld recommends consideration of the Law Commission's report on evidence of bad character in criminal proceedings, published on 9 October. We welcomed the Law Commission's thorough and comprehensive work on this topic and will carefully consider the way forward in light of the report, Sir Robin's recommendations and the outcome of the public consultation on the review of criminal courts currently in progress.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Immigration and Nationality Directorate will forward to the Immigration and Appellate Authority the appeal papers in respect of Nasira Bibi, date of birth 4 August 1974. [19483]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* I understand that Mrs. Bibi's appeal papers were sent to the Immigration Appellate Authority on 17 October 2001 and that a preliminary hearing took place on 22 November 2001.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when a decision will be made by Immigration and Nationality Directorate on application F220282, lodged on 19 June. [19482]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* On 27 November 2001 my officials wrote to my hon. Friend explaining that a decision has been made in Mrs. Bibi's case and that her file has been passed to the relevant department in order that her stay can be regularised.

Police Numbers

Derek Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the numerical establishment has been for *(a)* police officers and *(b)* special constables based in the Bexley division of the Metropolitan Police Service, in each year since 1996. [14086]

Mr. Denham: The information requested has been provided by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and is set out in the table.

Year to December	*Police officers*[1]	*Budgeted workforce totals*[2]	*Civilian support staff*
1996	287	n/a	87
1997	283	n/a	79
1998	274	n/a	74
1999	281	277	70
2000	306	310	69
2001[3]	322	328	70

[1] Actual officers in post.

[2] These are the numbers of officers for which the force have budgeted.

[3] To October.

Note

All figures are full-time equivalents

I am also informed that there are approximately 25 special constables currently attached to Bexley division. The metropolitan police service do not hold historical figures for special constables.

Departmental Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress towards tackling attrition in the criminal justice system and the cost to public funds in doing so. [17150]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Various initiatives funded in the Spending Review 2000 are expected to reduce attrition, but are unlikely to begin to have a significant effect until 2001–02. The most important of these are the expansion of the DNA database, the provision of additional scene of crime support, and increased police recruitment, funded from the Crime Fighting Fund. Additional funding of £16.3 million has also been provided to criminal justice services for 2001–02 to cover the increase in workload expected to flow from improved performance. However, it is not possible to disaggregate the total cost of bringing offences to justice.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress toward the public service agreement target for promoting an inclusive society with equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for all. [16928]

Mr. Blunkett: The Government are committed to promoting and improving race equality in a number of ways and the promotion of race equality within the provision of services to the public is a key priority. In support of this priority, the Government are driving forward a programme of initiatives to provide a new legislative and administrative framework to deliver improvements to race equality in the public sector.

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 provided new laws for race equality and strengthened the Race Relations Act 1976, outlawing race discrimination in all public functions, with only limited exceptions. Orders laid before Parliament on 24 October extend the list of bodies to which the general duty applies and impose specific duties on key public bodies to ensure their better compliance with the general duty.

The Government will publish their third edition of Race Equality indicators on public services early next year. Race Equality in Public Services is an annual publication which brings together key performance management data from across the range of government departments. The basket of indicators included in the document will be used to measure progress in achieving race equality.

The first edition was published in March 2000, the second in February 2001. The third edition is due to be published in February/March 2002.

The Government believe that these measures provide a framework for increasing the representation of minority ethnic communities in public life.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for reducing staff sickness rates in his Department. [16917]

Mr. Blunkett: The Civil Service Sickness Absence Report 1998 recorded the Department's baseline figure as 10.4 working days. The Prison Service baseline figure is 13.9 days.

The Home Office and its agencies have introduced new guidelines, policies and procedures with a view to reducing sickness absence. The Department's Service Delivery Targets for April 2001 to March 2004, which include a target for sickness absence, were published on Friday, 3 November 2000 and are available on the Home Office website. The targets are to reduce sickness absence, and sustain this improvement thereafter in the:

Home Office and its agencies (excluding the Prison Service) to an average of 6.9 working days by the end of March 2003.

Prison Service to an average of 9.0 days per member of staff by 2004.

The current sickness absence rate in the Home Office and its agencies (excluding the Prison Service) is 8.5 working days. In the Prison Service it is 13.7 working days.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many letters his Department received from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. [18563]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Information on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament received by ministerial agency chief executives, and departments and agencies and performance in handling them is published annually by the Cabinet Office. The most recent report, covering 2000, was announced by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office on 6 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 325W. Between 20 June and 20 July, the volume of correspondence received in the Home Office from right hon. and hon. Members was 1,537.

Criminal Assets Recovery Agency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the cost of the Criminal Assets Recovery Agency. [16909]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Our current estimate is that it will cost approximately £3 million to establish the Agency and that its annual running costs will be around £13 million, assuming around 100 staff. This estimate covers both the Agency's operational activities and the training and accreditation services which its centre of excellence will provide to other agencies. Based on current assumptions about caseloads and amounts available for recovery, the Government expect that the Agency's receipts will exceed its running costs.

The figures given above are subject to revision as our planning for the Agency develops. They do not take into account the possibility, currently under discussion, that the Agency should assume a major role in the enforcement of confiscation orders other than those that it has itself obtained.

European Arrest Warrant

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his intention to use the powers proposed in the draft Council Framework Decision on the European arrest warrant; and if he will make a statement. [20146]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Yes.

Magistrates Court

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many defendants who had pleaded guilty were sent by magistrates court for sentencing in a Crown court in each year since 1995. [20285]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Information collected centrally by the Home Department does not include details on defendants' plea at magistrates courts.

D. I. John Redgrave

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cause of the Metropolitan Police's delay in making a substantive reply to the letter sent to them on 25 April by lawyers acting for D. I. John Redgrave, and which was addressed to Inspector E. Owsley of DPS; and what was the date of the despatch of the substantive reply. [19371]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* I am informed by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that a substantive reply was provided to lawyers acting for Detective Inspector John Redgrave on 5 November 2001.

The delay in providing this reply was caused by the need to seek legal advice on the complex issue involved. A change of solicitor dealing with the matter extended the time taken to receive the advice.

MI5

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what rules apply to whether serving officers of M15 may belong to private security firms or associations made up of them. [19086]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* Serving officers of the Security Service may not join private security firms or associations of them, or engage in any other form of employment, without prior approval. The rules governing approval reflect those that apply to Civil Servants and take account of any potential conflict with the Service's interests and other matters such as the Working Time Regulations.

Internet

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Government's policy is on policing unsuitable material on the Internet; and what legislation is in place to enable it to do so. [19718]

Beverley Hughes: The Government's policy is that legislation should apply to illegal material online in the same way as it applies offline, and that legislation should be technology neutral. Legislation is kept under constant review to ensure it remains effective both offline and online.

The wider issue of unsuitable material on the Internet—material that is not illegal but is open to subjective interpretation, such as adult material—is one that the Government is addressing together with industry and industry bodies to ensure that consumers are able to manage their own Internet experience. Informed users can install Internet rating and filtering software on their computers and make choices between full Internet access and selective or 'walled garden' access. To help inform parents about these choices the Government have published a booklet "Keeping your child safe on the Internet". The advice is also available online at www.wiseuptothenet.co.uk.

Supporting Families

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of the policy proposals set out in the document Supporting Families *(a)* have been implemented, *(b)* are timetabled to be implemented, *(c)* have no date for implementation and *(d)* have been abandoned. [19535]

Angela Eagle: I will write to my hon. Friend with a report on progress to date, copies of which will be placed in the Library.

Anti-war March

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on how the Metropolitan Police calculated the number of demonstrators who took part in the anti-war march from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square on 18 November. [19433]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of the Police of the Metropolis informs me that it is established practice to use hand tally counters to determine numbers of people participating in marches in London. If the march enters Trafalgar Square crowd density measurements are used to reckon the numbers present.

On 18 November 2001 these methods identified 12,000 people leaving Hyde Park en route to Trafalgar Square and 15,000 people within Trafalgar Square.

Metropolitan Police Funding

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the impact of the level of central Government funding of the Metropolitan Police Authority in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002 on the expected increase in the MPA element of the GLA precept on council tax in London in 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [19595]

Mr. Denham: It is not Government policy to make such predictions. Decisions on the level at which the police precept for 2002–03 is set are a matter for the Greater London Authority after consultation with its local electorate and taxpayers.

The level at which the precept is set will be influenced not only by levels of revenue support grant, re-distributed non-domestic rates and police grant for 2002–03 but also by the use of any financial reserves the Metropolitan Police Authority puts towards its budget. Details of the provisional police funding settlement for 2002–03 will be announced shortly.

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those proposals under discussion at JHA Council level that contain elements of the Corpus Juris package; and if he will make a statement. [19589]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: None of the specific proposals in the Corpus Juris package are under discussion in the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council. However, the Corpus Juris report included a proposal for a European arrest warrant, to be issued by a national judge on the instructions of the European Public Prosecutor. A different proposal for a European arrest warrant is now under discussion in the JHA Council. The current proposal is based on the principle of mutual recognition and does not involve any role for the European Public Prosecutor.

Police (Cheshire)

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police *(a)* officers and *(b)* constables there were per head of population in Cheshire in each of the last 10 years. [18444]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is set out in the table in the form of population per officer.

Year[1]	*Population per officer*[2]	*Population per constable*[2]
1991	507	674
1992	516	684
1993	507	678
1994	511	669
1995	505	656
1996	490	628
1997	479	616
1998	481	613
1999	475	613
2000	489	639
2001	491	641

[1] Police numbers figures are for 31 March each year from Home Office police strength returns.

[2] Population estimates are provided by the Office for National Statistics.

Local Bodies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those local bodies which were set up under legislation which is the responsibility of his Department since May 1997. [17596]

Mr. Blunkett: The information requested is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the public appointments he has made since 7 June. [18749]

Mr. Blunkett: The table lists the appointments my Department has made to public bodies between 7 June 2001 and 31 October 2001.

It is the practice not to publish the names of those appointed to the Boards of Visitors in England and Wales because of concerns for their personal safety, but 121 new appointments were made between 7 June 2001 and 31 October 2001.

Body/name	*Position*
Animal Procedures Committee	
Dr. Michael Festing	Member
Dr. Robert Hubrecht	Member
Dr. Timothy Morris	Member
Parole Board	
His Hon. Judge Timothy Lawrence[1]	Member
Mr. Kofi Appiah[1]	Member
Mr. Michael Hennessey[1]	Member
Mrs. Lesley Hilton[1]	Member
Mr. Anthony Pembrooke[1]	Member
Mr. Mohammed Pirani[1]	Member
Dr. Simon Wood[1]	Member
Her Hon. Judge Estalla Hindley[1]	Member
Dr. Judith MacKenzie[1]	Member
His Hon. Judge John MacNaught[1]	Member
His Hon. Judge David Pugsley[1]	Member
Mrs. Judith Pitchers[1]	Member
Mr. John Staples[1]	Member
Mr. Robert Mathers[1]	Member
Ms Assia King[1]	Member
Dr. Abdul Sheikh[1]	Member

Body/name	*Position*
Dr. Susan Davenport[1]	Member
His Hon. Judge Jeremy Connor[1]	Member
Dr. David Mawson	Member
Mr. David Mylan	Member
Mr. Peter Palmer	Member
Mrs. Jo Turnbull	Member
Ms Josephine Dobry	Member
Dr. Anne Worrall	Member
Professor Roy King	Member
Mrs. Jane Geraghty	Member
Mrs. Diana Fulbrook	Member
Mrs. Sylvia Peach	Member
Dr. Claire Barkley	Member
Dr. Carol Hedderman	Member
Dr. Ann Barker	Member
Dr. Lawrence Chesterman	Member
Dr. Chris Hunter	Member
Dr. Ardash Kaul	Member
Dr. Richard O'Flynn	Member
His Hon. Judge Keith Cutler	Member
His Hon. Judge Kerry MacGill	Member
His Hon. Judge Gareth Hawkesworth	Member
His Hon. Judge Stephen Robbins	Member
His Hon. Judge Graham Boal	Member
Mr. Stephen Murphy	Member
Professor Andrew Rutherford	Member
Police Complaints Authority	
Mrs. Molly Meacher[1]	Deputy Chair
Ms Mehmuda Mian[1]	Member
Miss Sally Hawkins	Member
Mrs. Elaine Rassaby	Member
Mrs. Jennifer Rogers	Member
Ms Nicola Williams	Member
Mrs. Ann Barker	Member
Police Information Technology Organisation	
Mr. Peter Wilson	Member
Mr. Bruce McDowell	Member
Youth Justice Board for England and Wales	
Mrs. Annabella Scott[1]	Member
Mr. Charles Wilson[1]	Member
Ms Joyce Moseley[1]	Member
Mr. Cedric Fullwood[1]	Member

[1] Reappointment

Special Advisers and Press Officers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers were employed (i) full time, (ii) part time and (iii) on a contract basis by his Department in each year since 1992. [6925]

Mr. Blunkett: *(a)* On the number of special advisers, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 340W.

(b) On the number of press officers, detailed staff profiles for the period prior to 1997 are not held centrally and the cost of providing this information would be disproportionate as it would require the Home Office pay branch to conduct a detailed search of all staff records for the periods in question. Payroll records would not, in any event, provide accurate press officer staffing levels which throughout the period in question were enhanced by attachments and secondments, some at nil cost to the Department, and would not necessarily have been reflected in payroll information.

For numbers of press officers currently employed full and part time at the Home Office I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 49W.

Staffing levels for the years 1997 to 2000 were as follows:

May 1997: three senior information officers, 10 information officers (two part time) one assistant information officer, a higher executive officer on secondment.

January 1998: three senior information officers, 11 information officers (two part time).

January 1999: two senior information officers, eight information officers (two part time), three assistant information officers, a higher executive officer on secondment.

January 2000: three senior information officers, six information officers, three assistant information officers, one higher executive officer on secondment.

For all these periods the Home Office press office was managed by an assistant director at either grade seven or temporary grade six level.

National Crime Squad

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what level of funding he will make available to the *(a)* National Crime Squad and *(b)* National Criminal Intelligence Service in 2002–03. [20985]

Mr. Blunkett: I am writing today to the chairman of the Service Authority for the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad to inform him how I propose to increase the funding for the two organisations.

Under the provisions of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, the principal method of funding the two organisations is now one of grant in aid from the Home Office.

In reaching my decision, I have taken into account the proposals put to me by the Service Authority and also the representations made to me by the Association of Police Authorities, Association of Chief Police Officers and others. I have considered all this against the background of the overall settlement for the police service.

I have decided to make a grant of £134.05 million to the National Crime Squad in 2002–03. This is an increase of £20 million or 17.5 per cent.

I have decided to make a grant of £68.5 million to the National Criminal Intelligence Service in 2002–03. This is an increase of £19 million or 38.4 per cent.

The conditions under which payment of these grants will be made are set out in my letters to the chairman of the Service Authority and in the grant reports which have been published and laid before the House today. Copies have also been placed in the Library.

For both organisations, this level of increase provides the means for a significant boost in fighting the top priorities of drug and people trafficking. More generally, the increases will enable the National Crime Squad and the National Criminal Intelligence Service to continue and enhance their crucial work in tackling serious and organised criminal activity.

Police Authorities (Funding)

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will announce the allocations of police grant for police authorities in England and Wales for 2002–03. [20986]

Mr. Denham: I have today placed in the Library a copy of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's proposals for allocation of police grant for 2002–03. My right hon. Friend and I intend to implement the proposals subject to consideration of any representations we receive about them, and to the approval of the House.

We are taking the opportunity to outline the wider provision for support for the police service. This includes not only Total Standard Spending (TSS), supported by police grant and revenue support grant, but also provision for capital, specific initiatives (Crime Fighting Fund, Rural Policing, Airwave) and operational and administrative support directly provided by the Home Office.

The total provision made in Spending Review 2000 for policing in 2002–03 is £9,010 million. The overall increase on provision for 2001–02 is 6.1 per cent. It builds on an increase in 2001–02 of 10.1 per cent.

The increase in provision directly available to police authorities, for TSS, specific initiatives and capital grant and supplementary credit approvals is 5 per cent. In addition, there are increases in provision of services provided centrally for the police service—training, information technology, communications and scientific support.

We propose to distribute the settlement as follows:

Table 1

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*Change*	
	£ million[1]	*£ million*[1]	*£ million*[1]	*Percentage*
Total SR2000 provision	8,495	9,010	515	6.1
This comprises:				
1. Direct funding for police authorities				
Total standard spending[2]	7,568	7,777	209	2.8
Specific initiatives	229	349	120	51.4
Capital	232	310	78	33.6
	8,029	8,436	407	5.0
2. Centrally provided services	91	167	76	83.1
3. Central administration	211	204	–7	–3.3
4. NCS/NCIS	164	203	39	23.8
Grand total	8,495	9,010	515	6.1

[1] Rounded to £ million

[2] The original 2001–02 provision has been adjusted for National Crime Squad (NCS) and the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS)

Total Standard Spending (TSS)

Police funding proposals within the local government finance system are being announced today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. An announcement has also been made in the National Assembly for Wales. These proposals together would provide total standard spending on the police in England and Wales of £7,777.199 million, an increase of £209 million or 2.8 per cent. on the adjusted TSS for 2001–02.

The National Crime Squad (NCS) and the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) perform a valuable role in the battle against serious crime as part of the overall policing service. The NCS brought together the previous regional crime squads into a single unit, providing direction and control and making it easier to deploy resources effectively to prevent and detect serious crime and tackle major criminals operating in one or more police force areas in England and Wales. The role of NCIS is to develop intelligence to combat serious and organised crime, providing both tactical and strategic intelligence and expertise for law enforcement, Government and other relevant agencies at a national and international level. At present these services are financed mainly by a levy on police authorities set by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. From 2002–03 the services will be funded centrally. The new approach achieves transparency in the funding arrangements for the service authorities. Provision for the services in 2002–03 has been made from TSS. TSS for 2001–02 has been adjusted in the previous table to ensure comparability.

The increase in TSS is 2.8 per cent., but increases for individual authorities vary. The formula used to determine the distribution of grant/Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) is again unchanged. The main reasons for differences between authorities result from changes in the data applied from one year to the next. These include changes in population, unemployment, projected pensions' commitments and the area cost adjustment.

We propose that the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) should continue to receive additional funding in recognition of its distinct national and capital city functions. It has proved very difficult for the principal formula to take account of these special circumstances. As in previous years a special payment of grant will be made to the MPS above that given through the principal grant formula. The amount has been set at £197 million, which is included in the total provision.

It is proposed to make a final year's special payment of grant to the following authorities for additional costs incurred as a result of changes in Metropolitan Police District boundaries in April 2000, as follows:

Hertfordshire: £300,000

Surrey: £800,000.

TSS allocations are a mechanism for distributing grant. Provisional grants for police authorities in 2002–03 compared with the adjusted figure for 2001–02 are given in table 2. Protection has been given to authorities which would otherwise have received a low grant increase over

2001–02, by applying a "floor" or minimum increase of 2.3 per cent., in line with inflation. The associated TSS allocations are given in table 3.

The following items are not part of the annual grant settlement but demonstrate the wider range of support provided to police authorities.

Specific initiatives

The main items are:

Crime Fighting Fund (CFF): through the CFF resources are being provided for a programme of recruitment over and above forces previous plans. The programme has so far lived up to expectations. £221 million is included in 2002–03 to continue funding around 6,000 recruits from 2000–01 to 2001–02 and to support a further 3,000 to be recruited in 2002–03.

Rural Policing Fund: as in 2001–02, £30 million is provided for the particular needs of more rural forces through the rural policing fund.

Airwave: £65 million will be available for the start-up operational costs of authorities taking Airwave in 2002–03 and to enable those forces who have the Airwave service to purchase additional menu services from BT.

London and South East Payments: £33 million in total is provided for funding of free train travel for all Metropolitan and City of London officers; funding of 75 per cent. of the cost of the increase of £3,327 a year in London allowance paid to officers in the Metropolitan and City of London forces who were recruited on or after 1 September 1994 and who are not in receipt of housing emoluments, and an allowance for other forces in the south-east.

Police Authority Capital

The main items are as follows:

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I intend to increase provision of capital grant and supplementary credit approvals from £157.43 million in 2001–02 to £209.43 million in 2002–03. The increase is substantial, and police authorities will be asked to direct a significant proportion of the extra provision towards improvement of their estate, as well as providing for other capital assets such as vehicles and equipment.

Capital grants (up to £76 million) for introduction to Airwave will be made available to those authorities taking up the radio communications service in 2002–03. Similar arrangements were made for 2001–02 and will be made for 2003–04.

Centrally Provided Services

The main elements are CFF training costs (£23 million); DNA expansion programme (£61 million); The Airwave contractor's core service charges (£50 million); and the National Strategy for Police Information Systems (£27 million).

Central Administration

These include Home Office costs attributable to policing such as the Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO) and National Police Training facilities.

Enhanced security since 11 September

Additional provision of £30 million has also been made through the pre-Budget review for the police response during the current year to events of 11 September in the United States of America. We are considering further any longer term implications for policing.

The settlement continues to take account of our commitment to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the police service. Future grant allocations will be considered in the light of police authorities improving efficiency by 2 per cent., reprioritising use of resources in favour of front-line policing.

In addition to the resources which I have detailed specifically for policing, police forces share in and benefit from various wider programmes for crime reduction. For example, since April 1999, under the Crime Reduction Programme, over £390 million has been invested in the running and evaluation of over 1,450 crime-fighting projects. These will provide an evidence base on what methods, employed by the police and their crime and disorder partners, are the most effective in tackling crime and its causes.

Table 2: grant allocations

	Allocations[1]		
Police authority	*2001–02 (£ million)*	*2002–03 (£ million)*	*Percentage change*
English Shire forces			
Avon and Somerset	148.3	152.4	2.7
Bedfordshire	55.8	57.5	3.0
Cambridgeshire	66.0	67.5	2.3
Cheshire	96.4	98.9	2.6
Cleveland	77.7	80.1	3.0
Cumbria	54.1	55.6	2.8
Derbyshire	91.3	95.0	4.0
Devon and Cornwall	152.4	156.9	2.9
Dorset	58.2	59.6	2.5
Durham	75.7	77.7	2.7
Essex	147.4	150.8	2.3
Gloucestershire	53.9	55.3	2.5
Hampshire	173.3	178.9	3.2
Hertfordshire	96.0	98.6	2.7
Humberside	103.4	105.8	2.3
Kent	167.3	171.1	2.3
Lancashire	163.7	168.5	2.9
Leicestershire	92.0	94.6	2.8
Lincolnshire	55.5	56.8	2.3
Norfolk	74.2	76.8	3.5
North Yorkshire	66.6	68.1	2.3
Northamptonshire	57.8	59.1	2.3
Nottinghamshire	115.6	118.3	2.3
Staffordshire	100.0	102.6	2.5
Suffolk	60.4	61.8	2.3
Surrey	80.7	82.5	2.3
Sussex	144.8	148.3	2.5
Thames Valley	194.7	199.2	2.3
Warwickshire	45.6	46.6	2.3
West Mercia	98.7	101.0	2.3
Wiltshire	55.4	56.6	2.3
English Metropolitan forces			
Greater Manchester	352.9	362.5	2.7
Merseyside	223.6	228.7	2.3
Northumbria	199.3	203.9	2.3
South Yorkshire	160.1	163.8	2.3
West Midlands	358.0	368.1	2.8
West Yorkshire	268.8	275.6	2.5
London forces			
GLA—all functions[2]	1,882.5	1,943.0	3.2
City of London[2]			
English total	6,468.1	6,648.2	2.8
Welsh forces			
Dyfed-Powys	45.6	47.0	3.0

Table 2: grant allocations

		Allocations[1]	
Police authority	*2001–02 (£ million)*	*2002–03 (£ million)*	*Percentage change*
Gwent	63.6	65.9	3.6
North Wales	67.6	69.2	2.3
South Wales	150.4	156.2	3.9
Welsh total	327.2	338.3	3.4
Total	6,795.3	6,986.5	2.8

[1] Rounded to the nearest £100,000. Grant as would be calculated under the Local Government Finance Report (England) and Local Government Finance Report (Wales). This includes the Metropolitan police special payment, and the effects of floors and ceilings. Debt Charges adjustments are added to the 2001–02 grant figures for England.

[2] Figures for the City are excluded because these are allocated to the Common Council of the City of London as a whole in respect of all its functions. GLA is included but it includes all functions (eg fire)

Notes:

1. Because of the transfer of responsibilities for NCIS/NCS, the total available for distribution has been adjusted for 2001–02 to ensure like-to-like comparison with 2002–03.
2. Special payments for transitional costs associated with changes to the boundaries of the Metropolitan Police District from 1 April 2000.
3. Capital Financing SSAs as would be calculated under the Local Government Finance Report (England) and Local Government Finance Report (Wales).

Table 3: total standard spending

		Allocations[1]	
Police authority	*2001–02 (£ million)*	*2002–03 (£ million)*	*Percentage change*
English Shire forces			
Avon and Somerset	177.5	182.8	3.0
Bedfordshire	66.5	68.6	3.2
Cambridgeshire	79.5	81.6	2.6
Cheshire	116.0	119.3	2.9
Cleveland	86.8	89.6	3.2
Cumbria	63.4	65.3	3.0
Derbyshire	108.6	113.3	4.3
Devon and Cornwall	183.8	189.6	3.2
Dorset	73.4	75.5	2.9
Durham	85.6	88.0	2.8
Essex	181.2	185.0	2.0
Gloucestershire	65.5	67.3	2.8
Hampshire	209.2	216.3	3.4
Hertfordshire	120.2	123.4	2.6
Humberside	118.5	121.1	2.2
Kent	199.9	204.9	2.5
Lancashire	188.8	194.8	3.1
Leicestershire	108.3	111.6	3.0
Lincolnshire	67.1	68.9	2.6
Norfolk	89.5	92.7	3.7
North Yorkshire	82.2	84.3	2.5
Northamptonshire	69.4	71.1	2.5
Nottinghamshire	133.2	136.4	2.4
Staffordshire	119.0	122.3	2.8
Suffolk	73.3	75.3	2.6
Surrey	108.6	110.2	1.5
Sussex	177.8	182.6	2.7
Thames Valley	239.8	245.5	2.4
Warwickshire	55.8	56.7	1.6
West Mercia	121.6	124.3	2.2
Wiltshire	67.9	69.2	1.9
English Metropolitan forces			
Greater Manchester	395.8	407.2	2.9
Merseyside	247.2	253.0	2.3
Northumbria	222.7	227.4	2.1
South Yorkshire	180.8	184.6	2.2
West Midlands	400.9	412.6	2.9
West Yorkshire	304.0	312.4	2.8
London forces			
GLA—all functions[2]	1,788.0	1,841.1	3.0
City of London[3]	55.1	59.1	7.2
English total	7,232.3	7,434.7	2.8
Welsh forces			
Dyfed-Powys	55.1	56.9	3.3
Gwent	73.5	76.2	3.7
North Wales	80.5	82.1	2.0
South Wales	172.3	179.1	4.0
Welsh total	381.4	394.4	3.4
Total	7,613.7	7,829.0	2.8

[1] Rounded to the nearest £100,000. The Allocation is the sum of: Police Grant, Transitional Grant, Police SSA, and Capital Finance SSA. Figures for Capital Finance SSA are provisional.

[2] Figures for the Metropolitan police include its Special Payment.

[3] Figure for the City include Police SSA and Police Grant only and excludes other SSAs (eg Capital Financing) and Central Support Protection Grant. These are allocated to the Common Council of the City of London as a whole in respect of all its functions.

Note:

Because of the transfer of responsibilities for NCIS/NCS, the total available for distribution has been adjusted for 2001–02 to ensure like-to-like comparison with 2002–03.

Departmental Spending

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total amount of spending by his Department was in each nation and region of the UK, in the last year for which figures are available; what proportion of his Department's total spending this constitutes; and if he will make a statement. [6857]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 854W.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

New Deal (Civil Service)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw) of 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 901W, what proportion the new deal starts in each Government Department were of the total number of employees recruited by the Department over the relevant period; and how many of the new deal starts were followed by sustained unsubsidised employment. [20702]

Mr. Leslie: The information is not held centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Regional Government

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will publish a paper on regional Government in England. [19917]

Mrs. Roche: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 80W.

Civil Service

Adam Price: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many full-time posts in the UK Civil Service are based in each parliamentary constituency. [18521]

Mr. Leslie: Information is available for the countries and Government Office regions of Great Britain. Data for full-time equivalent posts are published in "Civil Service Statistics", copies of which are laid in the Libraries of both Houses. The latest information, for April 2000, was published in August this year. Data for full-time posts, excluding part-timers, is contained in the table.

The data are not collected in a form which can be disaggregated to parliamentary constituencies in Great Britain, and therefore the information is not available except at disproportionate cost. Figures for the Northern Ireland Civil Service are given in the table.

Full-time civil servants employed by Departments and agencies in Great Britain, by country/region of workplace

Government office regions	*Numbers of staff*
London	79,960
South East	51,870
South West	46,130
West Midlands	29,450
North West	34,340
Merseyside	14,150
North East	24,440
Yorks and Humberside	30,810
East Midlands	18,060
Eastern	25,410
Wales	27,410
Scotland	42,100
Northern Ireland	5,030
Overseas	2,380
Not known	4,400
Total	435,930

Full-time Northern Ireland civil service posts by parliamentary constituency

	Numbers of NICS[1] staff
Belfast, East	4,940
Belfast, North	1,470
Belfast, South	7,800
Belfast, West	1,510
East Antrim	450
East Londonderry	1,060
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	890
Foyle	1,410
Lagan Valley	580
Mid Ulster	310
Newry and Armagh	660
North Antrim	890
North Down	840
South Antrim	450
South Down	620
Strangford	210
Upper Bann	920
West Tyrone	820
Constituency unknown	80
Total	25,900

[1] Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) staff enumerated at 1 January 2001. Includes industrial and non-industrial, permanent and casual staff but excludes the following: those working part-time or on career break, Home Civil Servants, Northern Ireland Audit Office, Northern Ireland Court Service and uniformed Prison Service. Parliamentary constituency of staff refers to the location of the office or depot where staff are based.

e-Commerce Targets

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will rank Government Departments in respect of their performance in meeting e-commerce targets; and if he will make a statement. [17396]

Mr. Leslie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar) on 30 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1200W.

People's Panel

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 896W, on the People's Panel, if he will list *(a)* the title, purpose and cost of projects that have been commissioned from the panel between 1 November and the latest date for which figures are available and *(b)* ongoing projects being carried out by the panel in the same period. [20385]

Mr. Leslie: Since 1 November a sixth wave of consumer research using the panel ("People's Panel Wave 6") has been commissioned. The purpose is to complete a series of surveys tracking satisfaction with public services. The cost of the research is £73,200 excluding VAT.

The panel has been involved with no on-going projects during this period.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 4 December 2001

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Grant-maintained Protection Grant

Mr. Daisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will ensure that *(a)* the grant-maintained protection grant is maintained in 2002–03. [19981]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Bearing in mind the additional resources to be made available to local education authorities in 2002–03 as a result of the local government finance settlement to be announced on 4 December and the likelihood of a further general reduction in the amount of transitional funding payable by LEAs to former GM schools, my right hon. Friend considers that there are insufficient grounds for continuing to pay LEAs a special grant in respect of transitional funding in the face of other claims on the resources available to the Department.

Specialist Schools (Selection)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list each specialist school as at 1 September that had chosen to exercise the option to select up to 10 per cent. of pupils by aptitude together with *(a)* the nature of the specialism, *(b)* the status of the school, *(c)* the percentage of pupils selected, *(d)* the percentage of pupils with statements and *(e)* the percentage of pupils receiving free school meals. [20689]

Mr. Timms: The latest available information on aptitude selection is for school year 1999–2000. The following table shows the specialist schools which had selected a proportion of their pupils for that year by aptitude for a subject or subjects relevant to their specialist designation, together with the specialism of each school, the school's status, the percentage of pupils selected in each school, the percentage of pupils with statements and the percentage of all pupils receiving free school meals.

Specialist schools: selection by aptitude

				Percentage of:		
School	*LEA*	*Specialism*	*School's Status*	*pupils selected on aptitude*	*pupils with statements*	*free school meals take-up*
Archbishop Blanch	Liverpool	Technology	Voluntary aided	5.6	17.	11.7
Archbishop Temple	Lancashire	Technology	Voluntary aided	10.0	1.5	8.6
Bohunt	Hampshire	Language	Foundation	10.0	0.7	1.5
Brentwood Ursuline Convent	Essex	Arts	Voluntary aided	10.0	0.1	4.1
Chaucer Technology	Kent	Technology	Foundation	Up to 100	1.8	6.1
Chestnut Grove	Wandsworth	Arts	Community	16.0	4.2	20.3
Cornwallis	Kent	Technology	Foundation	10.0	3.6	6.1
Deacon's	Peterborough, City	Technology	Foundation	15.0	1.5	13.4
George Spencer GM	Nottinghamshire	Technology	Foundation	10.0	0.7	3.5
Heathside	Surrey	Technology	Foundation	4.0	1.2	2.3
Hockerill Anglo European	Hertfordshire	Language	Foundation	10.0	0.7	3.5
Intake High	Leeds	Arts	Community	10.0	4.6	18.0
Lodge Park	Northamptonshire	Technology	Foundation	10.0	1.3	8.4
Lynn Grove VA High	Norfolk	Technology	Voluntary aided	15.0	0.7	7.9
Mill Hill County High	Barnet, LB of	Technology	Foundation	10.0	2.9	2.8
Ninestiles	Birmingham	Technology	Foundation	10.0	4.5	22.6
Oakbank	Bradford	Sports	Foundation	10.0	3.7	10.2
Oldfield	Bath and NE Somerset	Sports	Foundation	10.0	0.5	4.1
Philip Morant	Essex	Technology	Foundation	15.0	1.2	5.0
Sandwich Technology	Kent	Technology	Foundation	10.0	1.8	11.1
Small Heath	Birmingham	Technology	Foundation	10.0	0.9	32.9
St. Margaret's C of E High	Liverpool	Technology	Voluntary aided	15.0	1.4	4.6
St. Martin's	Essex	Technology	Foundation	10.0	0.7	5.1
St. Marylebone (The)	Westminster	Arts	Voluntary aided	10.0	1.7	11.5
Wye Valley (The)	Buckinghamshire	Sports	Community	10.0	4.4	6.6

Notes:

This information was taken from progress reports submitted by 403 schools in December 2000. Progress reports for schools operational as of September 2000 are currently being received but the information from these has not yet been collated.

The 1998 School Standards and Framework Act provides for schools with a specialism to select up to 10 per cent. of their intake on the basis of aptitude for a specialist subject prescribed in regulations. Prior to the 1998 Act schools had greater discretion over aptitude selection and this accounts for the percentages above 10 per cent.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of the total of specialist schools have chosen to exercise the option to select up to 10 per cent. of pupils by aptitude for each of the last three years. [20690]

Mr. Timms: The latest available information for specialist schools which have chosen to exercise the option to select up to 10 per cent. of pupils by aptitude is for school year 1999–2000. This is the first year for which this information has been collected. Information for

2000–01 is due to be received shortly and will be available early in the new year.

Of the 403 Specialist Schools operational as of September 1999, 25 schools (6.2 per cent.) selected a proportion of their pupils by aptitude for a subject or subjects relevant to their specialist designation.

Departmental Spending

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total expenditure was on *(a)* advertising, *(b)* polling, *(c)* focus groups, *(d)* design consultants, *(e)* caterers, *(f)* production of departmental publications and *(g)* photographs/photographers by her Department for each year since 1995 in (i) cash and (ii) real terms; what was (A) the annual percentage increase in spending on each category and (B) spending on each category as a percentage of the total departmental running costs; and if she will make a statement. [6910]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: For each year since 1995 the Department's spend on advertising, caterers, production of departmental publications and photographs/photographers is shown in the table.

Within this period, the Department has not undertaken focus group or opinion polls of the general public. However it has sampled and consulted on views of teachers, Heads and other groups affected by the Department's policies on specific issues, for example literacy and numeracy strategies.

It is not possible to separate out expenditure on design consultants. This expenditure is contained within the costs of departmental publications. Advertising costs given do not include spending by agencies.

Some figures for 1995–96 are not available because of the merger of the Employment Department and Department for Education.

Real term expenditure is calculated using 1999–2000 base year prices.

All the expenditure given in the answer is from departmental programme budgets. It is not a valid comparison to give these as a percentage of departmental running costs.

Advertising

	Cash terms (£m)	*Real terms (£m)*	*Cash terms Annual percentage increase in spending (year on year)*	*Real terms Annual percentage increase in spending (year on year)*
1995–96 (ED)	7.7	8.6	—	—
1995–96 (DfE)	0.6	0.67	—	—
1995–96 (total)	8.3	9.27	—	—
1996–97	7.5	8.12	–9.64	–12.45
1997–98	10.0	10.53	[illegible]3.33	29.66
1998–99	15.7	16.07	57.00	52.64
1999–2000	11.9	11.9	–24.20	–25.95
2000–01	29.0	28.43	143.70	138.92

Caterers

Year	*Cash terms (£k)*	*Real terms (£k)*	*Cash terms Annual percentage increase in spending (year on year)*	*Real terms Annual percentage increase in spending (year on year)*
1995–96	—	—	—	—
1996–97	970.0	1,057.17	—	—
1997–98	852.6	897.62	–12.10	–14.53
1998–99	854.6	874.75	0.23	–2.55
1999–2000	932.9	932.90	9.16	6.65
2000–01	538.1	527.55	–42.32	–43.45

Departmental publications

	Cash terms (£m)	*Real terms (£m)*	*Cash terms Annual percentage increase in spending (year on year)*	*Real terms Annual percentage increase in spending (year on year)*
1995–96	—	—	—	—
1996–97	2.5	2.71	—	—
1997–98	2.1	2.21	–16.0	–18.32
1998–99	0.8	0.82	–61.90	–62.96
1999–2000	2.8	2.80	250.00	241.94
2000–01	2.3	2.25	–17.86	–19.47

Photographs/Photographers

	Cash terms (£k)	*Real terms (£k)*	*Cash terms Annual percentage increase in spending (year on year)*	*Real terms Annual percentage increase in spending (year on year)*
1995–96	63.3	70.74	—	—
1996–97	114.5	123.96	80.88	75.25
1997–98	100.5	105.81	−12.23	−14.65
1998–99	114.5	117.20	13.93	10.77
1999–2000	40.8	40.80	−64.37	−65.19
2000–01	72.3	70.88	77.21	73.73

Teachers

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers in East Sussex were assaulted by *(a)* pupils and *(b)* parents in each year since 1997. [19930]

Mr. Timms: The Department does not hold these data. East Sussex local education authority has informed us that, since 1998, there have been a total of 427 physical assaults on teachers by pupils and parents in its schools, the majority by pupils in special schools. There were 97 assaults in 1998–99, 118 in 1999–2000 and 212 in 2000–01. This information does not separately identify who carried out the assaults.

Learning and Skills Councils

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make it her policy to ensure that the amounts that local education authorities are required to transfer to learning and skills councils from April 2002 for post-16 education broadly matches the education standard spending assessment for that group for each local education authority. [17965]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* Local education authorities will, from April, receive funding for their sixth form provision from the learning and skills council (LSC). Initial funding allocations will be announced by the LSC by mid-December. The deduction from each authority's education SSA will be equal to the amount received from the LSC for sixth form funding.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to whom members of local learning and skills councils are accountable; and how. [20695]

Margaret Hodge: Members of local learning and skills councils (LSCs) are accountable to the Secretary of State through the LSC's National Council.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list those local learning and skills councils which *(a)* have at least one member who is a representative from the school sector and *(b)* have no such representative. [14558]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* All 47 local learning and skills councils include representatives with relevant experience from the school sector. These include:

three teachers;

17 headteachers;

36 local LSC members appointed with a local education authority (LEA) background (typically Directors of Education);

eight local executive directors who have previous LEA officer or head teacher experience; and

101 local council members who are school governors.

In addition, further experience of the schools and education sectors is brought by the vast range of other local authority representation (in most cases at council leader or chief executive level).

In April 2002, the LSC assumes responsibility for school sixth form funding. In recognition of this we will encourage the LSC to appoint further representatives with experience of the school sector as and when local vacancies arise.

A breakdown showing which local LSCs include representation from the schools and LEA/LA sector is given in the table.

Local LSC	*School Representatives*	*School Governors*	*LEA Representatives*	*Other LA Representatives*
North West				
Cheshire/Warrington	—	3	1 Elected	1 Official
Cumbria	—	2	2 Official	1 Elected
Lancashire	—	2	1 Elected	1 Official
Greater Manchester	—	3	—	1 Elected 1 Official
Greater Merseyside	1	2	1 Elected	1 Elected
West Midlands				
Birmingham/Solihull	—	2	1 Official	1 Elected
Black Country	—	1	—	1 Elected 1 Official
Coventry/Warwickshire	1	5	—	1 Elected 1 Official
Hereford/Worcester	1	1	—	1 Elected 1 Official

Local LSC	*School Representatives*	*School Governors*	*LEA Representatives*	*Other LA Representatives*
Shropshire	—	1	—	2 Elected 1 Official
Staffordshire	—	3	1 Elected	1 Official
South West				
Devon/Cornwall	—	2	—	1 Elected 1 Official
Bournemouth/Dorset/Poole	—	—	1 Official	1 Elected
Gloucestershire	1	2	—	1 Official
Somerset	—	2	—	1 Elected 2 Official
Wiltshire/Swindon	—	3	1 Elected	2 Elected 1 Official
West of England	1	—	—	1 Elected
North East				
County Durham	1	2	—	1 Elected 1 Official
Northumberland	—	3	1 Official	—
Tees Valley	—	3	—	2 Elected
Tyne and Wear	—	1	—	2 Elected
Yorkshire and Humber				
South Yorkshire	—	1	1 Official	2 Elected 1 Official
North Yorkshire	1	3	1 Official	2 Elected
West Yorkshire	—	2	1 Official	1 Elected
Humberside	—	2	1 Official	1 Elected 1 Official
East Midlands				
Derbyshire	—	4	1 Elected 1 Official	1 Elected
Leicestershire	—	3	2 Official	1 Elected
Lincolnshire	—	6	2 Official	1 Elected
Northamptonshire	1	2	1 Official	2 Elected
Nottinghamshire	—	3	1 Elected	1 Elected
East of England				
Bedfordshire	1	4	—	2 Elected
Cambridgeshire	1	4	1 Official	2 Elected 1 Official
Essex	1	1	1 Official	2 Elected 1 Official
Hertfordshire	2	—	1 Official	1 Elected 1 Official
Norfolk	1	—	1 Official	1 Elected
Suffolk	2	4	—	4 Elected
London				
Central London	1	3	—	1 Elected 1 Official
East London	—	4	1 Elected	1 Official
North London	1	2	—	1 Elected 1 Official
South London	1	1	1 Official	1 Elected
West London	—	2	—	1 Official
South East				
Berkshire	—	1	1 Official	1 Official
Hampshire/Portsmouth/IOW	—	1	1 Official	1 Official
Kent/Medway	—	1	1 Official	2 Elected 1 Official
Milton Keynes	—	2	2 Official	3 Elected
Surrey	1	1	1 Official	1 Elected 1 Official
Sussex	—	1	2 Official	1 Elected 1 Official

Teacher Vacancies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there were in maintained schools in Buckinghamshire at the beginning of the current school term. [15770]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available for the date requested. In January 2001 there were 59 full-time teacher vacancies in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in Buckinghamshire.

School Sport

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what statistics she requires London local education authorities to provide to her Department to measure the level of *(a)* competitive sport and *(b)* physical education in schools. [18505]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: All local education authorities are required to submit an assessment of the standards of attainment in physical education of Key Stage 3 pupils. However, there is no statutory requirement for local education authorities to submit statistics on the level of competitive sport in schools. The Government's White Paper "Schools: Achieving Success", includes a pledge that all children have access to at least two hours a week of PE or school sport, in or after school. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's survey into good practice in physical education has included examples from a number of schools in London.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what proportion of letters received by her Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days. [18580]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Between 20 June and 20 July 2001, the Department for Education and Skills replied to a total of 7,289 letters covering both ministerial and treat official correspondence. The Department replied as shown in the table:

	Number of replies sent	*Percentage of replies sent*
(a) in 15 working days and under	6,627	91
(b) in 16 to 20 working days	270	4
(c) in 21 to 30 working days	316	4
(d) in 31 working days and over	76	1
Total	7,289	—

Children and Young People's Unit

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what work is being done by the Children and Young People's Unit to include young people in Whitehall policy formulation. [19055]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

On 2 November I published "Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People" which sets out principles Government Departments have agreed to follow in their work to involve children and young people in the planning, provision and evaluation of Government policies and services relevant to them. The Children and Young People's Unit developed the principles in close consultation with Government Departments and with expertise from the voluntary sector. The Children and Young People's Unit is now supporting Departments as they plan how to take forward work to implement the principles and develop individual departmental action plans, for implementation from April 2002. The Unit will publish an annual report of progress against action plans.

The document "Learning to Listen—Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People" is available on the web at www.cypu.gov.uk and in the Library.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the budget is for the Children and Young Persons' Unit for *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002. [19562]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

The Children and Young People's Unit is responsible for the Children's Fund for which the spending plans are £100 million in 2001–02 and £150 million in 2002–03. The budget for the Children and Young People's Unit, including the administration and support of the Children's Fund is £2.7 million in 2001–02. Its budget for 2002–03 has not yet been finalised.

School Leavers

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of pupils in Birmingham, Northfield left full-time education at the age of 16 years in the last three years. [19389]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Data on the number and percentage of students continuing in post-compulsory education at age 16 are not calculated for areas smaller than LEAs, as reliable estimates cannot be made for small areas.

The percentage of 16-year-olds not participating in full-time education for Birmingham LEA, which includes the constituency of Birmingham Northfield, in the last three years for which figures are available is set out as follows:

16-year-olds not in full-time education: Birmingham LEA

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Percentage	33	32	33
Number	4,500	4,300	4,500

Participation rates by LEA are published in an annual statistical bulletin, "Participation in Education and Training by Young People Aged 16 and 17 in Each Local Area and Region, England".

LEA Music Services

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many local education authorities are receiving funds for a music service; and how many schools have benefited from the music service in each local education authority. [19616]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* All 150 local education authorities in England are receiving funds for a music service through the Music Standards Fund.

The Department for Education and Skills has not up to now collected information on how many schools benefit from the music service in each authority. We do, however, plan to ask music services for more information about the provision they offer in the new year.

Competitive Bidding

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the schemes administered by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies where funds are allocated by a competitive bidding process; and what was the amount of money allocated to each scheme. [19735]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the accuracy of the estimate previously supplied by her Department that 40 school playing fields per month were sold during the period 1979 to 1997; what recent representations she has received expressing concern over the *(a)* use and *(b)* accuracy of these estimated figures; and if she will make a statement. [19836]

John Healey *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* Public concern about the loss of school playing fields led directly to the introduction in October 1998 of section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. Prior to October 1998, the Government had no means of knowing precisely how many school playing fields were being sold. Before section 77 was introduced, only grant-maintained schools were required to seek consent from the Secretary of State before selling land, including areas of their playing fields. Local authorities and other schools that owned their own playing fields were free to sell without restriction.

Our best estimate is that an average of 40 playing fields a month were sold in this way before October 1998. This estimate is based on the number of playing field disposals at grant-maintained schools between April 1996, when the then Conservative Government further encouraged the disposal of playing fields by relaxing the Local Authority Capital Finance Regulations which governed the use of sale proceeds, and 1 October 1998, when section 77 took effect. During this 30-month period, some 64 grant-maintained schools were given approval to dispose of areas of playing field, which is an average of over two a month. Using the proportion of grant-maintained schools at that time compared with the number of other schools, we estimate the total number of playing field disposals each month to have been around 40.

Only the Central Council of Physical Recreation has expressed any concern about these figures. Officials in this Department responded to the Council's concerns in September 2001. There have been no further representations.

Pupil Places

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what basis is used to determine the funding made available to local education authorities for new pupil places. [19942]

John Healey *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Capital support for new pupil places is allocated to local education authorities (LEAs) where the forecast growth in pupil numbers in an area exceeds the assessed physical capacity of local schools to accommodate them. Once the number of pupil places needed is established, funding is allocated using a per pupil amount which reflects the average cost of new accommodation. Funding support is normally provided to LEAs in the form of basic credit approvals. Detailed guidance to LEAs on submitting requests for new pupil places is sent to them annually in the "Guide for the Schools Capital Allocation Round and PFI Credits" document, copies of which are lodged in the Library.

Capital Expenditure

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what mechanism she operates to record approvals given to local education authorities for capital expenditure; [19941]

(2) what information her Department holds on approvals to local education authorities for capital expenditure. [19943]

John Healey *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The Government have, as far as possible, moved away from centrally directed, bureaucratic bidding processes. We have moved towards needs related formulaic allocations to schools and local education authorities (LEAs) based on pupil numbers and survey-based assessments of building needs. It is the Government's view that, on balance and with the right safeguards, detailed decisions about capital priorities across a local area are best taken by LEAs working with their schools. In line with this, Asset Management Plans (AMPs) have been introduced by LEAs, giving them a clear and systematic view of the needs of their schools estate, based on surveys of all school buildings. LEAs and schools then prioritise these needs in a rigorous, consultative and transparent way against the formulaic capital support provided to them. This means that most detailed information on how schools capital is invested is held by LEAs and schools.

Central Government retains some central support for capital funded through bid based initiatives such as the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and the Targeted Capital Fund (TCF). Guidance on submitting PFI and TCF bids is sent to LEAs annually in the "Guide for the Schools Capital Allocation Round and PFI Credits" document, copies of which are lodged in the Library, together with copies of announcements of allocations to LEAs and schools made by the Department. Details of announcements of major capital allocations are also sent to each Member of Parliament.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools will have been allocated money in the period from May 1997 to March 2002 for repairs. [19944]

John Healey *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Every maintained school in England has been allocated money for repairs in this period. This Government made available £1.3 billion of New Deal for Schools capital from the Windfall Tax from 1997–98 until 2001–02, to help address the backlog of urgent repairs in schools that we inherited after years of under-funding. 17,000 schools are benefiting from this investment.

In 2000–01, Devolved formula capital for schools was introduced, giving, for the first time, every school in England a capital budget to enable them to address directly the needs of their buildings. This funding is nearly £300 million this year and will rise to £600 million by 2003–04, when a typical primary school will receive almost £20,000 a year, and a typical secondary school will receive almost £66,000 a year.

In addition to this, many schools are benefiting from repairs and improvements supported by formulaic capital allocations by central Government to local education authorities.

New Schools

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 773W, on new schools, what the value was of capital expenditure on *(a)* expanding new schools, *(b)* replacing schools and *(c)* repairing schools in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, (iv) 2000 and (v) 2001. [19946]

John Healey *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* We do not hold information in the form requested. Much capital support is allocated to local education authorities and schools on a formulaic basis, so that records on how it is allocated to specific categories of spend will be held locally.

"All Our Futures"

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress has been made in implementing "All our Futures: Creativity, Culture, Education". [19953]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The report of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education "All our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education", published in 1999, contained 59 detailed recommendations. Since then we have made considerable progress in addressing the report's recommendations.

The last national curriculum review introduced greater flexibility, which allowed teachers the freedom to incorporate more creativity into their planning and teaching. As a result of the review, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has established two projects, one on Creativity and one on the Arts, to produce guidance for schools on how to promote pupils' creativity and how the Arts can contribute to pupils' creative and cultural development.

This year, the Department's White Paper "Schools: achieving success" reinforced our commitment that all pupils should have access to a broad and balanced education which includes opportunities for creativity and self-expression. This includes our proposals to support schools to provide "education with character" and our commitment that there should be more opportunities for children to learn music, PE, sports and a modern foreign language. We are also supporting the continued development of Creative Partnerships between schools and arts organisations.

Rural White Paper

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W, on the rural White Paper, how many child care places were *(a)* taken up and *(b)* remained vacant in (i) Cornwall, (ii) Devon, (iii) Durham and (iv) Lincolnshire in 2000–01; and what plans she has to extend the child care places scheme to other rural counties. [20030]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The Department for Education and Skills has responsibility for the development of child care places in England through the National Childcare Strategy. The strategy is carried forward at a local level by Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) that have been established in every local education authority area in England. All rural areas are covered.

We do not currently hold information on the take-up of places. EYDCPs are now gathering this information and will be submitting it to the Department in spring 2002 along with their Implementation Plans for 2002–03.

We are making £22 million available from April 2002 to support the delivery of Sure Start type services aimed at young children and families in rural areas and small pockets of disadvantage. This will build on neighbourhood nurseries and bring child care, health and family support services to a further 7,500 children in England. Thirty-four local authority areas have been invited to develop these smaller scale programmes. A list of the areas and associated guidance has been placed in the Library.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W, on the rural White Paper, which schools have received support from the Small Schools Fund. [20034]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The Small Schools Fund is allocated to LEAs on a formula basis. Levels of funding are determined by the number of primary and special schools in the authority that have 200 or fewer pupils; and the number of secondary schools that have 600 or fewer pupils. The fund is worth £80 million per year in total. LEAs may set lower (but not higher) thresholds for allocation at local level.

Grandparent Mentoring

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what involvement her Department had in the proposal by Age Concern England to develop its transage action grandparent mentoring project in 2000–01. [20553]

Mr. Timms: None. The Department contributed towards the cost of a feasibility study in 1997–98 and made a further contribution to a pilot programme in 1998–99. No further requests for funding were received.

School Buses (Safety)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps the Government are taking to increase the safety of school buses; and what guidelines are given to schools with regard to bus and minibus safety in schools. [20634]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: From 1 October this year, all new buses, coaches and minibuses have to be fitted with seat belts. This change will make all bus and minibus travel in new vehicles safer.

Home to school transport is the responsibility of local education authorities. They must monitor the condition of vehicles used for transporting pupils from home to school, and report any safety defects to the Vehicle Inspectorate. Schools are responsible for arranging travel on educational visits, and we published good practice guidance in 1998 that advised that it is not normally appropriate to use buses without seat belts on long journeys. Supplementary advice on educational visits will be made available later this school term.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much VAT was paid by further education colleges in England in each year from 1995–96. [20740]

Margaret Hodge: Information on VAT paid by further education colleges in England was not recorded centrally by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), so is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the results of pilot studies into financial support for further education college students in England. [20741]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The only form of financial assistance for students in further education currently being piloted is the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), which is available in 56 local education authorities. The allowance is payable to eligible young people not just in colleges but also in school sixth forms.

The pilots are being evaluated over a three-year period and this work is on-going. The first reports were published in March this year and the next report is due for publication early in 2002.

Early findings from the evaluation show that EMA appears to have raised participation in education. The statistical analysis estimates an average gain in participation in pilot areas compared with control areas, among EMA eligible young people, of around 5 percentage points.

Although we do not yet have figures on attainment, the qualitative aspect of the evaluation has found some evidence of a positive effect on young people's performance and commitment to study.

In relation to adult learners in further education colleges in England, there are no pilot studies on which to report at this time.

Post-16 Education (Funding)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what change in funding *(a)* sixth form colleges and *(b)* further education colleges in England would receive for 16 to 19-year-old provision if funded at the level of sixth forms in schools. [20743]

Margaret Hodge: It is not possible to estimate reliably what change in funding would result if sixth form colleges and other FE colleges were to be funded at the level of school sixth forms. Comparable funding figures to do this are not available.

The latest estimate of the average delegated funding per sixth form student in schools per year for 2001–02 is £3,330, and the total funding per full time equivalent (FTE) student in FE sector colleges per year for 2001–02 is £3,660. However, the FE unit funding figure includes total public funding allocated for further education, while the schools' figure is based only on delegated funds and excludes other funding the school receives centrally from LEAs which impacts on post-16 students. The figures therefore cannot be used to make comparisons. Also, separate figures for sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges are not available.

Education Action Zones

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the estimated final cost to her Department of ending the education action zone scheme; and if she will make a statement. [20830]

Mr. Timms: All education action zones will complete their agreed full statutory term. Each education action zone (EAZ) will need to make arrangements to dispose of any assets and to meet any employment liabilities in accordance with guidance issued by the Department for Education and Skills in the EAZ handbook.

The costs will vary from zone to zone depending on individual circumstances and liabilities. All costs will be met from within the existing education action zone programme budget.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the impact of the climate change levy on carbon dioxide emissions *(a)* to date and *(b)* over the next five years. [15503]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 16 November 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

The climate change levy has only been operational since April and no assessment of delivered emissions reduction has yet been undertaken. However, the climate change levy package is forecast to deliver reductions in CO_2 emission by 5 million tonnes of carbon a year by 2010.

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to include policies to combat fuel poverty in her Department's aims and objectives. [8299]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* My Department gives high priority to policies to tackle fuel poverty as part of our provisional objective of promoting more sustainable management and use of natural resources including energy.

The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy was published on 21 November. This set out the Government's goal to seek an end to the problem of fuel poverty, with the first target to ensure that by 2010, no vulnerable household—older people, families, disabled and long-term sick—need risk ill health due to a cold home.

Lord Haskins

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she received from the National Farmers' Union regarding the choice of Lord Haskins to conduct a study of rural recovery, prior to his appointment. [10613]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* The suggestion that my noble Friend Lord Haskins should conduct the study was first made by the NFU in Cumbria to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) who passed this view to the Prime Minister. Subsequently, NFU representatives confirmed to the Prime Minister that they would welcome the appointment of Lord Haskins to this role.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for each country where foot and mouth disease exists *(a)* what regions are affected, *(b)* what is the amount of (i) sheep meat, (ii) beef, (iii) pig meat and (iv) other meat products imported directly to the UK since the first outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the United Kingdom this year and *(c)* what additional bio-security measures have been implemented to check imports from that country since February. [19246]

Mr. Morley: Listed are the countries that are affected with foot and mouth disease and from which European Community legislation would normally permit imports of meat of foot and mouth disease (FMD) susceptible species. Community legislation permits imports from regions not affected by FMD and these regions may change if the disease status of individual countries improves or deteriorates. Foot and mouth disease exists in other countries but they are not listed here as imports of meat are not permitted from those countries.

Table B shows the tonnage of bovine and ovine meat imported into the UK between February 2001 and September 2001. There were no recorded imports of porcine meat or meat of any other FMD susceptible species from the countries listed during that period.

Adequate measures are already in place to control legally presented imports of meat and meat products. All meat imported into the UK from third countries must enter at designated UK Border Inspection Posts (BIPs) where it is subject to veterinary checks, to establish that the products meet EU import conditions. Consignments that do not meet appropriate import requirements are rejected.

When outbreaks of foot and mouth disease occur in third countries, safeguard measures are taken banning the importation of all FMD susceptible meat from the entire country. Once the situation stabilises and sufficient guarantees provided, restrictions are lifted accordingly. All enforcement authorities are kept informed of the situation.

Where outbreaks of FMD occur in other EU countries, restrictions on the export of products of FMD susceptible species from that country are put in place in accordance with Community legislation. Port health authorities and local authorities are requested to undertake checks at port of entry and at premises of destination to ensure that products not eligible for trade are detected.

Countries currently affected by foot and mouth disease and regionalised in accordance with Community legislation.

Argentina: Imports banned from the whole country.

Botswana: Imports banned from the whole country except from designated zones which do not necessarily follow any distinct administrative area and are only described as 'veterinary disease control zones 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 18'.

Brazil—imports banned from the whole country except the states of Parana, minas Gerais (but not the regional delegations of Oliveira, Passos, São Gonçalo de Sapucai, Setelagoas and Bambui), São Paulo, Espirito Santo, Mato Grosso do Sul (except for the municipalities of Sonora, Aquidauana, Bodoquena, Bonito, Caracol, Coxim, Jardim, Ladario, Miranda, Pedro Gomes, Porto Murtinho, Rio Negro, Rio Verde of Mato Grosso and Corumba), Santa Catarina Goias and the regional units of Cuiaba (except for the municipalities of San Antonio de Leverger, Nossa Senhora do Livramento, Pocone and Barão de Melagaço), Caceres (except for the municipality of Caceres), Lucan do Rio Verde, Rondonopolis (except for the municipality of Itiquiora), Barra do Garças and the Barra do Bugres in Mato Grosso.

Namibia: Imports banned from the whole country except the area south of the cordon fences which extend from Palgrave Point in the west to Gam in the east.

Swaziland: Imports banned from the whole country except the area west of the 'red line' fences which extend northwards from the river Usutu to the frontier with South Africa west of Nkalashane and excluding the designated veterinary foot and mouth surveillance and vaccination control areas.

South Africa: Imports are banned from the following regions—the part of the foot and mouth disease control area situated in the veterinary regions of Mpumlanga and northern provinces, in the district of Ingwavuma of the veterinary regions of Natal and in the border area with Botswana east of longitude 28°, and the district of Camperdown, in the province of Kwazulu-Natal.

Uruguay: Imports banned from the whole country. From 1 November 2001 import restrictions on de-boned and matured meat have been lifted. Prior to that date imports of certain categories of meat were permitted if they had been produced before specified dates.

Zimbabwe: Imports banned from the whole country except the veterinary regions of Mashonaland West province, Mashonaland East province (including Chikomba district), Mashonaland Central province, Manicaland province (including only Makoni district), Midlands province (including only the Gweru, Kwekwe, Shurugwi, Chirimanzu and Zvishavane districts), Masvingo province (including only the districts of Gutu and Masvingo), Matabeleland South province (including only the Insiza, Bullimamangwe, Umzingwamange, Gwanda and West Nicholson districts) and Matabeleland North province (including only the districts of Bubi and Umgusa).

Table B—UK imports of meat of FMD-susceptible animals from countries affected by FMD February to September 2001

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Country	*Bovine meat and offal (total)*	*Sheep meat and offal (total)*
Argentina	3,710	149
Botswana	8,456	—
Brazil	48,492	17
Namibia	5,974	—
South Africa	214	—
Uruguay	5,484	250
Zimbabwe	3,181	—

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what dates between 1 December 2000 and 20 February *(a)* MAFF officials and *(b)* trading standards officers visited Burnside Farm, Heddon-on-the-Wall; what the purpose of the visits was; and what reports they submitted. [18876]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 November 2001]:* MAFF staff and Trading Standards Officers together visited Burnside Farm, Heddon-on-the-Wall on 22 December 2000 and 24 January 2001. Each of these visits was on welfare grounds and a report was produced on each occasion.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if *(a)* departmental officials, *(b)* persons acting on behalf of her Department and *(c)* military personnel involved in handling issues relating to foot and mouth disease were invited to sign a copy of the Official Secrets Act; and if she will make a statement. [18029]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* All civil servants, members of the armed forces, and those acting on behalf of the Department, are bound by the provisions of the Official Secrets Act and owe a duty of confidentiality to the Crown. There is therefore no requirement for such persons to sign a copy of the Official Secrets Act for work relating to foot and mouth disease.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she has received the report, "Observations on the Foot and Mouth Disease Outbreak in Cumbria 2001", by a former member of the Veterinary Investigation Service; and if she will make a statement. [11738]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* I am aware of the report prepared by Mr. Richardson, a former employee, in which he compares the working methods adopted in dealing with the outbreak in 1967 and 2001.

The recommendations of the Northumberland Committee have been taken into account, as appropriate during the current outbreak. Inevitably, conditions have changed here and in Europe since the Northumberland Committee's report, and the outbreak is clearly different in nature and extent to the 1967–68 outbreak. These differences have been fully documented in a report undertaken by the Cabinet Office which is available on the DEFRA website: http://www.defra.gov.uk/footandmouth/about/current/comparisons/1967a.asp. More generally, issues raised in Mr. Richardson's report should be looked at by the independent inquiries established by the Government.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the evidence in her possession of cases where resistance by farmers to culling during the foot and mouth outbreak exacerbated the spread of the disease. [15520]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 16 November 2001]:* I refer to the comments I made during the Second Reading debate on the Animal Health Bill on 12 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 577–78.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many animal blood tests have to be completed before Devon can be declared free of foot and mouth disease; and when she expects them to be completed. [17334]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 November 2001]:* Sampling in Devon was completed in the week beginning 12 November but test results were awaited from three premises, involving 426 blood samples, in the week beginning 19 November. All the laboratory results have now been received and Devon was classed as foot and mouth disease free from 27 November. Contrary to the local press reports, no samples were lost and the programme was completed on schedule.

Welfare Slaughter Programme

Mr. MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many animals have been slaughtered, broken down by region, as a result of the welfare slaughter programme. [16056]

Mr. Morley: The Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme was opened on 22 March 2001, to deal with severe welfare problems arising from the foot and mouth disease movement restrictions that cannot be dealt with by any other means. As at 21 November, the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme had slaughtered and made payment on a total of 1,625,652 animals since it opened. Of these, 945,554 came from England (58.2 per cent.), 108,748 came from Scotland (6.7 per cent.) and 571,350 came from Wales (35.1 per cent.). The Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme does not operate in Northern Ireland.

The number of animals in England that the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme had slaughtered and made payment on can be broken down further:

49,871 animals in east England (which is 5.3 per cent. of the England total and 3.1 per cent. of the GB total)

54,002 animals in the east midlands (which is 5.7 per cent. of the England total and 3.3 per cent. of the GB total)

61,542 animals in the north-east (6.5 per cent. of the England total and 3.8 per cent. of the GB total)

107,176 animals in the north-west (which is 11.3 per cent. of the England total and 6.6 per cent. of the GB total)

58,854 animals in the south-east (which is 6.2 per cent. of the England total and 3.6 per cent. of the GB total)

252,921 in the south-west (which is 26.8 per cent. of the England total and 15.6 per cent. of the GB total)

229,672 animals in the west midlands (which is 24.3 per cent. of the England total and 14.1 per cent. of the GB total)

131,434 in Yorkshire and the Humber (which is 13.9 per cent. of the England total and 8.1 per cent. of the GB total)

82 animals in Greater London (which is 0.1 per cent. of the England total and less than 0.1 per cent of the GB total).

Hedgerows

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to amend regulations relating to the protection of hedgerows. [15515]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 16 November 2001]:* We are reviewing the hedgerows protection system, including the Hedgerows Regulations 1997, in the light of developments such as the results of the Countryside Survey 2000 and the recommendations of the group responsible for the review of the regulations. We are holding meetings with stakeholders and expect to issue a consultation paper on our proposals early next year.

Livestock Movements

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) *(a)* for what reasons and *(b)* on what date her Department introduced new rules regulating the issuing of movement licences by trading standards officers for cattle direct to slaughter for human consumption; if she will list the administrative changes introduced; and what steps her Department took to inform (i) farmers and (ii) the agriculture industry of the administrative changes prior to their introduction; [16657]

(2) *(a)* for what reasons and *(b)* on what date her Department introduced new rules requiring (i) the completion of application forms and (ii) the supply of ear tag numbers to trading standards officers in advance of the issuing of movement licences for cattle direct to slaughter for human consumption; and what steps her Department took to inform (A) farmers and (B) the agriculture industry of the administrative changes prior to their introduction. [16658]

Mr. Morley: The latest revision of the rules for the movement of foot and mouth disease susceptible livestock to slaughter was introduced on 11 November. The changes brought the rules of movement to slaughter into line with those of other livestock movements.

The rules for movements from farm to farm where the animals stay alive, and pose a higher risk of disease spreading, require the animal to be identified and, in the case of cattle, ear tag numbers to be recorded. The information is vital for effective enforcement of the licensing regime. This requirement was replicated in the movement to slaughter rules introduced on 8 November. But it was quickly realised that the requirement was not always necessary and it was corrected in the revision published on 11 November.

Interested parties are consulted about the harmonisation of the rules for movement to slaughter with those for movement to stay alive and supported it. The simplification made on 11 November was in response to further representations. The question of whether cattle ear tag numbers should be required for movement to slaughter, is now left to the local authorities, from whose area the movement is to take place, to decide.

BSE Research

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to fund Professor Ebringer's research into the auto-immune theory of BSE beyond 31 December. [17633]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 23 November 2001]:* My Department has already contributed significant funding towards Professor Ebringer's research. Currently, there are no plans to provide further support to this work once the present studies have concluded.

Staff Morale

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the morale of staff within her Department. [17638]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 23 November 2001]:* Despite the pressures of dealing with foot and mouth disease and the current industrial action being taken by Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members in the Department, the morale of staff within the Department is good. Staff in DEFRA are committed to delivering high quality services to the public.

Departmental Staff Salaries

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many departmental staff of the same grade of job are being paid different levels of salary. [17804]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 23 November 2001]:* There are 9,079 ex-MAFF staff in DEFRA who are employed under the same pay arrangements and conditions of employment. Variations in individual levels of pay of staff doing work of equal value do occur because of a number of factors, but principally because pay is linked to performance. Staff of the same grade or equivalent, however, are normally paid salaries within their pay range minima and maxima.

636 ex-Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions staff joined DEFRA when it was created on 8 June. These staff will retain the pay and terms and

conditions of employment of their former department until common terms and conditions of employment are established following negotiations with the trade unions.

In addition, there is a small number of staff who have reserved rights to some historical terms and conditions.

Farmgate Sales (Organic Market)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of the total value of the retail organic market comprised UK farmgate sales in the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement. [18202]

Mr. Morley: The most recent data available indicate that in 2000–01 the retail market for organic produce was worth around £800 million. Around 30 per cent. of the retail market was supplied by domestic production. Farmgate returns to UK organic producers over the same period are estimated to have been a little in excess of £100 million.

Food Imports

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in how many cases in each of the last three years food imports have been *(a)* impounded and *(b)* destroyed; what type of foodstuff was involved; what the point of entry was; and what the resultant legal or other outcomes were. [18363]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 November 2001]*: I have placed tables detailing this information in the Library of the House.

Figures breaking down rejected consignments by port and product are available only for the period July 2000 to June 2001. Information in this format is not available for previous years. Details of the number of consignments by product rejected at UK ports have been provided for the period July 1998 to June 2001. Information on illegal imports seized is available from April 2001; information is not held centrally prior to that date. Rejected and seized consignments are either destroyed or re-exported outside of the EU. Information on the outcome of each rejected or seized consignment is not held centrally.

Electricity for Enterprise

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will extend the deadline for the Electricity for Enterprise grant scheme for those areas affected by foot and mouth disease which has prevented work going ahead. [19000]

Alun Michael: The Government have been negotiating with the European Commission for an extension to the Objective 5b programme since the outbreak of foot and mouth. If our request is granted this would enable the completion of projects such as 'Electricity for Enterprise'. We are hopeful that a favourable decision will be forthcoming shortly.

Sea Fishing

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress she has made in implementing the recommendations accepted by MAFF in its response to the Eighth report from the Agriculture Select Committee, Session 1998–99 on sea fishing. [19278]

Mr. Morley: I have been pleased to provide the Agriculture Select Committee on a number of occasions with upda[illegible] to the Government response to the Committee's 1999 Report on Sea Fishing. Most recently, I provided oral evidence to the Committee on 9 May 2001 on issues covered in the report. The transcript of this evidence has been published in the Agriculture Committee, Session 2000–01, Sea Fishing, (HC 404).

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress her Department made towards establishing a long-term sea fishing strategy for *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* England. [19279]

Mr. Morley: The sea fish industry itself must be fully involved in the establishment of a long-term strategy; and I therefore welcome the work which is being undertaken by the Fish Industry Forum to contribute towards a strategy. It will also be necessary to take account of the results of the current review of the Common Fisheries Policy due for completion by the end of next year.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the budget requirements of sea fisheries committees which seek to fulfil their full range of statutory duties. [19277]

Mr. Morley: The sea fisheries committees are funded by their sponsoring local authorities which nominate half the membership of each committee. The need for additional budgetary provision is a matter for each committee and its local authority membership.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with her counterparts in the *(a)* Scottish Executive and *(b)* Welsh Assembly with regard to (i) temporary tie-up schemes for fishing boats engaged in the hunt for pressure stock, (ii) the future of decommissioning schemes, (iii) the future of the European Common Fisheries policy, (iv) the allocation of total allowable catches and (v) controls on the landing of black fish. [19280]

Mr. Morley: This Department has regular contact with the other Fisheries Departments in the UK, both at ministerial and official level, on a wide range of fisheries issues including those cited by the hon. Member.

Meat Imports

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with colleagues in other Government Departments on *(a)* the level of illegal meat imports to the UK and *(b)* the effectiveness of controls and enforcement measures at (i) ports, (ii) airports and (iii) elsewhere to tackle illegal meat imports; and what assessment she has made of the need for further action. [19284]

Mr. Morley: Department for Education, Food and Rural Affairs Ministers regularly have discussions with ministerial colleagues and officials in many parts of

Government. In line with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information details of such confidential discussions are not normally disclosed.

Departmental officials are leading an interdepartmental review aimed at co-ordinating action across Government to ensure that rules on imports of all products of animal origin are enforced effectively and efficiently. In carrying out this task they meet regularly with colleagues in other Government Departments and responsible enforcement authorities.

Blackfish

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what her estimates are for the total landings of blackfish in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Northern Ireland, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* England and *(e)* the UK in each of the last 10 years for which records are available, by (i) gross tonnage and (ii) value; [19281]

(2) what estimate she has made of the total landings of blackfish *(a)* before and *(b)* since the implementation of the designated ports regulations. [19282]

Mr. Morley: As explained in the answer to the hon. Member on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 626W, this Department does not make estimates of the levels of blackfish. The landing of undeclared fish is an illegal activity and meaningful estimates of the extent to which it occurs cannot readily be made.

Agricultural Development Scheme

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the bids for funding submitted under round three of the Agricultural Development Scheme, broken down by region, stating the value of each bid. [18874]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 November 2001]:* We regard bids for competitive grant schemes such as the Agriculture Development Scheme as commercially confidential. As for previous rounds of the Agriculture Development Scheme, we shall publish a list of the successful bids when we announce the outcome next year.

Scientific Research

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 514W, on scientific research, what quality assessment is undertaken by her Department into the work of contractors, and through them sub-contractors, commissioned by her Department. [19304]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* In deciding whether to let contracts, one of the aspects considered by scientists in the Department is the need for suitable and relevant quality assurance in relation to the project or projects proposed. As indicated in the reply of 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 514W, the need for contractors and their sub-contractors to meet quality standards schemes appropriate to the science projects is evaluated. However, there are substantial and wider aspects to assessing and assuring the quality of science we commission. Chief among these are the processes of prior peer review, by national and international experts in the field, of many proposals put to us; the advice of independent expert committees and advisory bodies; the work of interdepartmental committees; the detailed departmental monitoring of all science projects in progress, including formal review on their quality, progress, outputs and direction; and the growing programme of ex post facto evaluations of the impact of programmes of work. In monitoring and evaluation, the Department is again assisted by external and independent scientific input. Finally, the overall scientific quality of the work of most of our individual contractors—such as our own agencies, the institutes of the Research Councils and the universities—is assisted by independently run science audits or the audits provided through processes such as the DfES Research Assessment Exercise.

Flood Defences

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the policy of managed retreat in maintaining coastal flood defences during the winter months. [19543]

Mr. Morley: Managed realignment (occasionally referred to as managed retreat) is one of the options which operating authorities are encouraged to consider when considering long-term options for coastal defence. It is only appropriate in specific circumstances where people or major assets are not at risk. In such circumstances it can have a range of benefits including the achievement of more secure and sustainable defences and the creation of additional areas of inter-tidal habitats. No specific study has been made since only a small number of sites for the implementation of managed realignment has been identified.

The Department has recently approved grant for a major realignment scheme on the Humber where land has been purchased by the Environment Agency to create compensatory inter-tidal habitat for areas that will be lost due to flood defence works elsewhere in the estuary. A series of major studies are continuing to establish the possibility of realignment of defences at other sites in the Humber to relieve the pressures on flood defences that will increase as sea levels rise. Further managed realignment schemes are currently planned for the Wash, Norfolk and in Essex.

Unallocated Funds

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the total unallocated funds within her departmental expenditure limit *(a)* at the start of the financial year and *(b)* to date; and what was the month seven forecast on outturn underspend against her departmental expenditure limit in (i) real and (ii) percentage terms. [19440]

Mr. Morley: The former Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food Departmental Annual Report for 2000–01 (Cm5113) contains the Departmental Unallocated Provision (DUP) set for the present financial year in Table 6.1 of Annex 1. The creation of DEFRA did not alter this figure, although £7.308 million was transferred directly to the Food Standards Agency from the DUP at the time of the Summer Supplementary Estimate. There has been no draw-down of the Department's remaining DUP to date.

Outturn against a six-month forecast for each Request for Resources will be published in the Winter Supplementary Estimates Summary Request for Supply as usual.

EU Vessels

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many Community vessels, by nationality, received Community grants for modernisation while flying non-EU flags of convenience in the last year for which figures are available. [19579]

Mr. Morley: EU rules state that Community grants for modernisation are available only for vessels on the Community fishing vessel register.

Farrowing Crates

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made on the phasing out of farrowing crates for sows; and if she will make a statement. [19764]

Mr. Morley: We have, for a number of years, funded research directly or indirectly related to the welfare of the sow and her piglets, from farrowing to weaning. A key issue which has emerged from this research is that changes in farrowing systems to improve sow welfare can frequently have an adverse effect on the welfare of the piglets. As a result, we are not yet able unreservedly to recommend free-farrowing systems for widespread commercial adoption. Our research, and that of others, continues to seek a solution to this problem. Our aim is to reach a position where it is possible to avoid the close-confinement of all sows.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's long-term strategy to deal with tuberculosis; and how much she is planning to spend in each of the next three years on this. [19801]

Mr. Morley: The Government's projected expenditure on TB for the years 2001–02, 2002–03, 2003–04 was published at Annexe A of the Reply by the Government to the First Report from the Agriculture Committee, Session 2000–01 (HC 92) and I refer the hon. Gentleman to that publication.

Future spending plans (for 2004–05) will not be finalised until the 2002 Spending Review has concluded next summer.

Livestock Farmers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to require all livestock farmers to be licensed; and if she will make a statement. [19604]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) on 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 857W.

Farm Subsidies

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* total and *(b)* average levels of subsidies to farmers were for (i) production and (ii) agri-environmental schemes in (1) 1996, (2) 1997, (3) 1998, (4) 1999, (5) 2000 and (6) 2001. [19233]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* The level of production related to subsidies and agri-environmental subsidies is given in the following table. Note that the estimates of the average per holding will mask a wide variation across holdings.

Figures for 2001 are not yet available and will be published in mid-March.

Subsidies paid to UK farmers: 1996–2000

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Total subsidies (£ million)	3,081	2,810	2,703	2,751	2,592
of which:					
Production related subsidies[1]	2,996	2,707	2,571	2,585	2,399
Agri-environment schemes	85	103	132	166	193
Number of UK holdings (thousand)[2]	234	238	238	240	233
Average per holding (£)[3]					
Total subsidies	13,149	11,824	11,360	11,481	11,111
of which:					
Production related subsidies[1]	12,787	11,390	10,805	10,788	10,285
Agri-environment schemes	362	434	555	693	826

[1] Excludes public expenditure on indirect support eg intervention

[2] Excludes minor holdings for GB. For NI all active holdings are included. The trends in the series have been affected by register improvements over this period

[3] Calculated by dividing by the number of UK holdings (excluding minor holdings in GB and inactive holdings in NI)

Source:

Agriculture in the United Kingdom

CAP Spending

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what was the *(a)* total level of CAP spending in Europe, *(b)* level of CAP spending in (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) other EU member states by different scheme and *(c)* proportion of CAP spending funded by (A) the United Kingdom and (B) other EU member states in each of the last 10 years. [19236]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* The level of CAP spending in Europe in the last 10 years is presented in the table.

Total EAGGF guarantee section expenditure	*Euro billion*
1991	31.6
1992	31.3
1993	34.7
1994	33.4
1995	34.5
1996	39.1
1997	40.7
1998	38.7
1999	39.5
2000	40.4

These figures are sourced from the 30th Financial Report on the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF), published by the European Commission.

The level of CAP spending in the United Kingdom and other EU member states by different scheme for 2000 is as follows. The breakdown of CAP spending by member state, by different scheme for previous years is available from the Financial Reports on the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund which are published annually by the European Commission.

The UK and other member states contribute to the budget as a whole and not to individual community spending programmes. The UK and other member states' gross contributions as a percentage of the total EC budget (after abatement) over the period 1991–2000 are given in the following table.

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Belgium	4.2	4.0	3.7	4.4	4.0	3.9	3.9	3.8	3.9	3.9
Denmark	2.0	1.8	1.9	2.0	1.9	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.0	1.9
Germany	29.1	30.2	29.8	33.3	31.4	29.2	28.2	25.1	25.5	24.8
Greece	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.5
Spain	8.7	8.6	8.1	7.4	5.4	6.4	7.1	7.0	7.6	7.3
France	20.1	18.7	18.0	19.6	17.5	17.5	17.5	16.5	17.0	16.5
Ireland	0.9	0.8	0.9	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.9	1.2	1.3	1.2
Italy	16.5	14.7	16.0	12.1	9.5	12.6	11.5	12.9	13.0	12.5
Luxembourg	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2
Netherlands	6.7	6.3	6.3	6.6	6.4	6.2	6.4	6.2	6.2	6.2
Austria	—	—	—	—	2.6	2.6	2.8	2.5	2.5	2.4
Portugal	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.9	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.5	1.4
Finland	—	—	—	—	1.3	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.4
Sweden	—	—	—	—	2.4	2.8	3.1	2.9	2.8	3.0
United Kingdom	9.0	11.9	11.9	10.0	13.6	11.6	11.9	15.2	13.4	15.8

Euro million

	Belgium	*Denmark*	*Germany*	*Greece*	*Spain*	*France*	*Ireland*	*Italy*	*Luxembourg*
Arable crops	196.9	669.7	3,682.4	442.7	1,519.3	5,121.4	116.9	1,748.9	9.2
Sugar	341.2	114.1	295.1	4.3	91.8	552.6	5.2	158.2	0.0
Olive Oil	0.0	0.0	0.0	505.1	974.3	3.6	0.0	686.9	0.0
Dried Fodder and Grain Legumes	0.1	12.0	22.4	4.1	182.8	82.9	0.3	57.3	0.0
Fibre Plants and Silkworms	9.2	0.0	2.8	640.7	280.0	40.3	0.0	0.4	0.0
Fruit and vegetables	20.2	1.1	13.9	283.0	466.5	238.1	0.5	423.4	0.0
Products of the Vine-growing Sector	0.0	0.0	29.8	10.1	220.8	201.5	0.0	281.3	0.0
Tobacco	3.6	0.0	36.2	374.8	115.6	79.7	0.0	357.4	0.0
Other Plant Sectors and Products	3.3	30.3	22.2	23.9	66.1	31.1	0.1	146.1	0.2
Milk and Milk Products	183.8	211.6	249.9	−3.0	23.9	724.5	155.3	124.8	−0.7
Beef and Veal	108.0	59.6	423.3	58.2	430.4	1,069.2	827.5	202.6	6.0
Sheepmeat and Goatmeat	1.4	1.8	43.7	227.2	466.5	170.8	112.4	177.6	0.1
Pigmeat, Eggs and Poultrymeat	13.8	132.0	39.1	0.3	26.7	119.5	6.4	22.2	0.0
Other animal product aid measures	0.2	0.2	1.0	1.1	3.5	1.5	0.0	1.9	0.0
Fishery products	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.4	3.9	1.1	0.0	0.0
Non-Annex II products	36.4	35.7	110.8	3.0	21.5	51.2	70.0	19.0	0.0
Food Aid	8.8	3.1	22.5	16.6	63.5	82.9	4.2	47.7	0.1
Outermost Regions	0.0	0.0	0.0	24.3	119.9	43.0	0.0	0.2	0.0
Veterinary and Phytosanitary Measures	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Monitoring and Prevention	0.7	0.0	−0.2	1.1	24.5	4.6	1.4	28.4	0.1
Clearance of Previous Years' Accounts	−3.2	−30.4	−41.2	−167.6	−29.8	−229.9	−19.9	−463.6	−1.4
Promotion Measures	1.6	0.7	6.4	0.3	5.6	8.5	0.2	4.8	0.1
Other Measures	3.3	28.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	107.2	52.3	219.3	0.2
Rural Development	25.4	34.2	681.6	146.8	395.4	474.1	344.4	757.3	6.7
Total EAGGF Guarantee Section	954.6	1,304.7	5.641.9	2,597.2	5,469.0	8,981.9	1,678.3	5,002.3	20.6

	Netherlands	*Austria*	*Portugal*	*Finland*	*Sweden*	*United Kingdom*	*EC*	*Total*
Arable crops	264.7	373.8	178.1	251.3	433.6	1,654.0	0.0	16,663.1
Sugar	66.8	43.4	25.5	12.2	29.7	170.0	0.0	1,910.2
Olive Oil	0.0	0.0	40.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2,210.1
Dried Fodder and Grain Legumes	14.0	0.2	0.6	0.0	0.4	4.3	0.0	381.3
Fibre Plants and Silkworms	3.6	0.4	0.6	0.4	0.2	12.6	0.0	991.4
Fruit and vegetables	38.1	1.0	46.5	0.1	1.5	17.5	0.0	1,551.3
Products of the Vine-growing Sector	0.0	1.7	19.4	0.0	0.1	0.8	0.0	765.5

	Netherlands	*Austria*	*Portugal*	*Finland*	*Sweden*	*United Kingdom*	*EC*	*Total*
Tobacco	0.0	0.8	16.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.8	989.4
Other Plant Sectors and Products	10.3	0.3	5.1	2.1	3.1	5.9	0.0	350.0
Milk and Milk Products	697.8	4.1	3.2	72.8	–0.7	97.2	0.0	2,544.3
Beef and Veal	75.2	93.1	85.3	35.9	74.4	990.8	0.0	4,539.6
Sheepmeat and Goatmeat	15.6	4.6	59.8	1.3	4.2	448.5	0.0	1,735.6
Pigmeat, Eggs and Poultrymeat	41.9	14.6	2.4	4.0	4.6	7.8	0.0	435.2
Other animal product aid measures	0.1	0.6	0.9	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.0	11.7
Fishery products	0.1	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.3	1.5	0.2	9.4
Non-Annex II products	104.1	19.3	2.1	9.4	13.5	76.5	0.0	572.2
Food Aid	3.5	1.6	23.5	5.5	10.6	14.9	0.0	309.1
Outermost Regions	0.0	0.0	39.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	226.9
Veterinary and Phytosanitary Measures	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	102.5	102.5
Monitoring and Prevention	–0.3	–0.2	9.6	0.3	0.1	0.1	7.3	77.4
Clearance of Previous Years' Accounts	–3.0	–0.8	–39.6	–4.3	–0.6	–42.3	0.0	–1,077.9
Promotion Measures	4.5	1.0	0.2	0.2	0.3	3.5	20.8	58.7
Other Measures	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.7	46.9	443.1	0.0	904.1
Rural Development	59.6	459.0	132.1	332.5	175.6	151.8	0.0	4,176.4
Total EAGGF Guarantee Section	1,396.6	1,018.5	652.0	727.6	798.0	4,058.7	135.6	40,437.4

Departmental Website

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the annual cost of maintaining her Department's website is. [10611]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* Many business units across the Department contribute to the maintenance of the DEFRA website as part of their communications activities, and an overall figure cannot be arrived at without incurring disproportionate cost.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Local Government Finance

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the items of additional funding and their levels over and above the revenue support grant which his Department has made available to *(a)* Telford and the Wrekin council and *(b)* Shropshire county council in 2001–02 to date. [14477]

Dr. Whitehead: The information is as follows:

Additional funding above RSG—2001–02 budget estimate grants data

	£000
Nature of funding	*2001–02*
Telford and Wrekin council	
Revenue Support Grant	58,840
Redistributed Non-Domestic Rates	42,169
Housing Annual Capital Guideline	1,070
Transport Supplementary Credit Approval	4,913
SRB—Madeley Challenge	213,696
SRB—Improving access in Telford	4,000
Disabled Facility Grant	200
Shropshire county council	
Rural Bus Service	674
SRB	1,231
Revenue Support Grant	71,105
Redistributed Non-Domestic Rates	68,844
Transport Supplementary Grant	563
Transport Annual Capital Guideline	562
Transport Supplementary Credit Approval	12,438
AWM Land and Property—Treflach Quarry Oswestry	176

Additional funding above RSG—2001–02 budget estimate grants data

	£000
Nature of funding	*2001–02*
AWM Land and Property—Montgomery Canal Stage 3a	100,027
SRB—Services Participation Access Resources Knowledge in Shropshire	104,883

Additional funding above RSG—2001–02 budget estimate grants data

		£000
Nature of funding	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Shropshire county council		
Rural Bus Challenge Grant	283	n/k
Rural Bus Subsidy Grant	635	804
Telford and the Wrekin		
Rural Bus Challenge Grant	184	n/k
Rural Bus Subsidy Grant	074	097
Urban Bus Challenge	—	615

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will announce the national non-domestic rates multiplier for 2002–03; and if he will set out the basis of his calculations of the distributable amount of non-domestic rates for 2002–03. [20987]

Mr. Raynsford: The non-domestic rate poundage (multiplier) for 2002–03 will be 43.7 pence. The amount of non-domestic rates in England for 2002–03 to be redistributed to local authorities will be £16,626 million, although estimated payments into the pool in 2002–03 will be £15,887 million. The distributable amount includes a surplus brought forward from 2001–02 of £611 million and an allowance of £128 million for an Exchequer payment to the non-domestic rates pool, to compensate for the shortfall which would otherwise occur as a result of the regulations under section 58 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and the transitional relief scheme, announced on 25 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 700.

The calculations for 2002–03, and the prior-year figures, on which this is based, are set out in the following table.

National non-domestic rates: calculation of Distributable Amount for 2002–03

£ million

	Provisional outturn			*Estimated in-year contribution*
	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
1. *Income from local lists*				
Multiplier (p)	48.9	41.6	43.0	43.7
Gross Yield	14,307	13,219	17,053	17,205
(i) Reliefs				
(a) Net Transitional Relief	–456	–943	–323	–193
(b) Empty Properties	–935	–970	–1,017	–1,087
(c) Charitable	–515	–538	–562	–601
(d) Rural Shops and Post Offices	–2	–2	–2	–5
(e) Discretionary	–28	–34	–35	–37
Net Yield after reliefs	12,372	10,732	15,114	15,281
(ii) Collection Costs/reductions to contributions				
(a) Cost of collection	–83	–85	–84	–84
(b) Losses on collection	–118	–118	–141	–170
(c) City of London offset	–7	–7	–7	–7
Total contribution in respect of year	12,165	10,523	14,883	15,021
(iii) Repayments/interest payments				
Total adjustments	–495	2,358	–254	–299
Net Local Yield	11,670	12,882	14,629	14,722
2. *Income from Central List*				
Net Central List Yield	1,319	868	1,136	1,155
3. *Income from Crown List*				
Contribution in Aid				
Net Crown Yield	332	9	10	10
Total NDR Yield	13,321	13,759	15,775	15,887
4. *Exchequer*				
Total Exchequer Contributions	310	415	262	128
Total NNDR pool payments (1+2+3+4)	13,631	14,174	16,037	16,015
5. *Adjustments*				
Surplus brought forward	919	939	–290	611
Combined total	14,551	15,113	15,747	16,626
Distributable Amount	13,612	15,402	15,136	16,626
Surplus Carried Forward	939	–290	611	—

Notes:

For 1999–2000 and 2000–01 the amounts shown are those recorded in the post end-year (NNDR3) returns. For 2001–02 the amounts shown are the provisional outturn for the year based mainly upon authorities' provisional contributions to the non-domestic rating pool. For 2002–03 the estimates are based on:

1. Item 1: The gross calculated rate yield represents the total value of non-domestic hereditaments on local rating lists times the multiplier.
2. Item 1(i)(a): The Transitional decrease adjustment includes the estimated amount of rates that will not be recouped from local list ratepayers under the transitional arrangements made by regulations under section 58 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and the transitional relief scheme, announced by written parliamentary question on 25 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 770W.
3. Item 1(i)(b): The empty property relief adjustments include voids and partially occupied hereditaments. The 2002–03 figure includes an allowance for the increase in the gross rate yield.
4. Item 1(i)(c): Charitable rate relief. The 2002–03 figure includes an allowance for the increase in the gross rate yield.
5. Item 1(i)(d): Rural Shops and Post Office relief. Figures include mandatory relief for general stores and post offices under the Local Government and Rating Act 1997. Figures for 2001–02 onwards includes mandatory relief for petrol filing stations and public houses under the Non-Domestic Rating (Public Houses and Petrol Filling Stations) (England) Order 2001 (SI 2001/1345) and mandatory relief for new enterprises on former agricultural premises under the Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Act 2001. The 2002–03 figure includes an allowance for the increase in the gross rate yield.
6. Item 1(i)(e): Discretionary relief granted to charities, non-profit making organisations and for other reasons including discretionary relief for village shops and post offices under the Local Government and Rating Act 1997. Figures for 2001–02 onwards include discretionary relief for petrol filing stations and public houses under the Non-Domestic Rating (Public Houses and Petrol Filling Stations) (England) Order 2001 (SI 2001/1345) and discretionary relief for new enterprises on former agricultural premises under the Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Act 2001. The 2002–03 figure includes an allowance for the increase in the gross rate yield.
7. Item 1(ii)(a) and (b): The allowances for the costs and losses incurred by authorities in collecting non-domestic rates from ratepayers.
8. Item 1(ii)(c): City Offset—the amount which the City of London will not be required to pay into the non-domestic rating pool. It is the amount which will be retained by the City to meet its own expenditure.
9. Item 1(iii): net adjustment in respect of appeals and other amendments to the rating list affecting liability for previous years rates settled in that year.

10. Item 2: the rateable value of non-domestic hereditaments on the central rating list times the multiplier, less the net effect of transitional arrangements, and adjusted for appeals and other changes in respect of previous years.

11. Item 3: the 1999–2000 figures for crown properties include an allowance for the effect of transitional arrangements. For 2000–01 and 2001–02 almost all properties included in the crown list in previous years are included in the local list figures at item 1.

12. Item 4: the contribution from central Government to offset the amount of the Secretary of State's estimate of income forgone as a result of transitional arrangements established by regulations under section 58 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and the transitional relief scheme, announced by written parliamentary question on 25 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 770W.

Corsham Station

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost is of the new Corsham station; and what part of that cost is being paid by *(a)* the Government, *(b)* Wiltshire county council and *(c)* Railtrack. [17043]

Mr. Jamieson: The total cost of the new station at Corsham is approximately £2.42 million. A grant of £1.28 million has been awarded from the Strategic Rail Authority's Rail Passenger Partnership scheme which is funded by Government. North Wiltshire district council is contributing £720,000, Wiltshire county council £100,000, Corsham Town council £25,000, First Great Western £40,000 and the private sector consortium promoting the nearby Pockeredge Farm housing development £252,000. Railtrack are not contributing to the capital costs.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what *(a)* performance targets and *(b)* financial objectives for the Ordnance Survey he has set. [18171]

Ms Keeble: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 27 June 2001, *Official Report*, columns 103–104W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett).

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the level of consultation with external stakeholders during the quinquennial review of the Ordnance Survey. [19966]

Ms Keeble: Consultation with internal and external stakeholders constitutes an integral part of the first stage of a Quinquennial review. The review of Ordnance Survey provided extensive opportunities for consultation.

The details of the Quinquennial Review process were widely published with an open invitation to any organisation or individual with an interest in Ordnance Survey to make a contribution.

Responses were received from a wide range of stakeholders spanning central Government, the private sector, Ordnance Survey's customer and partner community, professional associations, user groups and individuals.

In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with a broad range of Ordnance Survey's key external stakeholders to ensure that their views were represented.

I am satisfied that the level and range of consultation was both adequate and appropriate to the review process.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what estimate he has received from the Railtrack Administrator about the minimum time required to end Railtrack's administration; [18940]

(2) if Railtrack will be out of administration by 2004; [18942]

(3) if he will make a statement on the anticipated minimum amount of time needed to complete the Railtrack administration; [18939]

(4) if Railtrack administration will last more than two years. [18941]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him of 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 605W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what statutory powers govern his right of veto over the recommendations of the Railtrack Administrator about the future of the company; and if he will make a statement; [18949]

(2) what the responsibilities are of the Railtrack Administrator in determining the future of the company. [18950]

Mr. Jamieson: The administrators of Railtrack plc have a duty under section 59 of the Railways Act 1993 to manage the affairs, business and property of Railtrack plc for the achievement of the purposes of the railway administration order and in a manner which protects the respective interests of the members and creditors of the company in railway administration.

The purposes of a railway administration order are to secure the transfer of so much of the company's undertaking as is necessary to ensure that the company's railway related activities are carried on and the carrying on of those activities until then.

The transfer of the undertaking is effected by a scheme made by the company (acting by its administrators) under Schedule 7 to the Railways Act 1993. A scheme made under Schedule 7 cannot take effect unless it is approved by the Secretary of State.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information his Department has collated about Railtrack's creditors and their willingness to grant further credit to the company in Administration. [18938]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack plc's post-Administration trade and finance creditors are being financed through the Loan Agreement made available to Railtrack plc at the making of the Railway Administration Order. Since 7 October the Administrator has been in negotiation with a number of suppliers, who are continuing to provide goods and services to Railtrack plc (in Administration), on account of the continued support of Government.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the Parliamentary Secretary's answer of 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 276W, on Railtrack, if he will publish the Government's estimated monthly financial commitments to the Railtrack administration, broken down into *(a)* running expenditure and *(b)* capital expenditure for as long as the Government estimates Railtrack to be in administration. [20087]

Mr. Jamieson: As the exact extent of the Administration is at this stage unknown, it is not possible to estimate monthly financial commitments to the Railtrack Administrator for the length of the Administration.

Strategic Rail Authority

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he last met the Chief Executive of the Strategic Rail Authority. [18959]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers meet the Chief Executive of the Strategic Rail Authority regularly; specifically to discuss the authority's work and as part of wider industry meetings. The most recent meeting was on 8 November.

Light Rail Schemes

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total amount of public funding is for light rail and tram schemes within the £180 billion total for the 10 year plan. [19350]

Ms Keeble: The total amount of public funding for light rail and tram schemes within the £180 billion total for the 10 year plan is £2.4 billion.

Ministerial Visits (North-East)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many times Ministers from his Department have visited *(a)* the Teesside area and *(b)* Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency to meet locally based businesses. [19071]

Dr. Whitehead: None.

Energy Saving Regulations

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of energy saving regulations on *(a)* new buildings, *(b)* refurbishment of existing buildings, *(c)* domestic buildings and *(d)* non-domestic buildings. [19105]

Dr. Whitehead: The Regulatory Impact Assessment that accompanied the Building (Amendment) Regulations 2001 was placed in the Library of the House on 11 October when the Amendment Regulations were laid before Parliament. It can also be viewed on the DTLR website at http://www.safety.dtlr.gov.uk/bregs/brpub/02.htm. It sets out the impact in terms of million tonnes of carbon (MtC) likely to be saved in 2010. It does not precisely address savings in the categories set out in the question. However, the savings identified are as follows.

	MtC
New buildings	0.7
Refurbishment of dwellings (rather than all buildings)	0.7
New dwellings	0.28
New and refurbished non-domestic buildings	0.425

London Civil Contingencies Committee

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the London Resilience Sub-Committee referred to by Lord Rooker on 5 November 2001, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column 5, is the same body as the London Civil Contingencies Committee mentioned in a DTLR press release of 10 October. [19893]

Dr. Whitehead: Yes.

Fire Brigade (East Sussex)

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what emergency funding is in place for East Sussex Fire Brigade to help it deal with heavy flooding in east Sussex. [19929]

Dr. Whitehead: The fire service is funded through the local authority revenue support grant system. In the event of a combined fire authority, such as east Sussex, incurring exceptional expenditure it would be able to seek any necessary additional funding from its constituent local authorities. These constituent local authorities would in turn be eligible to apply for emergency financial assistance under the Bellwin Scheme, subject to the normal criteria that apply to that scheme.

Social Housing

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reasons the stock of social housing in England has changed since 1997. [20120]

Ms Keeble: The stock of social housing in England since 1997, based on figures from local authorities and the Housing Corporation are in the table:

Year	*Social stock (million)*
1 April 1997	4.390
1 April 1998	4.358
1 April 1999	4.340
1 April 2000	4.290

The main reason for the decrease in the social housing over the period from 1 April 1997 to 1 April 2000 was that more dwellings were being sold under Right-to-Buy legislation than were being added to the stock by new building and other acquisitions of dwellings. As well as buying dwellings in good condition, other acquisitions include refurbishment and conversions of existing dwellings or other buildings such as offices.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many new social housing properties have been built in England in each of the past 10 years. [20121]

Ms Keeble: The number of new social dwellings, both for registered social landlords and local authorities, built in England in each of the past 10 years is in the table:

Year	New social build (thousand)
1991–92	23.1
1992–93	26.5
1993–94	31.7
1994–95	32.2
1995–96	31.0
1996–97	25.0
1997–98	21.7
1998–99	19.1
1999–2000	17.5
2000–01	18.0

As well as building new dwellings, registered social landlords increase their stock by buying existing dwellings, converting and rehabilitating existing dwellings and other buildings such as offices.

Railways

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the regulations which apply to the gap between the door of a train and the platform. [20119]

Mr. Jamieson: The Railways and Other Transport Systems (Approval of Works, Plant and Equipment) Regulations 1994, require approval from the Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate (HMRI) before any new or altered railway works plant and equipment, including station platforms, can be brought into use on the railway network.

As a guide to these regulations HMRI's Railway Safety Principles and Guidance recommends maximum stepping distances of 250mm vertically, 275mm horizontally or 350mm diagonally for new or altered works. If these dimensions cannot be achieved, dispensation may be given and warning signs such as "mind the gap" along the platform edges, together with public address announcements are also required.

Speed Restrictions

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 683W, on speed restrictions, what form the assessment framework will take; what progress has been made; when the assessment will be completed; and when revised guidance will be issued to highways authorities. [20101]

Mr. Jamieson: The assessment framework is under development by DTLR as part of a package of work to implement our Road Safety strategy commitments. It was referred to in my answer of 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 943W, and is envisaged as a tool to assist highway authorities in the setting of speed limits on rural roads, rather than as a survey or definitive assessment of all roads. This and the related elements, also referred to, required to deliver the Road Safety strategy commitments on speed management are expected to take about a year to complete. The resulting guidance will follow that, probably during 2003.

Private Landlords

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce a licensing scheme for private landlords. [19939]

Ms Keeble: My right hon. Friend published on 20 October a consultation paper on selective licensing of private landlords. This seeks views on proposals to introduce powers for local authorities to license all private landlords in all, or part of, their area, subject to the Secretary of State's consent. This would normally be granted only for areas of low housing demand facing severe problems, though consideration would also be given to any special cases outside such areas if compelling reasons were advanced. New primary legislation would be required to introduce such powers. The proposals are in addition to the Government's proposals to introduce mandatory licensing for houses in multiple occupation.

Pollutants

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research he has undertaken into the pollutants emitted from *(a)* petrol and *(b)* diesel engines; and if he will make a statement. [19788]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 30 November 2001]*: In the past two years the Department has conducted nine main research projects on pollutant emissions from road vehicles, some of which are still ongoing.

Completed projects for which reports will shortly be deposited in the House Libraries are;

Detection of Vehicles Burning Lubricating Oil—AEA Technology (Petrol)

DETR/SMMT/CONCAWE Particulate Research Programme—Ricardo (Petrol and Diesel)

Low Emissions Diesel Research, Phase 1—AEA Technology (Diesel)

Monitoring of Heavy-Duty Diesel Engine Control Systems For The Detection of Off-Cycle Strategies—Lotus Engineering (Diesel).

Ongoing projects for which reports are not yet available are:

In-Service Exhaust Emissions Testing For SI Petrol Engines—AEA Technology (Petrol)

Ethanol Emissions Testing—AEA Technology (Petrol)

Emissions Factors—TRL (Petrol and Diesel)

In-car Pollution Levels—AEA Technology (Petrol and Diesel)

Remote Sensing and Vehicle Emission Inspection and Maintenance Programmes—TRL (Petrol).

In addition the Department sponsors Powershift and CleanUp, programmes managed by the Energy Saving Trust, which monitor performance of a range of alternatively fuelled vehicles and emission reduction technologies. The Department also funds emissions research conducted by other organisations through the Foresight vehicle programme and the International Energy Agency. As a result of the Greener Fuels Challenge, the Department is also funding research into examining the benefits of promising fuels.

Radioactive Material

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which *(a)* ports and *(b)* airports are permitted to handle radioactive material; and what checks are in place to ensure the appropriate level of security applies to cargoes carried. [20174]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* All ports and airports can handle radioactive materials subject to the provisions of the relevant regulations.

The security of radioactive material in transport is ensured through a range of measures and checks appropriate to the nature of material and the mode of transport.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the Government's policy is on allowing an unlimited number of movements of radioactive material by *(a)* ship, *(b)* rail and *(c)* air provided safety standards are met. [20173]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Transport of radioactive material is permitted subject to regulations based on the standards set by the International Atomic Energy Agency and the appropriate modal authorities. These standards are reviewed on a regular basis and set in order to ensure an adequate level of safety. By doing so appropriate limits are placed on the transport of radioactive material

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on allowing movement of radioactive material *(a)* through the channel tunnel and *(b)* on passenger ferries; and if he will make a statement. [20172]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Transport of radioactive material is permitted subject to regulations based on the standards set by the International Atomic Energy Agency and the appropriate modal authorities.

(a) The transport of radioactive materials through the channel tunnel is only authorised through Eurotunnel Freight after agreement between the manufacturer/producer of the radioactive material and Eurotunnel.

(b) The carriage of radioactive materials on passenger ships is regulated by the provisions of the International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code (IMDG Code) of the International Maritime Organization.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many aeroplane flights in UK airspace carried *(a)* high-level, *(b)* intermediate level and *(c)* low level radioactive material in the most recent year for which figures are available. [20175]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* This Department does not hold statistical information of this nature.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to seek to reduce the number of movements of radioactive material; and what review he has made of the movements of radioactive material since 11 September. [20168]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The transport of radioactive material, in support of justified practices, is subject to regulations based on the standards set by the International Atomic Energy Agency and the appropriate modal authorities. These standards are reviewed on a regular basis in order to ensure adequate levels of safety are maintained.

The implications of the events of 11 September on the nuclear industry are under consideration by Government and industry. Transport is included in this exercise.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* flights and *(b)* shipments were made in the latest year for which figures are available where *(a)* spent nuclear fuel, *(b)* nuclear waste, *(c)* other high level and *(d)* other intermediate radioactive material was transported between the UK and a foreign country. [20171]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* This Department does not hold statistical information of this nature.

Physical Agents Directive

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will ask the Health and Safety Executive to investigate further the potential impact of the European Commission's proposed physical agents directive. [20414]

Dr. Whitehead: The Health and Safety Executive's Regulatory Impact Assessments of the proposed physical agents directives on vibration and noise are available in the House of Commons Library. The Health and Safety Commission will, in the course of consultation on the regulations implementing the directives if adopted, publish further assessments of the costs and benefits of those regulations.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will provide financial support to businesses which are required to replace existing machinery under the European Commission's proposed physical agents directive. [20415]

Dr. Whitehead: There are no requirements under the proposed physical agents directives on vibration and noise for businesses to replace existing equipment. It will be for businesses to decide, in the light of the final text of the directives which are still under negotiation, whether they wish or need to replace equipment to help them comply with requirements to limit exposure. In the case of the vibration directive there are long transitional periods before the exposure limitation requirement comes fully into force. The Government have no plans to offer financial support to businesses to comply with the legislation.

Fire Protection and Safety Legislation

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment he has made of the efficacy of fire protection and safety legislation; and what plans he has to reform fire protection and safety legislation. [20488]

Dr. Whitehead: Broad proposals for the reform of fire safety legislation were developed by the Fire Safety Advisory Board and agreed by the Central Fire Brigades

Advisory Council in November 2000. These are now being developed in detail and our aim is to conduct a full public consultation in mid-2002 with a view to implementation by means of an Order under the Regulatory Reform Act 2001. The aim of the reform would be to simplify, rationalise and consolidate existing legislation, which is currently spread across over 100 different statutes. It would provide for a risk based approach to fire safety allowing more efficient, effective enforcement by the fire service.

Government Office for London

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employees the Government Office for London has; and what the corresponding figures were in June 2000. [20765]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government Office for London currently employs 245 full-time and 11 part-time employees. Corresponding figures in June 2000 were approximately 362 full-time and eight part-time employees.

Roads

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the criteria are for prioritising the targets for the resurfacing of concrete trunk roads and motorways under the 10 year plan; [19790]

(2) what the annual budget is for the motorway and trunk road noise barrier programme; and when it will next be reviewed; [19792]

(3) if he will list, in order of priority, the projects in the noise barrier programme, together with the expected dates for the commencement of construction and anticipated cost of each project; [19794]

(4) when the *(a)* M27 between junctions 7 and 8 and *(b)* M3 between Southampton and Winchester were last subjected to condition surveys and maintenance cycle reviews; and what estimates were made of the time expected to elapse before resurfacing with low noise materials would be required; [19791]

(5) if he will list those noise barrier projects that *(a)* have been completed and *(b)* are under construction, indicating the construction cost of each project. [19793]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to reply to the hon. Gentleman.

Letter from Tim Matthews to David Chidgey, dated 4 December 2001:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the noise barrier programme, the criteria for prioritising resurfacing of concrete roads, and about the condition of the M27 between junctions 7 and 8 and the M3 between Southampton and Winchester.

The Government recognised in "A New Deal For Trunk Roads in England" published in 1998 that traffic noise was becoming an increasing problem and stated that:

> Quieter road surfaces would be specified in all future contracts for new trunk roads;
>
> The most appropriate noise reducing surfaces are used whenever a road needs resurfacing where noise is a particular concern; and
>
> A budget would be established for noise mitigation measures to tackle some of the most serious and pressing problems on existing trunk roads.

Traffic noise is therefore being tackled through programmes of quieter surfacing and noise mitigation measures, such as noise barriers. As a matter of policy, we use quieter surfaces whenever a road needs to be resurfaced and as part of the Government's 10 Year Transport Plan, we are tasked with resurfacing at least 60% of trunk roads, including all concrete roads, with quieter materials by 31 March 2011. The criteria to be used in deciding the priorities for resurfacing concrete roads were recently announced by Ministers and are as follows:

> That wherever possible the application of quieter surfaces will fit in with normal maintenance needs;
>
> That priority will be given to those sites where treatment would benefit the greatest number of people;
>
> That the works will be carried out in such a way as to minimise disruption to the general public and users of the network;
>
> That priority will be given to roads, opened since June 1988, where actual noise levels have turned out to be significantly higher than predicted at the time of the Public Inquiry.

The Government's proposals for reducing the effects of traffic noise were first set out in Hansard (Column 682 in November 1999). A list of the schemes at these sites that have been completed or are under construction is in Table A attached. The provision of low noise surfacing has an impact on the treatment necessary at these sites. We are still carrying out studies listed in Hansard and until they are completed, I cannot give an indication of the cost or timing of any work identified at the remaining sites. The annual ring fenced budget for noise mitigation measures is £5M and there are currently no plans to review it.

Regarding the condition of the M27 and M3, the Agency carries out several different road surveys to determine the condition and residual pavement life of the trunk road network. Measurements are undertaken annually of the road surface condition, including rutting, texture depth and profile. A visual assessment is undertaken every 5 years, together with a deflectograph survey that determines residual pavement life. A skid resistance survey is completed every 3 years. The forward programme of maintenance is identified from a study of the results of all these assessments. Analysis of the results of the latest road condition surveys of the M3 between junction 7 and 8 indicates that, subject to further testing, the section near Winchester may be due for major maintenance, which would include the use of a low noise surface, in about 2004–05. The condition of the M27 between Southampton and Winchester currently indicates that maintenance would not be required within the next 5 years.

Table A

Scheme name/description	*Quieter surfacing QS Noise barrier B*	*Completed C under construction U*	*Construction costs (£)*
A19 Billingham Bypass	B	C	192,000
M6 J26–27 Orrell(1)	B	C	186,000
M1 J33–34 Tinsley	B	C	1,820,000
M1 J33–34 Brinsworth	B	C	
M62 J31–32 Lower Altofts	B	C	
M602 J1–2 Eccles	B	C	794,000
M42 J1 Lickey End	B	C	67,000

Table A

Scheme name/description	*Quieter surfacing QS Noise barrier B*	*Completed C under construction U*	*Construction costs (£)*
A52 Spondon	B	C	834,000
A1 Tuxford	QS	C	[1]—
A52 Clifton	QS	C	436,000
A27 Portsbridge Noise Barrier	B	C	125,000
A34 Boltey Noise Mitigation	B	C	470,000
A404 (M) Maidenhead Noise Mitigation	B	C	1,335,000
M25 Clackett Lane to Jct 5	QS	C	[1]—
M60 J12–13 Worsley	B	U	4,000
M6 J8–9 (Phases 1 to 3)	B	U	689,000
M1 J25	B	U	2,116,000
M3 6–7 Basingstoke Accoustic Barrier Ph 1	B	U	410,000
M3 J4–4a Farnborough	B	U	1,275,000
M4 J7 8/9 Holyport/Bray Noise Mitigation	B	U	300,000
M4 J5–6 Datchet Brands Hill Noise Mitigation	B	U	469,000
A34 Hinksey Noise Mitigation	B	U	503,000

[1] Major Maintenance schemes providing quieter surfacing

Deprived Wards

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish, in rank order, the 100 most deprived wards in the Government office eastern region, indicating their *(a)* local authority and *(b)* parliamentary constituency. [20379]

Ms Keeble: The information has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list in rank order the 100 most deprived wards in the Government office north-west region, indicating the *(a)* local authority and *(b)* parliamentary constituency. [19561]

Ms Keeble: The following 100 wards in the Government office north-west region are sorted by Index of Multiple Deprivation (2000).

Number/ward	*Local authority*	*Parliamentary constituency*
1. Benchill	Manchester	Wythenshawe and Sale, East BC
2. Speke	Liverpool	Liverpool, Garston BC
3. Everton	Liverpool	Liverpool, Riverside BC
4. Vauxhall	Liverpool	Liverpool, Riverside BC
5. Princess	Knowsley	Knowsley, South CC
6. Granby	Liverpool	Liverpool, Riverside BC
7. Pirrie	Liverpool	Liverpool, West Derby BC
8. Breckfield	Liverpool	Liverpool, Walton BC
9. Longview	Knowsley	Knowsley, South CC
10. Cherryfield	Knowsley	Knowsley, North and Sefton, East CC
11. Harpurhey	Manchester	Manchester, Blackley BC
12. Beswick and Clayton	Manchester	Manchester, Central BC
13. Kirby Central	Knowsley	Knowsley, North and Sefton, East CC
14. Northwood	Knowsley	Knowsley, North and Sefton, East CC
15. Bradford	Manchester	Manchester, Central BC
16. Bidston	Wirral	Birkenhead BC
17. Melrose	Liverpool	Liverpool, Walton BC
18. Clubmoor	Liverpool	Liverpool, West Derby BC
19. Smithdown	Liverpool	Liverpool, Riverside BC
20. Ardwick	Manchester	Manchester, Central BC
21. Dovecot	Liverpool	Liverpool, West Derby BC
22. Cantril Farm	Knowsley	Knowsley, North and Sefton, East CC
23. Whitefield	Pendle	Pendle BC
24. Central	Manchester	Manchester, Central BC
25. Netherley	Liverpool	Liverpool, Garston BC
26. Newton Heath	Manchester	Manchester, Central BC
27. Kensington	Liverpool	Liverpool, Wavertree BC
28. Central	Bolton	Bolton, North-East BC
29. Central and Falinge	Rochdale	Rochdale CC
30. Birkenhead	Wirral	Birkenhead BC
31. Linacre	Sefton	Bootle BC
32. Tranmere	Wirral	Birkenhead
33. Tower Hill	Knowsley	Knowsley, North and Sefton, East CC
34. Audley	Blackburn with Darwen	Blackburn CC
35. Danehouse	Burnley	Burnley BC
36. Gorton South	Manchester	Manchester, Gorton BC
37. Woodhouse Park	Manchester	Wythenshawe and Sale, East BC
38. Middleton West	Rochdale	Heywood and Middleton CC
39. Moss Side	Manchester	Manchester, Central BC
40. Coldhurst	Oldham	Oldham, West and Royton BC

Number/ward	*Local authority*	*Parliamentary constituency*
41. Werneth	Oldham	Oldham, West and Royton BC
42. Shadsworth	Blackburn with Darwen	Blackburn BC
43. Alexandra	Oldham	Oldham, West and Royton BC
44. Mirehouse West	Copeland	Copeland CC
45. St. Mary's	Liverpool	Liverpool, Garston BC
46. Central	Hyndburn	Hyndburn BC
47. Sandwith	Copeland	Copeland CC
48. Higher Croft	Blackburn with Darwen	Blackburn BC
49. Smallbridge	Rochdale	Rochdale CC
50. Wensley Fold	Blackburn with Darwen	Blackburn BC
51. St. Mary's	Oldham	Oldham, East and Saddleworth
52. Longsight	Manchester	Manchester, Gorton BC
53. Central	Barrow-in-Furness	Barrow and Furness CC
54. Parr and Hardshaw	St. Helens	St. Helens, South BC
55. Shear Brow	Blackburn with Darwen	Blackburn BC
56. Queen's Park	Blackburn with Darwen	Blackburn BC
57. Valley	Liverpool	Liverpool, Garston BC
58. Broughton	Salford	Salford BC
59. Bradley	Pendle	Pendle BC
60. Derby	Bolton	Bolton, South-East BC
61. Little Hulton	Salford	Worsley CC
62. Knowsley Park	Knowsley	Knowsley, North and Sefton, East CC
63. Salterbeck	Allerdale	Workington CC
64. St. Michael's	Knowsley	Knowsley, South
65. Castlefields	Halton	Weaver Vale CC
66. Brinnington	Stockport	Stockport BC
67. Hulme	Manchester	Manchester Central BC
68. Abercromby	Liverpool	Liverpool, Riverside BC
69. Cheetham	Manchester	Manchester, Blackley BC
70. Blackfriars	Salford	Salford BC
71. St. Gabriels	Knowsley	Knowsley, South CC
72. Ordsall	Salford	Salford BC
73. County	Liverpool	Liverpool, Walton BC
74. Park	Blackpool	Knowsley, North and Sefton, East CC
75. Norley	Wigan	Wigan CC
76. Ewanrigg	Allerdale	Workington CC
77. Alexandra	Blackpool	Oldham, West and Royton BC
78. Seacombe	Wirral	Wallasey BC
79. Bank Hall	Burnley	Burnley BC
80. Halewood South	Knowsley	Knowsley, South CC
81. Tanhouse	West Lancashire	West Lancashire CC
82. Bastwell	Blackburn with Darwen	Blackburn BC
83. Fishwick	Preston	Preston BC
84. Risedale	Barrow-in-Furness	Barrow and Furness CC
85. Claremont	Blackpool	Blackpool, North and Fleetwood CC
86. Pendleton	Salford	Salford BC
87. Whitefield	Knowsley	Knowsley, North and Sefton, East CC
88. Lightbowne	Manchester	Manchester, Blackley BC
89. Dingle	Liverpool	Liverpool, Riverside BC
90. Ribbleton	Preston	Preston BC
91. Riverside	Halton	Halton CC
92. Barclay	Burnley	Burnley BC
93. Hindpool	Barrow-in-Furness	Barrow and Furness CC
94. Page Moss	Knowsley	Knowsley, South CC
95. Tuebrook	Liverpool	Liverpool, West Derby BC
96. Baguley	Manchester	Wythenshawe and Sale, East BC
97. Newbold	Rochdale	Rochdale CC
98. Langworthy	Salford	Salford BC
99. Blackley	Manchester	Manchester, Blackley BC
100. Fazakerley	Liverpool	Liverpool, Walton BC

SSA (Somerset)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he plans to take to ensure that Somerset county council's standard spending assessment is set at a level to reflect *(a)* the costs of delivering services in rural areas, *(b)* the size of the county's road network, *(c)* the demands on social services due to the level of the elderly population and *(d)* the backlog of capital works; and if he will make a statement. [18880]

Dr. Whitehead: All of the factors referred to in the question are reflected to some extent in the current Standard Spending Assessment formulae, which are used to allocate between councils the resources made available by the spending review. We are currently reviewing those formulae and have announced our intention to implement changes to take effect in 2003–04. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is today announcing the provisional 2002–03 local government finance settlement.

Rough Sleepers

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what methodology was used by Rough Sleepers' Unit and its predecessor to count the number of people sleeping rough on any single night since 1997; and if he will make a statement regarding the reasons for changes in the methodology used. [20532]

Mr. Byers: The methodology used by the Rough Sleepers Unit to count the number of people sleeping rough on any single night was developed in the early 1990s by the Department, in partnership with the voluntary sector. The methodology used for producing a national estimate was set out in an answer given by my right hon. Friend the then Minister for Local Government and the Regions on 19 May 1999, *Official Report,* columns 355–62W and has been tested and developed through independent research and remains unchanged. The same methodology has been used nationally for over five years, and since the early 1990s in London.

Counts are conducted by voluntary sector homelessness agencies, working with local authorities and independent volunteers. The results are finalised and submitted by these agencies to the Rough Sleepers Unit. The methodology for counts is adhered to strictly and consistently.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people obtained permanent housing after being housed in *(a)* bed and breakfast accommodation and *(b)* hostels by the Rough Sleepers' Unit for (i) less than one week, (ii) between one week and one month and (iii) over one month, in each quarter since the unit was established. [20528]

Mr. Byers: Under the Government's strategy on rough sleeping, the Rough Sleepers Unit funds a number of agencies to provide permanent and temporary accommodation for rough sleepers and to refer people sleeping rough, or with a history of rough sleeping, into that accommodation and other services.

Information is not available in the format requested. Information from the Clearing House which manages referrals to permanent accommodation in London provided with Government funding shows that:

During the last financial year (1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001), 669 former rough sleepers were housed in permanent homes.

A total of 898 former rough sleepers were referred to the Clearing House for permanent accommodation during 2000–01, of whom:

74 per cent. were referred from hostels

10 per cent. from the street

5 per cent. from staying with friends

2 per cent. from a housing association tenancy

1 per cent. from Bed and Breakfast accommodation

1 per cent. from a cold weather shelter

1 per cent. from a rolling shelter.

1 per cent. where the referral location was in an "other" category

5 per cent. where the referral location was not stated.

These referrals have played a vital part in helping the Rough Sleepers Unit to achieve its target of reducing rough sleeping in England by two-thirds.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people were housed in *(a)* bed and breakfast accommodation and *(b)* hostels by the Rough Sleepers' Unit for (i) less than one week, (ii) between one week and one month and (iii) over one month in each quarter since the unit was established. [20529]

Mr. Byers: Under the Government's current strategy on rough sleeping, the Rough Sleepers Unit provides funding for a number of agencies who provide permanent and temporary accommodation. The Unit also funds a number of agencies to provide outreach workers and Contact and Assessment Teams who help rough sleepers into accommodation and other services. Staff from the Unit do not routinely refer rough sleepers into accommodation. However, they do from time to time liaise with agencies to ensure that any vulnerable rough sleepers they encounter during street work are helped into appropriate accommodation and support.

Information on referrals into accommodation is not available in the format requested. Monitoring information from the database of Contact and Assessment Team's clients in London is given.

Over the twelve months between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001, 1,679 rough sleepers were helped into accommodation. Some were helped into accommodation more than once. The total number of referrals from the streets for those 1,679 individuals was 2,485. These referrals were to the following types of accommodation:

Action	*Number who entered accommodation*
Booked into permanent accommodation	151
Booked into a hostel	1,211
Booked into a rolling shelter	719
Booked into other temporary accommodation	63
Accessed specialist treatment programme	252
Admission to a night centre	86
Booked into Bed and Breakfast accommodation	3
Total	2485

Of the 1,679 individuals who were referred into these forms of accommodation during the period, 1,262 (75 per cent.) were still in accommodation at the end of the year.

These referrals have played a vital part in helping the Rough Sleepers Unit to achieve its target of reducing rough sleeping in England by two-thirds.

Homelessness

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* statutory single homeless people and *(b)* non statutory homeless people are (i) in bed and breakfast, (ii) in hostels, (iii) in squats and (iv) sleeping rough; and what plans he has to reduce the numbers of non-statutory homeless people. [20534]

Mr. Byers: On 30 June 2001, the total number of households being accommodated by local housing authorities in bed and breakfast hotels under existing homelessness legislation was 11,340 and a further

9,440 households were being accommodated in hostels. Information about the proportion of these which were single person households is not held centrally.

It is estimated that there are 532 people sleeping rough in England on any one night in autumn 2001, compared to 1,850 in 1998.

Information is not held centrally about the number of households living in squats or the number of households who are self-placed in hostels or bed and breakfast accommodation.

The Homelessness Bill, when enacted, will require local authorities to conduct a review of the levels, and likely future levels, of all forms of homelessness in their area and to develop a strategy for preventing homelessness and ensuring that sufficient accommodation and support is available for those who are or may become homeless.

My right hon., noble and learned Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning also announced yesterday that a new Homelessness Directorate will be set up to bring together and invigorate existing work to help homeless people, as well as develop new work to help prevent homelessness, and investigate its underlying causes.

London Underground

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much London Transport has spent on consultancy costs for the London Underground public private partnership and the forecast of total expenditure. [20965]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand from London Transport that their expenditure on external consultants from 20 March 1998 (the date of the Government's announcement) to 30 September 2001, for work on the PPP and restructuring of London Underground, was £80.2 million and London Transport estimate that the final amount should be around £98 million.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 5 December 2001

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Tobacco Sponsorship

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which recommendations of the tobacco taskforce have been implemented to date; and which are planned to be implemented in the future. [20156]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The tobacco taskforce was established in 1998 to provide practical assistance to the sports affected by the Government's decision to ban tobacco sponsorship of sport. The taskforce's role is mainly advisory: to assist sports currently in receipt of tobacco sponsorship to find replacement sponsors by assessing the needs of each sport offering advice on best practice in establishing commercial relationships with sponsors; and assisting the sports in making links with potential new sponsors. In all, seven sports have sought assistance to make the transition from tobacco sponsorship—rugby league, clay pigeon shooting, billiards and snooker, pool, darts, ice-hockey and angling.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the value of tobacco sponsorship for each sport sponsored in the UK, was in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [20167]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Records are not kept of the amount of tobacco sponsorship received by each sport. As part of the 1995 voluntary agreement on sponsorship of sport, the Tobacco Manufacturers Association is required to make a return detailing the expenditure incurred in that year by tobacco sponsorship in the United Kingdom. The total value of tobacco sponsorship of sport in the United Kingdom for 1999–2000 was £8,815,000.

Sports (North-East)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has further to develop grassroots sports in the north-east. [20358]

Mr. Caborn: The Government are committed to the development of sport and increasing opportunities for participation throughout the country. The strategy for sport—A Sporting Future for All—and the Government's plan for sport set out an action plan on how we intend to achieve those objectives. Responsibility for developing grassroots sport at the regional level rests with a number of organisations including Sport England, local authorities, local education authorities, schools, sports governing bodies, sports clubs, volunteers, and in order to ensure the best use of resources it is essential that all these interests work in partnership.

In the north-east region all of the programmes for providing better sports facilities and improving sports provision are being implemented. These include lottery funding, where almost £80 million has been committed to the region, the school sport co-ordinators programme and specialist sports colleges, while £20.6 million under the spaces for sport and arts, £37.9 million under NOF Round three and £2.8 million under the NOF Green Spaces programmes will be invested into facilities which will be available to schools and the wider community.

The North East Sports Board has also published its Sports Strategy—2001–2006 as a result of which eight action plan implementation groups have been set up to take forward a range of issues including investment in sport, health, education, social inclusion and links to economic and cultural strategies.

For the future I have made it clear that I want to see a strengthened regional structure for the delivery of sport in the regions which involves local decision making and strong partnerships with all the key local interests. I will be discussing these issues with the Sport England Council and its new chief executive when he is in post.

English Heritage

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if it is her policy to reduce grants to English Heritage proportionately to reductions on VAT liabilities following the Finance Act 2001. [20180]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* In the last Budget the Chancellor announced a new grant scheme to assist repairs and maintenance to listed places of worship. Initial estimates are that the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme could be worth up to £30 million per year. There is no cap on the scheme; all listed places of worship that meet the criteria will receive a grant. This Department has been asked to make a small contribution to its administration costs. We have asked English Heritage to meet this commitment, which they have chosen to do through the redirection of £2 million in grant-in-aid from the Joint Places of Worship (JPOW) Scheme.

Competitive Bidding

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the schemes administered by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies where funds are allocated by a competitive bidding process; and what was the amount of money allocated to each scheme. [19789]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* My Department administers two schemes through Re:source, the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, where awards are allocated on a competitive bidding process. These are the DCMS/Wolfson challenge fund for public library projects to which we allocate £2 million a year; and the designated museums challenge fund for which £15 million was allocated for the three year period from 1999–2000 to 2001–02 to support projects to improve presentation at museums with designated collections.

National Foundation for Youth Music

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the National Foundation for Youth Music in providing more opportunity for young people to participate in musical activity; and if she will make a statement. [19613]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* The National Foundation for Youth Music operates independently of Government. It has made over 500 awards nationally totalling nearly £16.5 million, and reaching over 150,000 participants. 84 per cent. of these are enjoying their first musical experience.

Broadband Broadcasting

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action she is taking to ensure that all areas of the UK proceed at the same rate with the shift from analogue to broadband broadcasting. [19976]

Dr. Howells: The Government are committed to ensuring that everyone who currently receives free-to-air broadcast channels on analogue will continue to do so digitally after the switchover to digital television, whether by terrestrial, cable or satellite means. We recognise that there are some synergies between the ranges of services which digital television and broadband access can deliver and we aim to ensure that these synergies are developed. But it is for the competitive market to determine which services are valued by consumers and which technology is best able to deliver them.

Silverstone

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of *(a)* the future of and *(b)* the costs of improved access to the Grand Prix circuit at Silverstone. [17327]

Mr. Caborn: Silverstone is one of the most popular Grand Prix circuits in the world. The Government are in discussion with the owners and operators of Silverstone about its future and their proposals for its redevelopment.

The operator of Silverstone is concerned that the problems encountered by spectators arriving at recent British Grand Prix threaten the retention of the event. The operator has been consulting with the Highways Agency and the local authorities about an improved access from the A43 trunk road. Planning applications have recently been submitted to the planning authorities. I have made no estimate of the costs of these proposals.

International Sporting Events

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans the Government have to submit bids for future major international sporting events; and if she will make a statement. [18166]

Mr. Caborn: Responsibility for submitting bids for major sports events lies with the relevant governing body. The Government encourage all sports to work closely with the UK sports major event's steering group in the preparation of bids for major events to ensure that bids are properly co-ordinated. Where a bid cannot proceed without significant public funding, the Government will need to review all aspects of a bid thoroughly before giving any support. The Government have asked the performance and innovation unit (PIU) to consider the structure of support for major international sporting events.

2005 World Championships

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what work her Department is undertaking to ensure that Sheffield is a viable alternative to London as a bidder for the 2005 World Championships; and if she will make a statement. [17944]

Mr. Caborn: The International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) decided at its council meeting on 26 November to reject the offer of Sheffield's Don Valley Stadium as an alternative to Picketts Lock and to reopen the bidding for the 2005 World Athletics Championships. The IAAF's decision is disappointing; Sheffield would have provided an outstanding venue for the 2005 World Championships.

At a meeting between UK Athletics, Sheffield city council, the Government, UK Sport, Sport England and the British Olympic Association on 27 November, it was agreed unanimously that UK Athletics should not enter a Sheffield bid.

Sports Fields

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of publicly owned school sports fields have been sold *(a)* since 1997 and *(b)* in 2001–02. [17176]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

In October 1998, this Government introduced new legislation to protect school playing fields from unjustified disposal. Precise information on the number of sales that have taken place since that time was included in the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for School Standards on 18 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 1292W.

Before October 1998, local authorities were able to sell school playing fields without the permission of the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, and information on the individual sales that took place was not collected centrally. Information on the total number of school sports fields was also not available centrally.

We are currently validating the Asset Management Plan information we have received from authorities, including that relating to school sports fields, and hope to be in a position to publish further analysis in the spring.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Post Office Users' National Council

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will provide the combined total expenditure of the Post Office Users' National Council in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland for the financial years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000; what this year's budget will be for postwatch and projections for the next three years; and if she will list the elements of unplanned outturn in (a), (b) and (c). [16280]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 20 November 2001]:* Historical information in respect of the financial years 1997–98; 1998–99 and 1999–2000 for the Post Office Users' Councils in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland can be found in the annual reports for those years in question. The annual reports were placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Information in respect of the Post Office Users' National Council was contained in the answer on 4 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 149W.

The Consumer Council for Postal Services (known as Postwatch) was established to fulfil an important role in the new postal regulatory framework. It has wider statutory obligations and powers than POUNC and a more extensive regional structure. When considering Postwatch's budget we wish to ensure that Postwatch has sufficient funds to fulfil its role effectively.

We have agreed a total budget of £7.8 million for Postwatch for the financial year 2001–02. The sum initially agreed for Postwatch for this financial year (£6.9 million) has recently been increased by £0.9 million in light of special circumstances associated with establishing a new organisation within a new regulatory framework.

The figures on planned expenditure on Postwatch for the two financial years 2002–03 and 2003–04 are provisional and may be subject to adjustment with ministerial approval. This Department has not yet received from Postwatch a detailed bid for the financial year 2002–03 but we will consider the bid on its merits.

BNFL

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 20 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 163W, on BNFL, whether the purchase prices paid by BNFL to acquire companies in the US include payments to settle outstanding claims against each company and the acquisition of other financial liabilities. [19330]

Mr. Wilson: The purchase prices BNFL paid in these acquisitions took account of the assets and liabilities associated with the individual business acquired.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what savings have been made in Magnox-related liability estimates since the Government transferred its shareholding in Magnox Electric to BNFL. [19253]

Mr. Wilson: BNFL's liabilities, including those of Magnox Electric, are stated in its annual report and accounts. BNFL's liabilities have shown a net increase in the period since the acquisition of Magnox Electric. Magnox liabilities account for over 85 per cent. of the BNFL group liabilities.

Manufacturing (Teesside)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many local firms are involved in the Manufacturing Advisory Service in the Teesside area. [19977]

Alan Johnson: The Manufacturing Advisory Service is in the process of being established. No firms have been assisted as the regional centres of delivery have not been announced. Therefore, it will take some time to assess the level of assistance given. However, it is expected that the north-east centre will be aiming to assist approximately 500 companies per year.

Small and Medium Enterprises

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many SMEs have been launched in each year since 1996 *(a)* nationally, *(b)* within Teesside and *(c)* in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. [19979]

Alan Johnson: The information held relates to businesses that have registered for VAT. The table shows how many businesses registered, year on year, since 1996 throughout the United Kingdom. We are unable to provide figures for Teesside or the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency, but can provide those for the unitary authorities of Middlesbrough; Redcar and Cleveland and the former county of Cleveland.

Area	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
United Kingdom	168,200	182,570	186,250	178,460	183,325
Middlesbrough	195	205	190	200	220
Redcar and Cleveland	170	155	150	175	150
Former county of Cleveland	755	745	805	760	820

Investment, Lancashire

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the Government are taking to secure investment in Lancashire in *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* service sector jobs. [19921]

Alan Johnson: The Government office for the north-west, the North West Development Agency and Small Business Service work in partnership with other agencies, business and local authorities to provide support and advice to investors in these two sectors, and to ensure that an attractive range of skills is available. A number of schemes, including Regional Selective Assistance, the Enterprise Grant Scheme, SMART awards and Regional Innovation Fund, exist to provide direct financial assistance to support new investment. Work on cluster developments, reclamation and re-use of land and on promoting the leisure and tourist industries is also intended to attract investment to Lancashire.

Farmers, Kent

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress of the agreement between suppliers and supermarkets as it affects farmers in Kent. [16835]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 7 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 263W.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what her estimate is of the number of jobs lost in small businesses as a result of foot and mouth disease; [17677]

(2) what estimate she has made of the number of businesses that will be lost in the next 12 months as a result of foot and mouth disease. [17679]

(3) how many small businesses have had to cease trading because of the effects of foot and mouth disease. [17678]

Nigel Griffiths: The DTI, Small Business Service and DEFRA have not made estimates of the numbers of jobs lost; the number of businesses that will be lost in the next 12 months; or the numbers of businesses that have ceased trading in the small business sector as a result of foot and mouth disease. It would be difficult to arrive at such figures, given that in many cases there will be a number of factors influencing a decision to reduce the size of a business or to cease trading, for example prospects for an individual business prior to the foot and mouth outbreak.

Ofgem

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will issue the statutory social and environmental guidelines to the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority; and if she will make a statement. [18391]

Mr. Wilson: The Department undertook a public consultation on a draft of the social and environmental guidance over the summer, and we are currently considering the responses. We plan to issue the guidance as soon as possible once that process has been completed.

Online Trading

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her Department's targets are for the number of businesses trading online. [17284]

Mr. Alexander: The Department wants to ensure that the performance of UK small and micro businesses is up with the best in the world.

The Department's target for the number of businesses trading online is to ensure that one million micro, small and medium sized businesses are trading online by 2002.

The Department has already exceeded its target to connect 1.5 million SME's by 2002, reaching 1.9 million last year.

Sudan

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many UK companies have approached her Department for advice on investing in Sudan in 2001. [17903]

Nigel Griffiths: We estimate that 30 inquiries relating to Sudan were received from 1 January to 30 September. We have no detailed breakdown of these inquiries between trade and investment.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the UN initiative, UN Global Compact, and its implications for companies operating in Sudan. [17917]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

The Global Compact is the UN Secretary General's initiative on global corporate social responsibility involving a number of leading international companies and NGOs. It encourages companies to take nine core human rights, labour and environment principles into consideration in their business in the developing world. We fully support the UN Global Compact and were one of the first Governments to do so. The Global Compact is a voluntary instrument aimed at developing best practice that goes beyond compliance frameworks and encourages creative responsibility on the part of companies. We encourage firms operating in developing countries like Sudan to consider how they can best implement the principles behind the compact. The compact offers the potential to make a tangible improvement to the quality of life of people affected by UK company operations around the globe, but particularly in the developing world.

Bilateral Aid

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the level of bilateral trade is with *(a)* Yemen, *(b)* Oman, *(c)* India and *(d)* Pakistan. [20251]

Nigel Griffiths: The information is as follows:

(a) British exports of goods to Yemen from January to September 2001 amounted to £56.7 million, an increase of 39 per cent. on the same period last year. Imports from Yemen for the same period were £4.1 million, a decrease of 28 per cent. The last full year figures for 2000: British exports were £52.5 million. British imports were £6.2 million.

(b) British exports of goods to Oman from January to September 2001 amounted to £219.8 million, an increase of 38 per cent. on the same period last year. Imports from Oman for the same period were £51.1 million, a decrease of 12 per cent. The last full year figures for 2000: British exports were £278.3 million, and British imports were £97.4 million.

(c) British exports of goods to India from January to September 2001 amounted to £1,404.8 million, a decrease of 14.3 per cent. on the same period last year. Imports from India for the same period were £1,394.7 million, an increase of 10 per cent. The last full year figures for 2000: British Exports were £2,055.8 million. British Imports were £1,712.1 million.

(d) British exports of goods to Pakistan from January to September 2001 amounted to £178.4 million, an increase of 20.1 per cent. on the same period last year. Imports from Pakistan for the same period were £317.3 million, an increase of 16.9 per cent. The last full year figures for 2000: British exports were £205.9 million. British imports were £378.1 million.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the staffing levels of the Insolvency Service. [20249]

Miss Melanie Johnson: As at 1 November 2001 the number of staff in post in the Insolvency Service was 1,359 (full-time equivalent).

Women's Employment and Pay

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the report by the Deputy Competition Commissioner into women's employment and pay. [21321]

Ms Hewitt: I welcome this report, which examines non-legislative and cost effective measures to improve women's employment prospects and participation in the labour market and to achieve greater equality of pay.

I welcome too the Government-sponsored research report, "The Gender Pay Gap", which analyses the causes of the pay gap. Both of these reports are being published today.

A number of Government initiatives are already under way to tackle this important issue, including key elements of the Employment Bill and the work of the fair pay champions in supporting equal pay initiatives in their sectors. We welcome the contribution both these reports make to understanding and to reducing the gender pay gap.

We will also be publishing the Government's full response to the 14 recommendations made in the Deputy Competition Commissioner's report today.

I am placing copies of both reports and the Government's response in the Libraries of the House.

Motor Vehicles

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 785W, on motor vehicles, what radical pro-consumer change she is advocating to the block exemption for motor vehicles; and what consultation she has had with the retail motor industry and motor manufacturers on this. [20374]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The current block exemption is not working satisfactorily. If consumers are to obtain value for money, then change is needed to secure an effective single European market in new cars and to provide more competition in the retailing of new cars and in their servicing and repair. My officials have had a series of discussions with motor industry trade associations and individual manufacturers and retailers, as well as with the Consumers Association.

Fireworks

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what measures she has taken to ensure that fireworks are sold only close to specific dates such as 5 November and 31 December; [21062]

(2) what recent guidelines she has provided retailers selling fireworks; [21061]

(3) how many *(a)* children and *(b)* adults were injured by fireworks in (i) 1995 and (ii) 2001 to date; [21303]

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people were injured by fireworks in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* the north-east and *(c)* south Tyneside in each year since 1997. [20975]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The powers available under the Consumer Protection Act 1987 allow for regulations to be made that address the intrinsic safety of goods but do not allow for the periods of sale to be regulated. We have, therefore, entered into a voluntary agreement with the industry that fireworks should only be made available for general retail sale for a period of three weeks around the 5 November and for a similar period around new year.

Our fireworks Safety Toolkit includes advice to retailers as to their responsibilities under the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997, the voluntary agreement on the period of sale and best safety practice.

Data on firework injuries for this year (2001) are still being collated, therefore the latest data available are for 2000. Firework injuries in 1995 and 2000 are as follows:

In 1995: Children (under 18 years) 929, adults 556, not specified 45;

In 2000: Children (under 18 years) 557, adults 415.

We collect data from accident and emergency departments across Great Britain of accidents involving fireworks over a four week period around 5 November. We do not have separate data for the north-east or south Tyneside. The nearest we can provide is as follows:

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Great Britain	908	831	1,056	972
Northern and Yorkshire Region	143	144	167	142
South Tyneside Healthcare NHS Trust	3	5	2	3

Small Businesses

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she has taken in response to the recommendation in the Better Regulation Task Force annual report 2000–01 that her Department should become an effective champion for small retailers. [20677]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* The Government Response to the Better Regulation Task Force (BRTF) report gave me this role, which I have for all small firms. We are now considering how this can best be done.

We will certainly engage with key stakeholders in seeking to improve the competitiveness and productivity of the small retail sector, as well as to encourage small retailers to take advantage of the full range of support schemes appropriate to them.

Employment Tribunals

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in employment tribunal cases where parties were required to pay a deposit, what the mean average deposit was at a preliminary hearing as a condition of continuing to proceed with the case in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000. [20660]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* The mean average deposit required at a pre-hearing review as a condition of continuing to proceed with the case was:

Year	*£*
1998	89.51
1999	83.31
2000	95.82

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employment tribunal claims, where a deposit at a preliminary hearing was required as a condition of proceeding, were proceeded to a full hearing in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000, broken down by deposits required from applicants and respondents; and in how many such cases (i) the claimant won and (ii) the case was withdrawn and (iii) the case was settled before a full hearing. [20661]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* Most of the information requested is displayed in the table.

	1998	*1999*	*2000*
Number of cases which withdrew after a PHR deposit order	6	7	7
Number of cases which settled after a PHR deposit order	11	1	7
Number of cases which proceeded to a full hearing after a PHR deposit order	30	9	7
Of which, successful at full hearing	8	1	1

The ETS database cannot provide information according to whether the deposit was required by an applicant or respondent.

A claim may be brought under more than one jurisdiction or subsequently amended/clarified in the course of proceedings, but will only be counted once in the table (against the main jurisdiction).

Source:

Employment Tribunals Service

Departmental Initiatives

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list for each *(a)* area based and *(b)* other regeneration-related initiative for which her department is responsible (i) the amount budgeted and (ii) the total expenditure in each financial year for the planned lifetime of each initiative (A) nationally and (B) in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. [16450]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 20 November 2001]:* No specific area based initiatives are currently listed by the Cabinet Office Regional Co-ordination Unit as being the lead responsibility of my Department.

As part of its promotion of enterprise the Department of Trade and Industry has a number of programmes which can contribute to the regeneration of disadvantaged neighbourhoods, notably the £100 million Phoenix fund.

Gambling

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made on the impact of enacting the recommendations in the Budd report on gambling in respect to amusement machines in seaside arcades on *(a)* employment and *(b)* exports; and what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. [17366]

Ms Hewitt: We have made no such assessments. I have had no such discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

Public Bodies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will list those public bodies to which her Department appoints members and which are not listed in Public Bodies 2000; [17606]

(2) if she will list those public bodies which are the responsibility of her Department and which are not listed in Public Bodies 2000. [17607]

Ms Hewitt: Public Bodies 2000 sets out information on non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), certain public corporations (including nationalised industries) and NHS bodies. There are four types of NDPB: executive NDPBs; advisory NDPBs; tribunal NDPBs; and boards of visitors to penal establishments. The next edition will be published around the end of the year. Information about taskforces, reviews and ad hoc advisory groups is set out in an annual report, published by Cabinet Office. Copies of Public Bodies 2000 are in the Library of the House and this publication may be accessed via Cabinet Office's website (http://www.official-documents.co.uk/document/caboff/pb00/pb00.htm). Copies of the annual report on taskforces and similar bodies have also been placed in the Library of the House and the annual report is being made available on Cabinet Office's website.

The following executive NDPBs have been established since the publication of Public Bodies 2000:

The Consumer Council for Postal Services
The Gas and Electricity Consumer Council.

The following advisory NDPBs have been established since the publication of Public Bodies 2000:

Advisory Committee on Cleaner Coal Technology
Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission
Ethnic Minority Business Advisory Forum
Import Parity Price Panel
Partnership Fund Assessment Panel
Small Business Council
Small Business Investment Taskforce.

The following executive NDPBs have transferred to the Department since the publication of Public Bodies 2000 as part of machinery of government changes:

Advantage West Midlands
East Midlands Development Agency
East of England Development Agency
North West Regional Development Agency
One North East
South East England Development Agency
South West England Development Agency
Yorkshire Forward.

The following advisory NDPB has transferred to the Department since the publication of Public Bodies 2000 as part of machinery of government changes:

Advisory Committee on Work-Life Balance.

Yemen

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which Ministers in her Department have visited Yemen since 1 May 1997 and on what dates; what visits are planned by her Department's Ministers to Yemen; and what dates have been arranged for future visits. [19126]

Ms Hewitt: None. No visits are planned.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will estimate the total unallocated funds within her departmental expenditure limit *(a)* at the start of the financial year and *(b)* to date; and what was the month seven forecast on outturn underspend against her departmental expenditure limit in (i) real and (ii) percentage terms. [19443]

Ms Hewitt: The departmental unallocated provision (DUP) for the present financial year is contained in "Trade and Industry—The Government's Expenditure Plans 2001–02 to 2003–04" (Cm 5112 at Annex B Tables B6 and B7). Draw-down of the DUP has been reported to Parliament in the Winter Supplementary Estimate. Outturn against six-month forecast for each request for resources will be published in the Winter Supplementary Estimates Summary Request for Supply as usual.

Regulations

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many regulations affecting business have been introduced since 1997. [20096]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has been responsible for the introduction of 533 statutory instruments since May 1997. Of these 533 regulations, we estimate that 9 per cent. reduced costs borne by businesses, charities and voluntary bodies, while over 75 per cent. had no or a negligible effect on costs for businesses, voluntary bodies, and charities. Over 30 per cent. of all the regulations introduced by DTI since May 1997 have been orders licensing firms to provide public telecommunications services, increasing consumer choice and competition in this sector.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Cuba

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance Her Majesty's Government are providing to Cuba in response to the devastation caused by Hurricane Michelle; and if she will make a statement. [19999]

Clare Short: We have provided immediate funding of £250,000 for the populations worst affected by the flooding in Cuba which followed Hurricane Michelle. Funding has been allocated through the International Federation of the Red Cross (to deliver shelter materials and medicines) and the United Nations Development Programme (for their work on immediate needs for food production and food security, health and social infrastructure, communication and housing).

Financial Deepening Challenge Fund

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what criteria are used for allocation of Financial Deepening Challenge Fund grants; what mechanisms are in place to assess the impact and effectiveness of grants made under the Financial Deepening Challenge Fund; and what assessment her Department has made of the impact and effectiveness of projects funded by the Financial Deepening Challenge Fund; [20646]

(2) how much money has been allocated in grants through the Financial Deepening Challenge Fund; [20645]

(3) how many companies have received funding through the Financial Deepening Challenge Fund. [20644]

Clare Short: The Financial Deepening Challenge Fund was launched in April 2000. It has since been made available for application by enterprises in 15 countries in Africa, South Asia and the UK. The fund accepts bids for assistance twice a year. All bids are independently assessed on fixed timescales and on a competitive basis. More information on the fund can be obtained from the website: www.challengefunds.org. or by contacting the DFID public information point on 01355 84 3132.

Since the launch of the fund in January 2001, there have been two completed bidding rounds—with the third bidding round currently in progress. In the first two bidding rounds, the fund panel approved seven projects. In total, grants amounting to £3.7 million have been committed to these projects, these amounts being disbursed over the life span of the projects. A number of these projects were submitted by consortiums rather than single companies. In total, seven companies and six non-governmental organisations are expected to be involved in the implementation of these projects.

Business Linkages Challenge Fund

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what criteria are used for allocation of Business Linkages Challenge Fund grants; what mechanisms are in place to assess the impact and effectiveness of grants made under the Business Linkages Challenge Fund; and what assessment her Department has made of the impact and effectiveness of projects funded by the Business Linkages Challenge Fund; [20643]

(2) how much money has been allocated to grants through the Business Linkages Challenge Fund; [20642]

(3) how many businesses have received funding through the Business Linkages Challenge Fund. [20641]

Clare Short: The Business Linkages Challenge Fund was launched in January 2001. It has since been made available for application by enterprises in 19 countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the UK. The fund accepts bids for assistance twice a year. All bids are independently assessed on fixed timescales and on a competitive basis.

More information on the fund can be obtained from the website: www. challengefunds.org. or by contacting the DFID public inquiry point on 01355 84 3132.

Since the launch of the fund in January 2001, there has been one completed bidding round—with the second bidding round presently in progress. In the first bidding round, the fund panel approved four projects. Contracts for the implementation of these projects are currently being concluded with the bidders, with projects either just commencing or due to commence shortly. The four projects approved will receive grants amounting to circa £700,000.

The four projects approved were all submitted by consortiums. In total, 12 companies, five public bodies, three non-governmental organisations and one university department are expected to be involved in these four consortiums.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the President of the Council (1) what fairly traded products, other than tea and coffee, have been purchased by his Department in each of the last five years; and what their value was; [17553]

(2) what the value is of fairly traded *(a)* tea and *(b)* coffee used in his Department in each of the last five years. [17552]

Mr. Robin Cook: None. The Privy Council Office does not, however, have a refreshment facility in which it could stock fair trade goods.

First Order Questions

Paul Goggins: To ask the President of the Council what plans he has to change the rota for first order questions. [21596]

Mr. Robin Cook: From January 2002 there will be two changes:

(i) Trade and Industry questions will be reduced to 50 minutes, so as to provide Members with 10 minutes to question the Secretary of State covering her role as Minister for Women.

(ii) Provision has also been made during questions to the Church Commissioners, and Public Accounts Commission for Members to question the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gibraltar

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next proposes to meet his Spanish counterpart as part of the Brussels process. [18894]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Spanish Foreign Minister propose to hold a further ministerial meeting of the Brussels Process in early next year.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the geographical limits of the administrative area of Gibraltar as defined in Article 10 of the Treaty of Utrecht. [18898]

Peter Hain: The territory of Gibraltar includes both the Rock and the southern part of the Isthmus connecting the Rock to Spain; UK title is based on both the treaty of Utrecht and continuous possession over a long period of time. The Government are confident of the UK's title to the territory.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when *(a)* he and *(b)* one of the Ministers in his Department visited Gibraltar in the last four years and when (i) he and (ii) one of the Ministers in his Department propose to do so. [18899]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State hopes to pay his first visit as Foreign Secretary to Gibraltar early in 2002. Over the last four years, the following Ministers for Europe have visited Gibraltar:

Dates	*Ministers*
22–23 July 1999	Joyce Quin
10–11 May 2000	Keith Vaz
6 September 2001	Peter Hain

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment was made at the recent meeting in Barcelona between himself and his Spanish counterpart of the level of cross-border smuggling from Gibraltar. [18897]

Peter Hain: The Spanish Foreign Minister and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did not discuss the issue of cross-border smuggling at the ministerial meeting of the Brussels Process in Barcelona on 20 November.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, as part of the negotiations with Spain, the Government are discussing giving inhabitants of Gibraltar the right to vote in elections to the European Parliament. [19965]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Watts) on 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1081W.

The decision to extend the European Parliamentary franchise to Gibraltar in this way is for the UK. But, in preparing to take this step we have been in contact with all interested parties, including Spain.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what statement the Spanish Foreign Minister made relating to the ability of EU citizens resident in Gibraltar to vote in European parliamentary elections during his recent meeting with UK Ministers. [20227]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Watts) on 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1081W.

At the meeting in Barcelona on 20 November, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Spanish Foreign Minister welcomed progress on a number of issues, including enfranchisement for the purpose of elections to the European Parliament.

EU Arms Exports Embargo

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Government are taking to make the EU embargo on arms exports to the Great Lakes Region legally binding. [18907]

Mr. Bradshaw: There is no EU arms embargo for the Great Lakes Region. An EU arms embargo against the Democratic Republic of Congo was announced in a Declaration on 7 April 1993.

International Terrorism

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking within the UN Security Council to establish a tribunal to try for crimes against humanity persons allegedly responsible for preparation and commission of *(a)* the 11 September attacks in the US and *(b)* other international terrorist crimes. [19894]

Mr. Bradshaw: International criminal courts are not a substitute for national jurisdictions. Their function is to prosecute perpetrators of crimes for which a relevant national jurisdiction is unable or unwilling to take action. That does not apply in the case of the 11 September attacks. Setting up a new international court or tribunal to try terrorism would cause great delay, not least since there is no internationally agreed definition of terrorism.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will reply to the letter to him dated 4 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Mohammad Azam. [20364]

Mr. Bradshaw: I regret that, due to an administrative error, my right hon. Friend has not yet received a reply to his letter of 4 October.

The matter is being checked urgently and a reply will be sent in the next few days.

Missile Technology Control Regime

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place a copy of the Draft International Code of Conduct, agreed to by members of the Missile Technology Control Regime at their plenary session in Ottawa during September in the Library. [20505]

Mr. Bradshaw: A copy of the draft International Code of Conduct on Ballistic Missiles was placed in the Library of the House on 15 November 2001.

European Union (Public Attitudes)

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to survey public attitudes to the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [21008]

Peter Hain: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office commissioned ICM to conduct opinion research to find out what the British public know about our membership of the European Union, which issues they believe are important, what information they want, and how they want it delivered.

I will place the full results in the Libraries of both Houses on Wednesday 5 December.

Balkans

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in rebuilding the Balkans, with particular reference to the Serbian oil, chemical and motor manufacturing industry. [18197]

Mr. MacShane: The Government together with EU partners are committed to rebuilding and developing the Balkans. Under the Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation regulation agreed by the Council of Ministers in December 2000, 4.65 billion euros of EU assistance has been allocated to the region for the period 2001–06.

The Serbian car, oil and chemical sectors have made progress since 1999. We understand that the Zastava car manufacturing plant aims to produce 7,500 vehicles in 2001 and has signed a four year export agreement with Syria. The Pancevo oil refinery now operates at full capacity and may exceed its current plans to refine 2.1 million tonnes of oil in 2001. The re-opening of the Danube to commercial traffic on 29 November 2001, will assist trade development in these commodities and goods from and to Serbia and the surrounding area.

Zimbabwe

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on *(a)* the progress of the Abuja Agreement in Zimbabwe and *(b)* the prospects for the elections next year. [18634]

Mr. Bradshaw: We continue to encourage the Government of Zimbabwe to honour the commitments they made in Abuja on 6 September. However, their actions over the past three months show scant regard for these commitments and have seriously undermined the Abuja Agreement.

With Commonwealth, SADC, EU partners and other concerned members of the international community, we continue to encourage the Government of Zimbabwe to create a climate conducive to free and fair elections. It is clear that there have to be significant changes in the arrangements which President Mugabe is in practice willing to put in place for observers to the election process, and the election process itself, if that election is to carry any credibility with the rest of the world and with voters in Zimbabwe.

Sellafield

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the United Kingdom submission to the United

Nations Commission on the law of the sea in the case brought by the Irish Republic on the Sellafield MOX plant on 19 November; and if he will make a statement. [17939]

Mr. Straw: On 9 November 2001, Ireland submitted a request for the prescription of provisional measures to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (The MOX Plant Case). The United Kingdom's Written Response, dated 15 November 2001, and the United Kingdom's oral submissions at the hearing on 19 and 20 November are on the Tribunal's website: www.itlos.org. I hope my hon. Friend finds this an acceptable response.

Yemen

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Yemen. [20252]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our relations with Yemen are firmly founded on our historic links. Relations have improved since the low-point of the Abyan incident in 1998. We welcome President Saleh's strong condemnation of the attacks in the USA and his co-operation in the fight against terrorism. We are in close touch with the Yemenis on this and on other issues such as the British prisoners detained in Aden.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* the US Government, *(b)* the United Nations and *(c)* other coalition partners concerning (i) terrorist organisations in Yemen and (ii) the policy of the Government of Yemen towards such organisations. [19127]

Mr. Bradshaw: We regularly discuss Yemen (including terrorist issues) as well as many other countries, both formally and informally with the US and other Governments. The contents of these talks remain confidential. There was a brief discussion of suspected terrorists in Yemen at the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee on 25 October.

We are grateful for the positive Yemeni approach to counter-terrorism. The Government of Yemen have HMG's support in their efforts to combat terrorism.

Suicide Terrorists

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the need for an inquiry into international preparedness for the willingness of suicide terrorists to use aircraft and other vehicles to inflict substantial loss of life. [19775]

Mr. Bradshaw: We take the threat of international terrorism very seriously and attach great importance to deterrence and prevention of terrorist activity. Since the horrific terrorist attacks in the US on 11 September the international community has intensified co-operation on responses to international terrorism, for example, reviewing safeguards in respect of aviation security. We are also working across Government to ensure that our own contingency plans represent the best possible response to a range of situations.

We do not believe that an inquiry into international preparedness would help us prevent or respond more effectively to terrorist attacks.

Albania

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Albanian Government with respect to the assassination attempt on Mr. Azzan Haklaj. [19581]

Mr. MacShane: This incident is the subject of an Albanian judicial investigation. With our partners in the international community, we are monitoring developments closely.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment is of the recent parliamentary elections in Albania, with special reference to *(a)* organisation and *(b)* conduct. [19582]

Mr. MacShane: A report published in October by the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) praised the improved organisation and conduct of the elections. It highlighted a number of cases of manipulation, for which it identified the Socialist Party, rather than Prime Minister's Meta's Government, as responsible. The ODIHR report made clear that these shortcomings were not such as to affect the overall result. We continue to encourage and support Albanian efforts to address any flaws and to strengthen the democratic process.

Kosovo

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the level of gun running into Kosovo from Bosnian sources. [19583]

Mr. MacShane: Arms have been smuggled into Kosovo from various sources, including a low level of trafficking from Bosnia and Herzegovina. In an effort to tackle this activity and strengthen law and order structures in Kosovo, in June 2001 the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) adopted legislation against the illegal possession of arms, illegal border crossings in and out of Kosovo, and terrorism. The United Kingdom strongly supports these measures.

Afghanistan

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the importance of the BBC World Service during the conflict in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [19975]

Mr. MacShane: Public service broadcasting is important at a time of international tension when millions of people around the world rely on the BBC's objective reporting. In response to the events of 11 September the BBC World Service has increased output in Persian, Pashto, Urdu and Arabic and mounted its longest-ever continuous news transmission in English. I welcome these enhancements. A survey carried out among Pashto and Persian-speaking male heads of household in Afghanistan before the crisis indicated that 71 per cent. of Pashto speakers and 62 per cent. of Persian speakers listened to the World Service weekly.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many countries he has visited since 7 June. [20253]

Mr. Straw: I have visited 17 countries since 7 June, in a number of cases more than once.

Cuba

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Cuba. [20256]

Mr. MacShane: Britain has a good relationship with Cuba. Bilateral visits, trade links and exchanges in new areas of co-operation continue to develop. We are committed to a policy of constructive engagement with Cuba, based on critical dialogue and practical co-operation. Through our frank and open discussions we cover a wide range of issues of common interest, including human rights.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Decommissioning

4. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent progress has been made towards decommissioning. [18095]

Dr. John Reid: The IICD reported, on 23 October, that it had witnessed the IRA putting a quantity of arms, ammunition and explosives completely beyond use, in accordance with the decommissioning scheme and regulations.

It also undertook to continue its contact with the IRA in pursuit of its mandate.

19. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress in decommissioning of illegally held weapons and explosives since 23 October. [18112]

Jane Kennedy: In its report of 23 October the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning reported that it would be continuing its contact with the IRA representative in the pursuit of its mandate.

All paramilitary groups should now build on this very significant progress. The Good Friday Agreement committed all participants to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. This can only be achieved through the legal framework of the Decommissioning Commission.

23. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement regarding the progress made in decommissioning. [18116]

Jane Kennedy: The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning reported on 23 October that it had witnessed a quantity of IRA arms being put beyond use according to the terms of the decommissioning schemes and regulations. However, in the interest of furthering the process of putting all arms beyond use, the Commission declined to provide further details.

All paramilitary groups should now build on this very significant progress. The Good Friday Agreement committed all participants to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. This can only be achieved through the legal framework of the Decommissioning Commission.

Criminal Justice Review

6. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the criminal justice review. [18097]

10. **Sandra Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the criminal justice review. [18103]

12. **Mr. Borrow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the criminal justice review. [18105]

27. **Jean Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent action the Government have taken to improve confidence in the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. [18121]

Mr. Browne: We have published a draft Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill and an implementation plan to take forward the recommendations of the review of the criminal justice system. We are consulting on our response to the review and expect to introduce the legislation in this Session. Our response to the review marks another key step in implementing the Belfast Agreement.

This was the most important review of its kind to have been undertaken in Northern Ireland in the last 30 years. The criminal justice system has served the people of Northern Ireland well over many years, often in very difficult circumstances. The review is radical and progressive, maintaining the best of the old system while integrating applicable international concepts and practices.

I want to ensure that everyone interested in the future of criminal justice in Northern Ireland has adequate opportunity to have their say and to contribute to the effectiveness of our proposals. I am therefore extending the period of consultation by a further four weeks to 7 January 2001.

Organised Crime

7. **Mr. Hendrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the organised crime taskforce. [18099]

11. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what initiatives the Government have put in place to tackle organised crime in Northern Ireland. [18104]

20. **Mr. McCabe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the organised crime taskforce. [18113]

Jane Kennedy: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), *Official Report*, columns 320-21.

22. **David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to tackle *(a)* paramilitary and *(b)* organised crime in Northern Ireland. [18115]

Jane Kennedy: The Government utterly condemn all paramilitary violence and intimidation and remain resolute in the fight against the illegal activities of paramilitary organisations. We will continue to ensure that the Chief Constable and the GOC have the resources at their disposal to meet the threat. With regard to organised crime, the Government are tackling this on a number of fronts. The organised crime problem is sophisticated and our response is too.

The organised crime taskforce has been in operation for just over a year and has overseen structural improvements in the way organised crime is tackled. Links between the various agencies are developing. This is leading to operational success such as the 42.5 million cigarettes seized in Warrenpoint Harbour during a search of a vessel which had just arrived from Latvia: the largest ever such seizure in the United Kingdom.

We must keep up the fight against organised crime and we must continue to increase the effectiveness of our response. We are in this for the long haul and everyone in Northern Ireland has a role to play in tackling organised crime.

Paramilitary Violence

8. **Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland since 1 November. [18101]

Jane Kennedy: The main republican paramilitary groups' ceasefires are still holding. However, dissidents continue to pose a threat.

The main loyalist paramilitary groups UDA/UFF, and the smaller group LVF, have been specified on 23 October. The Secretary of State keeps all ceasefires under review.

However, during the month paramilitary groups on both sides have continued to exercise control over their communities through fear and acts of intimidation.

The Government utterly condemn all paramilitary violence and intimidation and remain resolute in the fight against terrorism.

A copy of the security statistics from 15 November to 27 November is as follows:

Security situation statistics 1–27 November 2001

	Number
Deaths	1
Shooting incidents	27
Bombing incidents	17
Casualties as a result of Paramilitary:	
Assaults	6
Shootings	13

Notes:

1. Includes all deaths due to the security situation.

2. The following types of incidents are included:

Shots fired by terrorists

Shots fired by the security forces

Paramilitary style attacks involving shootings

Shots heard (and later confirmed)

Other violent incidents where shots are fired (eg armed robbery)

3. An individual bombing incident may involve one or more explosive devices. Incidents recorded include explosions and defusings. Incidents involving hoax devices, petrol bombings or incendiaries are excluded.

4. 2001 statistics are provisional and may be subject to minor amendment.

16. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the level of violence and intimidation by paramilitary groups. [18109]

Jane Kennedy: Terrorist violence has remained at a significant level. The following table gives a breakdown of that violence from 1 January 2001 to 26 November 2001.

Security situation statistics 1 January–26 November 2001

	Number
Deaths	14
Shooting incidents	329
Bombing incidents	325
Casualties as a result of Paramilitary:	
Assaults	128
Shootings	174

Notes:

1. 2001 statistics are provisional and may be subject to minor amendment.

2. Includes all deaths due to the security situation.

3. The following types of incidents are included:

Shots fired by terrorists

Shots fired by the security forces

Paramilitary style attacks involving shootings

Shots heard (and later confirmed)

Other violent incidents where shots are fired (eg armed robbery)

4. An individual bombing incident may involve one or more explosive devices. Incidents recorded include explosions and defusings. Incidents involving hoax devices, petrol bombings or incendiaries are excluded.

Religious Bigotry

9. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to reduce religious bigotry as part of the peace process. [18102]

Dr. John Reid: In my speech at the recent Labour party conference I reiterated the Government's commitment to eradicating all forms of intolerance in Northern Ireland, and promised to criminalise such manifestations of hatred, whether based on racism or based on sectarianism. To that end it is my intention to consult in the new year on how best to tackle crime committed because of either racial or religious intolerance.

Security

13. **Mr. Dodds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland. [18106]

Jane Kennedy: We continue to monitor the activities of all paramilitary groups who are on ceasefire. There is a significant threat from dissident republican paramilitaries and from disaffected elements within loyalism who are intent in continuing with their campaign to disrupt the peace process. We congratulate the security forces on their continued success against these groups as evidenced by the recent discovery last month of a fully primed bomb in Armagh.

Voting Procedures

14. **Valerie Davey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals the Government have introduced for changes to the voting procedures in the Northern Ireland Assembly. [18107]

Dr. John Reid: The Government have not made proposals to change Assembly voting procedures. However, I have established a review under paragraph 36 of Strand One of the Belfast Agreement to look at whether there is scope for some amendment, to which all of the Assembly parties have been invited to participate. The review group will issue a statement after it concludes its discussions next week.

Police Recruitment

15. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in implementing the new police recruitment process; and if he will make a statement. [18108]

Jane Kennedy: The new recruitment arrangements for the Police Service of Northern Ireland, as recommended by the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland, have been implemented in full. The first recruitment competition to be run in accordance with these procedures will enable the Chief Constable to appoint around 300 recruits on a 50 per cent. Catholic, 50 per cent. non-Catholic basis, as the Commission envisaged. The first tranche of new recruits began training on 4 November.

18. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next expects to meet the Chief Constable to discuss recruitment; and if he will make a statement. [18111]

Jane Kennedy: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State meets the Chief Constable on a regular basis to discuss a range of issues, including recruitment. The first recruitment competition to be run in accordance with the new procedures will enable the Chief Constable to appoint around 300 recruits on a 50 per cent. Catholic, 50 per cent. non-Catholic basis, as the Commission envisaged. The first tranche of new recruits began training on 4 November.

Police Service

17. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the Gaelic Athletic Association on the promotion of a police service that attracts support from all sections of the community in Northern Ireland. [18110]

Dr. John Reid: I have not had any discussions with the Gaelic Athletic Association on either matter.

21. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the ability of the police service of Northern Ireland to carry out its duties in the absence of a full-time reserve. [18114]

Jane Kennedy: As the published Implementation Plan on the Patten report states, a review of the prevailing security situation and policing requirements is to be carried out by the Chief Constable next spring when the first new recruits complete their training. A decision on the phasing out of the full-time reserve will be taken in the light of the findings of that review.

Good Friday Agreement

24. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the prospects for securing the full implementation of the Good Friday agreement; and if he will make a statement. [18117]

Dr. John Reid: The Government believe that prospects for the full implementation of the Belfast Agreement are very good following the significant progress made in recent weeks. This has included IRA decommissioning; the stabilisation of the political institutions; further normalisation; and the publication of the Criminal Justice Implementation Plan. We are committed to building on these developments to ensure steady and continued progress.

Assembly and Executive

25. **Paul Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the future of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive. [18118]

Dr. John Reid: The devolved institutions are now established on a very stable basis following the successful election of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister by over 70 per cent. of the Members of the Assembly. We are committed to working to ensure their continued stability, and we will continue to encourage everyone to facilitate their full and unfettered operation in the future.

Bombing Campaign

26. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent assessment he has made of the capabilities of republican terrorist networks to mount a sustained bombing campaign. [18119]

Jane Kennedy: The Secretary of State continues to monitor the ceasefires of all paramilitary groups. He receives regular briefings from the Chief Constable and his senior security advisers. The decision by the IRA to decommission its weapons has led the Chief Constable to conclude there to be a reduction in the threat to enable further normalisation measures to proceed. However, we are not complacent. There remains a significant threat from dissident republican groups as evidenced by the recent bomb found in Armagh.

Republican Terrorist Groups

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the level of threat posed by dissident republican terrorist groups. [18100]

Jane Kennedy: The level of threat posed by dissident republican groups remains high. Dissidents are believed responsible for the bomb attack on Woodbourne Police Station in October. The security forces continue to frustrate their attempts to disrupt the peace process. The most recent successes are the arrests and subsequent charges of republicans after the discovery of a bomb in Armagh, ammunition finds in Lurgan and Moira. Anti-terrorist Branch officers also recently made a number of arrests in north London and Liverpool in connection with the bomb attacks in London and Birmingham.

Gaelic Athletic Association

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had with the Gaelic Athletic Association on its change of rules to allow fixtures against teams representing the police in Northern Ireland. [18098]

Dr. John Reid: I have not had any discussions with the Gaelic Athletic Association on either matter.

TREASURY

Unemployment Count

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown of the average monthly flow from the unemployment count of claimants aged 18 to 24 and unemployed for *(a)* every six months from April 1993 to May 1997 and *(b)* each year under the New Deal. [20461]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Bercow, dated 5 December 2001:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question regarding average monthly flow from the claimant count for people aged 18 to 24 years. (20461)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) compiles statistics for unemployment from surveys following the internationally standard International Labour Organisation definition. ONS also compiles statistics of claimants of unemployment-related benefits. The claimant count consists of all people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or National Insurance credits at Employment Service local offices. They must declare that they are out of work, capable of, available for and actively seeking work during the week in which the claim is made.

Information on the levels of computerised claims by age can be obtained from the Nomis® database at the House of Commons Library. Computerised claims do not include clerical claims which currently make up about one per cent. of the total claimant count.

Census (Twickenham)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the results of the 2001 census for Twickenham will be published. [20623]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Dr. Vincent Cable, dated 5 December 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on when the results of the 2001 Census for Twickenham will be published. I am replying in his absence (20623).

The target date for summary Census results—Key Statistics for local authority areas throughout England and Wales is December 2002. They will be laid before Parliament and accessible through the National Statistics website at www.statistics.gov.uk. Detailed results for local authority areas and wards will be available throughout the first half of 2003.

Census data for the Parliamentary Constituency of Twickenham are planned to be published in the second half of 2003.

A prospectus giving more detail on publication dates will be issued at the beginning of next year and will be available on the website.

Graduate Earnings

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the average annual earnings for graduates in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [20359]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Stephen Hepburn, dated 5 December 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the average annual earnings for graduates. I am replying in his absence. (20359)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of average gross weekly earnings for graduates of working age (i.e. men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59) who have a first degree qualification or higher.

The figures for summer (June to August) 1999, 2000 and 2001, are given in the table below.

Average gross weekly earnings of working-age[1] graduates who are full-time[2] employees; United Kingdom; summer (June to August) 1999, 2000 and 2001; not seasonally adjusted

	Average gross weekly earnings (£)
Summer 1999	538
Summer 2000	567
Summer 2001	601

[1] Men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59.

[2] The definition of full-time is based on respondents' self-assessment not on the number of hours worked

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Financial Products (Quality Standards)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he plans to take to define quality standards for retail financial products. [20207]

Ruth Kelly: The Government have already introduced benchmark standards for Individual Savings Accounts and mortgages. These standards apply to charges, access and terms, and are known as CAT standards.

In response to proposals in the March 2000 report of the Banking Review led by Don Cruickshank, the Treasury consulted on possible new CAT standards for credit cards and basic bank accounts earlier this year.

The consultation document, "Standards for retail financial products", explored the case for such standards in detail.

The Government are considering the many responses that were received.

In the case of stakeholder pensions the Government require provider companies to comply with a set of minimum standards, which have similar aims in seeking to offer decent value to consumers.

Pre-Budget Report

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the plans for 2000–01 on the basis of the Department's listed resource/capital distinction set out in Table B.16 of the pre-Budget report. [20291]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Spending within departmental expenditure limits for resource and capital budgets for 2000–01 was set out in the 2001 pre-Budget report (Cm 5318). Plans in resource and capital terms were last stated in table C13 of Budget 2001 (HC 279).

Cross-border Payments

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he intends to include sterling denominated payments within the scope of the proposed regulation on cross-border payments in euros. [21456]

Ruth Kelly: The Government do not intend to extend the scope of the proposed Regulation on cross-border payments in euro to sterling denominated payments. The approach taken in the Regulation is inconsistent with the competition-based approach that we believe is the better way of tackling the problem of market failure in cross-border payments. Such an approach would be consistent with our commitment to introduce a new regime for regulating competition in domestic payment systems—as recommended by the Cruickshank report. Not including sterling denominated payments would also avoid the potentially counter-productive effects arising from the proposed Regulation that could be damaging to consumers.

Regulatory Standards (Crown Dependencies)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he takes to monitor and scrutinise the regulatory standards in the Crown Dependencies. [20209]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's policy is to encourage all offshore centres, including the Crown Dependencies, to meet the highest international standards of regulation, supervision and fair tax competition.

Financial Regulation (British Overseas Territories)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the recommendations are of the KPMG report on the state of financial regulation in the British overseas territories; and what steps have been taken to implement them. [20208]

Ruth Kelly: The KPMG Review of Financial Regulation in the Caribbean Overseas Territories and Bermuda recommended: the establishment of independent regulatory authorities; the introduction of investigative powers to assist inquiries by overseas regulators; and the establishment of comprehensive anti-money laundering networks.

All the overseas territories now have comprehensive money laundering frameworks fully in place.

Good progress has been made in providing the legal basis for the introduction of powers to obtain information to assist foreign regulators. The Cayman Island, the British Virgin Islands, the Turks and Caicos Islands and Montserrat have already introduced relevant provision. Bermuda's existing regulatory powers are being strengthened. Anguilla has compulsory powers legislation in draft.

Considerable progress has been made in establishing independent regulatory authorities. The Turks and Caicos Islands have introduced legislation to establish an independent authority and legislation is in an advanced stage in the British Virgin Islands, Anguilla and Montserrat. Bermuda already has an independent authority for banking and securities; it is now proceeding to complete the process for the insurance sector by the end of 2001. Cayman expects to enact the relevant legislation in the first quarter of 2002.

The Caribbean Overseas Territories and Bermuda have made a commitment substantially to implement the remainder of the KPMG recommendations by the summer of 2002. They have agreed to publish further reports by February 2002 explaining how their implementation plans are progressing. This should place them in a strong position prior to their forthcoming examination by the International Monetary Fund under the Financial Stability Forum's initiative into offshore financial centres.

The overseas territories and Bermuda have pledged to play their full part in the international efforts to close off financial networks to terrorism as effectively as dealing with other types of serious criminal activity.

The UK Government will continue to work closely with the overseas territories both on closing off financial networks as well as on the implementation of the KMPG recommendations with the aim of helping them meet international standards in full.

Stamp Duty

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place a list in the Library of the wards which are to qualify for the exemption from stamp duty up to £150,000; and if he will make a statement explaining the basis of selection. [19989]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* A list of the areas which qualify for the stamp duty exemption for disadvantaged areas was placed in the Library on 27 November 2001. The qualifying areas were identified by reference to each country's most recent index of deprivation.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason the *(a)* Milton, *(b)* St. Lukes and *(c)* Victoria wards in Southend on Sea did not qualify for the exemption from stamp duty announced on 27 November. [19990]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* For England, the exemption is available for the 15 per cent. most deprived wards as identified by the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000. The wards of Milton, St. Lukes and Victoria in Southend on Sea do not fall within this category.

Lloyd's

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library his response to queries from the European Commission about regulation of Lloyd's in accordance with Directive 73/239. [20900]

Ruth Kelly: The European Commission has made informal inquiries about the regulation of Lloyd's in accordance with Directive 73/239, but it has not notified the UK that in its opinion a breach has occurred. It is not the Government's policy to release informal correspondence of this sort with the Commission. However, the Government remain of the view that the requirements of EC legislation in respect of Lloyd's have been and are being properly implemented.

Building Insurance

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will regulate the fees by mortgage lenders to customers who choose *(a)* alternative provision for their building insurance when they take out a mortgage and *(b)* to switch providers for building insurance at a later stage. [20835]

Ruth Kelly: I have no plans to do so.

Capital Spending

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown of total Government capital spending for each year since April 1992. [20477]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Table 3.7 of the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2001–02 provides a breakdown of capital spending for each year back to 1995–96. Corresponding breakdowns are not available for earlier years on a consistent basis.

Crude Oil Prices

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumptions he made (1) in preparing table B9, page 175 of the pre-Budget report, about the level of crude oil prices in each year up to and including 2006–07; [20192]

(2) preparing Table B8, page 174 of the pre-Budget report about the level of crude oil prices in each year up to and including 2002–03. [20191]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answers 3 December 2001]*: The oil prices underlying the pre-Budget report projections are:

	$/barrel
2000	27.9
2001	24.5
2002	22.9
2003	23.3
2004	23.6
2005	23.9
2006	24.1

As set out in Box B1 on page 169 of the pre-Budget report, the assumption for 2002 is based on the average of independent forecasts, in line with the NAO audited assumption.

EU (Fraud)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate has he made of the cost to the UK taxpayer of fraud in the European Union. [20479]

Ruth Kelly: The European Commission is responsible for publishing statistics on fraud and irregularities against the EC budget. Its latest report including figures for detected irregularities was published in May 2001, entitled "Protecting the Community's financial interests and the Fight against Fraud", and is available on the internet. Details of the developments described in the Commission's report are also set out in the Government's July 2001 "Statement on the 2001 EC Budget and Measures to Counter Fraud and Financial Mismanagement", Cm 5173.

Care should be taken in interpreting the statistics because the Commission's report does not distinguish between cases of fraud and irregularities. Errors arise when, for example, payments are made outside prescribed time limits or using the wrong exchange rates. Moreover, increases in the level of detected errors may be attributed to improved detection and notification of cases by member states.

Special Advisers and Press Officers

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers were employed (i) full time, (ii) part time and (iii) on a contract basis by his Department in each year since 1992. [6877]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 21 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 340W.

The number of press officers employed by HM Treasury has remained broadly constant since 1992. There are currently seven, in addition to the Head of Communications.

Airline Industry

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to extend the Government's temporary underwriting of third party war risk insurance for the UK airline industry. [20118]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government's replacement insurance scheme for UK airlines and service providers was due to expire at midnight on 23 November. Assessment of the aviation insurance market demonstrated that commercial capacity for underwriting third-party war and terrorism liabilities above $50 million has not yet returned. It is unlikely that there will be any significant return of commercial insurance until reinsurance contracts are renegotiated at the beginning of January, which will shape the whole of the aviation industry, including aviation, for the next 12 months. Therefore the Treasury announced on 22 November that it had decided to extend the airline insurance scheme until midnight on 22 January 2002.

Public Expenditure (Health)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost of raising public expenditure on health to the EU average by 2005. [19980]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Health service expenditure plans for the period between 2003–04 and 2005–06 will be set in the 2002 spending review.

Tax Credits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what basis he determines whether a tax credit is classed as public expenditure. [19808]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Treasury's calculation of net taxes and social security contributions treats all tax credits as reductions in tax collected since working families and business tax credits appear as reductions in their tax bills.

The Treasury's calculation of public sector receipts, drawn from ONS's national accounts, treats some tax credits as public expenditure, as explained in the ONS publication "National Accounts Concepts Sources and Methods", Doggett 1998, 21.69 to 21.71.

Debt Repayment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his oral statement of 7 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 297, on debt repayment, on which lines in which tables in the March 2001 Financial Statement and Budget report his statement is based. [17307]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The 2001 Budget estimate for the public sector net cash requirement (PSNCR) in 2000–01 is given in the net cash requirement line of table C20 of the March 2001 Financial Statement and Budget report. A negative figure for PSNCR implies the repayment of debt. Historical estimates of the PSNCR from 1963–64 are available from the Office for National Statistics. For the years 1951–52 to 1962–63, ONS estimates of public sector net borrowing have been used. These were positive in each year, implying no significant repayment of debt.

E-mail Information Service

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason subscribers to the Treasury's e-mail information service do not receive e-mails automatically informing them of news releases, services or documentation being made available by the Treasury; and if he will make a statement. [16708]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has an e-mail information service which provides subscribers with e-mails notifying them of news releases from the Treasury. The service is currently available and can be accessed by visiting the Department's website at http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the value for money of public expenditure on *(a)* education, *(b)* defence and *(c)* health care; and if he will make a statement. [18882]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Departments publish performance against their value for money targets in their spring departmental reports or, in the case of the Ministry of Defence, in its autumn performance report.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Parliamentary Ombudsman

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many formal notices his Department has received in the last year from the Parliamentary Ombudsman expressing an intention to carry out an investigation; and in respect of each notice how long it took to respond. [18764]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* Information on the outcome of statutory investigations which were concluded during 2000–01 are set out in the Parliamentary Ombudsman's Annual report for 2000–01, copies of which are available in the Library, or on the Parliamentary Ombudsman's website at www.ombudsman.org.uk/pca/document/par01/index.htm.

Between 1 April 2001 and 31 October 2001, the Home Office has received seven new statutory statements of complaint from the Parliamentary Ombudsman. So far, we have responded to six of these cases, and the average time taken to respond overall is 27 and a half days.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his assessment is of the average additional cost of supporting an asylum seeker if the EC draft directive laying down minimum standards in the reception of applicants for asylum in member states were implemented. [6060]

Angela Eagle: The European Commission draft directive laying down minimum standards on the reception of applicants for asylum is currently under negotiation. The costs of implementation remain to be quantified and will depend on the final terms of the directive.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people applied for asylum to the UK this year from *(a)* Russia, *(b)* Ukraine, *(c)* Latvia, *(d)* Lithuania, *(e)* Estonia and *(f)* Georgia; and of these how many have been granted leave to stay. [19934]

Angela Eagle: The number of asylum applications from nationals of Russia, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Georgia this year is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Applications for asylum lodged between January and September 2001 (inclusive) by selected nationalities, principal applicants[1,2]

Month	*Asylum applications*
Russia	335
Ukraine	340
Latvia	85
Lithuania	170
Estonia	35
Georgia	90

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest five

[2] Provisional figures

The number of initial decisions made this year on applications for asylum from nationals of these countries are shown in Table 2, however information regarding initial decisions does not necessarily relate to applications made in the same period.

Table 2: Decisions made between January and September 2001 (inclusive) on applications for asylum from selected nationalities, principal applicants[1,2]

	Total initial decisions	Granted asylum		of which: Granted ELR		Refusals	
	Level	*Level*	*Percentage*	*Level*	*Percentage*	*Level*	*Percentage*
Russia	760	15	2	35	4	710	94
Ukraine	1,000	5	1	15	2	980	98
Latvia	350	[3]—	1	[3]—	1	345	99
Lithuania	585	[3]—	0	25	4	560	96
Estonia	245	—	0	—	0	245	100
Georgia	170	10	5	5	3	155	92

[1] Levels rounded to the nearest five

[2] Provisional figures

[3] 1 or 2

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those who have failed in their application for asylum status have been removed from the UK in 2001; and if he will make a statement. [20160]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The latest available information is given in the table.

Asylum removals in 2001[1,2]

	Q1 2001	*Q2 2001*	*Q3 2001*
Principal applicants removed	2,070	2,375	2,385
Dependants removed[3]	[4]—	215	355
Total asylum seekers removed	[4]—	2,590	2,745

[1] Provisional figures, rounded to the nearest five. Figures may not sum due to rounding

[2] Includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action had been initiated against them and persons leaving under Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes run by the IOM

[3] Data on dependants of asylum seekers removed have only been collected since April 2001

[4] Not applicable

Information on the number of asylum removals is published on a quarterly basis. The next set of data will be published on 28 February 2002 on the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate website http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his target is for removing asylum seekers whose application for asylum in the UK has failed; if this target has recently changed; and if he will make a statement. [20162]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The current Service Delivery Agreement target relating to the removal of failed asylum seekers from the United Kingdom is to remove 3,000 in 2001–02; 33,000 in 2002–03; and 37,000 in 2003–04. The totals include dependants.

The 30,000 target for this year has always been extremely ambitious and high risk. No European country has achieved levels of this kind and the Home Secretary announced in the House as early as 27 June that the target would not be met. We aim to remove at the rate of 2,500 per month from early next year.

Police Statistics

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* uniformed full-time officers, *(b)* special constables and *(c)* civilian staff there are per thousand of population in each English constabulary. [8625]

Mr. Denham: Details of the numbers of special constables and civilian staff per 1,000 population are given in the table. Numbers of uniformed full-time officers are not collected centrally; number of full-time equivalent police officers per 100,000 population by police force area are given in table three in Home Office Statistical Bulletin 10/01, entitled "Police Service Strength England and Wales, 31 March 2001", published on 28 June 2001.

Strength as at 31 March 2001, by police force area—England

Police force	*Special constables per 1,000 population*[1]	*Civilian police staff per 1,000 population*[2]
Avon and Somerset	0.27	0.97
Bedfordshire	0.20	0.87
Cambridgeshire	0.30	0.85
Cheshire	0.30	0.85
Cleveland	0.17	1.05
Cumbria	0.32	1.20
Derbyshire	0.28	0.90
Devon and Cornwall	0.51	0.93
Dorset	0.39	0.99
Durham	0.24	0.93
Essex	0.28	0.89
Gloucestershire	0.33	0.90
Greater Manchester	0.14	1.11
Hampshire	0.26	0.83
Hertfordshire	0.19	0.90
Humberside	0.24	0.92
Kent	0.25	1.13
Lancashire	0.25	0.96
Leicestershire	0.17	0.86
Lincolnshire	0.26	0.89
London, City of[4]	—	—
Merseyside	0.39	1.01
Metropolitan Police[3]	0.11	1.41
Norfolk	0.33	0.87
Northamptonshire	0.30	1.12
Northumbria	0.21	1.00
North Yorkshire	0.24	0.79
Nottinghamshire	0.32	1.01
South Yorkshire	0.14	1.01
Staffordshire	0.38	0.88
Suffolk	0.52	0.92
Surrey	0.14	0.83

Strength as at 31 March 2001, by police force area—England

Police force	Special constables per 1,000 population[1]	Civilian police staff per 1,000 population[2]
Sussex	0.20	0.96
Thames Valley	0.20	0.89
Warwickshire	0.44	0.81
West Mercia	0.35	0.96
West Midlands	0.23	1.07
West Yorkshire	0.20	1.05
Wiltshire	0.25	1.02

[1] Special constable figures are based on number of staff.

[2] Civilian figures are based on full time equivalents.

[3] Staff per 1,000 population figures for City of London and Metropolitan Police are combined.

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on police numbers in South Yorkshire. [10385]

Mr. Denham: I understand from the Chief Constable that on 31 August the force had 3,203 police officers. This is six more officers than the force had in March 2001 and is a record number of officers. South Yorkshire Police has set a budgeted workforce total for 31 March 2002 of 3,200 officers. On 31 March 2001 the force had 1,312 civilian support staff, 21 more than in March 1997.

Sixty-seven recruits to South Yorkshire Police were funded by the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) in 2000–01 and the force expects to recruit 61 CFF officers in 2001–02.

Crime Rates (Bromley)

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many notifiable offences there were in the London borough of Bromley in each of the last five years; [9993]

(2) what the crime clear-up rate was in the London borough of Bromley in each of the last five years. [9994]

Mr. Denham: The requested details are given in the table. For the reason given, detection rates are not directly comparable over the years 1997–98 to 2000–01.

Recorded crimes and detection rates—borough of Bromley

Year ending March	Number of recorded crimes	Detection rates (Percentage)
1996–97	22,176	23
1997–98	20,356	24
1998–99[1]	24,172	20
1999–2000[2]	26,474	14
2000–01	26,142	13

[1] There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which expanded the offences covered, and placed a greater emphasis on counting crimes in terms of numbers of victims. Numbers of recorded crimes and detection rates after this date are therefore not directly comparable with previous years.

[2] There was a change in the guidance for counting detections on 1 April 1999, with the new guidance providing more precise and rigorous criteria for counting a detection. Detection rates after this date are therefore not directly comparable with previous years.

Public Bodies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those public bodies to which his Department appoints members and which are not listed in Public Bodies 2000. [17594]

Angela Eagle: Public Bodies 2000 sets out information on non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), certain public corporations (including nationalised industries) and NHS bodies. There are four types of NDPB: executive NDPBs; advisory NDPBs; tribunal NDPBs; and boards of visitors to penal establishments. The next edition will be published around the end of the year. Information about taskforces, and ad hoc advisory groups is set out in an annual report, published by the Cabinet Office. Copies of Public Bodies 2000 are in the Library and this publication may be accessed via the Cabinet Office's website http://www.official-documents.co.uk/document/caboff/pb00/pb00.htm. Copies of the annual report on taskforces and similar bodies have also been placed in the Library and the annual report is being made available on the Cabinet Office's website.

Home Office Ministers now appoint members to the following bodies, which are not listed in Public Bodies 2000:

Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (NDPB)

Annual Reviewer of the Criminal Justice (Conspiracy and Terrorism) Act 1998

Annual Reviewer of the Terrorism Act 2000

Asylum Support Adjudicators

Charity Commission

Criminal Justice Consultative Council

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of the National Probation Service for England and Wales

Immigration Nationality Directorate Complaints Audit Committee

Independent Assessor of Compensation for Miscarriages of Justice

Metropolitan Police Authority

Ministerial Advisory Group to the Retail Crime Reduction Action Team

National Probation Service

Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

Property Crime Reduction Action Team

Retail Crime Reduction Action Team

Selection Panels for Independent Members of the Police Authorities for 42 Provincial Forces

Service Authority for the National Criminal Intelligence Service

Service Authority for the National Crime Squad

Vehicle Crime Reduction Action Team

Visitor Committees for Immigration Detention Centres:

- Campsfield House
- Dungavel
- Harmondsworth
- Oakington
- Tinsley House
- Yarl's Wood.

In addition to the above, the Home Office also has responsibility for the following bodies, to which appointments are made by Her Majesty the Queen or the Prime Minister:

Investigatory Powers Tribunal (NDPB)

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary

Intelligence Services Commissioner

Interception of Communications Commissioner

Police Advisory Board.

Immigration

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he routinely takes to monitor immigration through south coast ports; and how that has increased since 11 September. [18393]

Angela Eagle: Passengers arriving at south coast ports are routinely examined by an immigration officer in order to establish their nationality and identity and whether they require leave to enter. The personal details of all such passengers are checked against the Immigration Service Warnings Index, a computer system, which provides information to immigration staff for the purpose of immigration control, national security and the prevention of crime. All Immigration Service staff at points of entry on the south coast have access to this system.

The Immigration Service also routinely conducts vehicle searches in order to detect people attempting to enter the United Kingdom clandestinely. Advanced scanning equipment including x-ray machines and carbon dioxide detectors have been introduced in order to assist in the detection of such people.

The Immigration Service is developing closer liaison with the French authorities and carriers in order to control the flow of passengers arriving in the United Kingdom without any identifying documentation. A United Kingdom liaison officer from the Immigration Service now operates alongside French colleagues in Paris and juxtaposed immigration controls were established at Waterloo and Paris this year, which enables passengers to be cleared before they pass through the channel tunnel. It has also had significant success in taking forward, in conjunction with the police, the prosecution of people suspected of having attempted to facilitate the illegal entry of inadequately documented foreign nationals.

Since 11 September all ports throughout the country have been put on a heightened state of alert. The Immigration Service has issued instructions to all operational officers advising them of the procedures to be followed, including closer liaison with the Security Services in the event of known or suspected terrorists being encountered.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedure is to be adopted by those seeking to enter the UK via ports without immigration controls or personnel; and how that has changed since 11 September. [18395]

Angela Eagle: Immigration Officers routinely attend ports which are normally unstaffed, in order to examine passengers arriving on services originating from outside the European Economic Area. Other services are closely monitored and carriers are required to fax passenger manifests to a designated local immigration office. The personal details of the passengers are checked against the Immigration Service Warnings Index. The Warnings Index computer system is the primary tool for providing information to staff operating the immigration entry control; it also provides information on matters of national security and the prevention of crime. All Immigration Service staff at points of entry have access to this system. If the passenger is a national of a country from outside the European Economic Area, and the immigration officer is satisfied that he qualifies for entry under the Immigration Rules, he will grant him leave to enter, normally following a telephone interview.

In order to preserve the integrity of the control immigration officers also make regular unannounced visits to unstaffed ports in order to ensure that the correct procedures are being followed. The Immigration Service maintains close links with Customs and Excise and the police, sharing intelligence where appropriate in relation to arriving passengers.

All ports around the country have been put on a heightened state of alert since 11 September and the Immigration Service has issued instructions to all officers advising them of the procedures to be followed, including close liaison with the security services, in the event of known or suspected terrorists being encountered.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff are engaged in monitoring immigration and immigration control through each south coast port; and how that has increased since 11 September. [18394]

Angela Eagle: Immigration staff are deployed on a permanent 24 hour basis at all designated points of entry on the south coast. As of 26 November, provisional figures indicate that 367 immigration officers and 106 assistant immigration officers are currently based at Dover, covering a range of functions including interviewing arriving passengers, searching freight vehicles and working at Coquelles, the point of entry for the Channel Tunnel in France. As of 26 November 2001, the staffing figures for the other south coast ports are given in the table.

Port	*Immigration Officers*	*Assistant Immigration Officers*
Dover	367	106
Newhaven	11	—
Portsmouth	38	6
Southampton	5	—
Poole	15	5
Plymouth	11	2
Total	447	119

I regret that the specific information requested on the increases in staffing levels since 11 September is not currently available. There is however an on-going national recruitment campaign for the Immigration Service. Between April 2000 and October 2001 staffing levels at Poole, Plymouth, Portsmouth and Southampton increased by 113 per cent., 47 per cent., 43 per cent. and 45 per cent. respectively. Additional resources will be targeted for the south-east region over the next 12 months.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons are known to have entered the UK via ports without immigration personnel, *(a)* in the last 12 months and *(b)* since 11 September. [18396]

Angela Eagle: I regret that the information requested is not currently available.

Drugs

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the efficiency of the proportion of the drugs budget that has been spent on *(a)* treatment, *(b)* the criminal justice system and *(c)* anti-drugs education in (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) Council of Europe countries. [19716]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Proactive expenditure directly targeted at tackling drug misuse and drug trafficking will total some £932 million in 2001–02 (excluding devolved spending). This is broadly allocated as follows:

£328 million treatment;

£92 million protecting young people (education, prevention and early intervention);

£135 million safeguarding communities (including criminal justice measures and the new Communities against Drugs (CAD) programme);

and £373 million reducing the availability of drugs, particularly class A drugs; and

an additional £5 million to support the work of local Drug Action Teams in delivering the strategy locally.

A number of studies have been published which support the value of Government investment in tackling drug misuse and drug related crime. These include the National Treatment Outcome Research Study (NTORS), whose reports are published by the National Addiction Centre at www.ntors.org.uk and "Drug Treatment and Testing Orders: Final Evaluation Report, Home Office Research Study 21", published October 2000, copies of which are available in the Library of the House of Commons.

On anti-drugs education I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 183W.

We have not undertaken any assessment of allocation of drugs budgets in other Council of Europe countries.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of Britain's anti-drug budget was devoted to treatment in each of the past six years for which figures are available. [19711]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Information in the form requested is available only for the year 1998–99 onwards. The data refer to proactive investment directly aimed at tackling drug misuse.

	Treatment[1] *(£ million)*	*Total anti-drug budget (£ million)*	*Treatment as percentage of total*
1998–99	168	525	32
1999–2000	209	619	33.8
2000–01	234	695	33.7
2001–02	328	932	35.2

[1] The amounts detailed comprise mainstream spending by Department of Health, local authorities and the pooled National Treatment Agency budget. They exclude additional Prison Service treatment spend which is under the Communities aim

Entry Clearance

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for entry clearance in the UK were received in the entry clearance office in Dhaka in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000; of those, how many were refused at first instance; of those refused, how many were the subject of an appeal; and of those appeals, how many were successful. [17986]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Data on entry clearance applications which are received, refused initially and granted following an appeal in Dhaka are given in the table. Statistics on the number of appeals lodged in Dhaka are not available.

Applications for entry clearance[1] *made in Dhaka, 1997 to 2000*

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Received	18,310	17,290	19,460	22,410
Refused initially	5,940	4,570	4,530	5,340
Granted on appeal	500	400	390	360

[1] Entry clearance applications for settlement, temporary purposes and certificates of entitlement to the right of abode.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for entry clearance were handled by joint entry clearance offices in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000 in (i) Pakistan, (ii) India, (iii) Bangladesh, (iv) Australia, (v) New Zealand and (vi) Canada; and how many of them were allowed at first instance. [17987]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Statistics on entry clearance applications granted and refused are given in the table.

Applications for entry clearance[1] *made in selected countries*[2] *1997–2000*

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Pakistan				
Initial decisions	52,740	71,080	68,840	84,500
Granted initially	43,660	60,430	54,010	69,400
Refused initially	9,070	10,640	14,830	15,100
Granted on appeal	940	620	270	540
Total decisions	53,680	71,700	69,110	85,040
India				
Initial decisions	137,910	157,270	175,300	186,140
Granted initially	125,130	143,000	157,100	165,540
Refused initially	12,780	14,260	18,190	20,590
Granted on appeal	310	270	220	250
Total decisions	138,220	157,540	175,520	186,390
Bangladesh				
Initial decisions	18,850	17,480	18,300	22,980
Granted initially	12,920	12,920	13,770	17,640
Refused initially	5,940	4,570	4,530	5,340
Granted on appeal	500	400	390	360
Total decisions	19,350	17,890	18,690	23,340
Australia				
Initial decisions	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Granted initially or on appeal	26,080	30,980	33,280	30,500
Refused initially	40	30	40	60
Total decisions	26,130	31,010	33,320	30,550
New Zealand				
Initial decisions	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Granted initially or on appeal	12,580	12,970	12,900	11,460
Refused initially	20	20	40	70
Total decisions	12,600	12,990	12,940	11,540

[1] Entry clearance applications for settlement, temporary purposes and certificates of entitlement to the right of abode.

[2] The country shown is that where the application was made and is not necessarily the nationality of the applicant.

[3] Not available due to differences in data collection in the countries concerned.

Victims of Crimes

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many letters he has received from victims of crimes of violence in the last 12 months. [20428]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Department receives letters from victims of crimes of violence on a wide range of issues. Numbers are not collated centrally.

European Convention on Human Rights

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the implementation of Article 5(3) and 5(4) of the ECHR by other EU member states; and if he will make a statement. [20145]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* All other European Union member states are signatories to the European convention on human rights and are obliged, except in times of war and national emergencies when certain derogations may be made, to comply with its provisions.

Either-way Offences

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many defendants charged with either-way offences consented to trial in magistrates court and pleaded not guilty in the last 12 months for which figures are available; [19730]

(2) how many defendants charged with either-way offences *(a)* elected for trial by jury and *(b)* were directed by magistrates to the Crown court in each year since 1987; [19729]

(3) what was the average period *(a)* between committal to start of trial in Crown courts and *(b)* from first appearance or mode of trial decision to verdict in magistrates courts for cases triable either-way which were contested in each year since 1987; [19731]

(4) how many *(a)* contested cases, *(b)* convictions after trial and *(c)* acquittals there were in (i) magistrates courts and (ii) Crown courts in each year since 1987; [19728]

(5) how many *(a)* either-way and *(b)* other cases were committed to Crown court for sentence after trial in a magistrates court in each year since 1999. [19558]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Information collected centrally by the Home Department does not include information on the number of defendants charged with triable either-way offences who consented to trial in a magistrates court, nor does it contain details on defendants' plea at magistrates courts (nor, therefore, data on the number of contested cases), nor information on whether defendants elect Crown court trial or are directed there.

I am informed by the Lord Chancellor's Department that the average time by stage of proceedings for triable either-way cases is not available centrally.

The available information is contained in Tables A and B. Table A provides figures on the number of defendants who pleaded "not guilty" for the principal offence at Crown court, who were either convicted or acquitted in England and Wales, for the years 1995 to 2000. Plea data at the Crown court were not collected centrally by this Department before 1996.

Table B shows the numbers of defendants who were committed for sentence at the Crown court for triable either-way offences and all other offences for England and Wales, for the years 1999 and 2000.

Table A[1]: Number of defendants who pleaded "Not guilty"[2] at the Crown court, who were either convicted or acquitted[3] for all offences, England and Wales 1996 to 2000

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Number of defendants who pleaded not guilty	28,434	29,272	30,195	29,802	30,500
Number of defendants who pleaded not guilty who were convicted	11,869	11,592	10,807	10,226	9,864
Number of defendants who pleaded not guilty who were acquitted	14,894	15,843	17,563	17,829	18,955

[1] Table excludes the figures of those defendants who pleaded "not guilty" who were not tried (ie bench warrants issued, indictment to lie on file, unfit to plead, defendant died etc).

[2] Not guilty plea to the principal offence.

[3] Acquitted—includes not guilty, no evidence offered, charge withdrawn, judge rules no case to answer.

Table B: Number of triable either-way cases and all other cases[1] that were committed for sentence to the Crown court after trial in a magistrates court, England and Wales 1999 and 2000

	Defendants committed for sentence	
Offence type	*1999*	*2000*
Triable either-way	19,324	16,445
Others	1,093	851
Total	20,417	17,296

[1] Indictable only and summary offences

Conspiracy

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he has made for the review of the conspiracy provisions in the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998. [21429]

Mr. Blunkett: I am please to say that Lord Carlile of Berriew QC has accepted my invitation to carry out the annual review of the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998.

Written observations about the operation of the Act should be submitted to Lord Carlile c/o room 324, 3rd Floor, Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London, SW1H 9AT by 31 April 2002.

Missile Technology

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the next scheduled meeting of MTCR members will be at which the draft International Code of Conduct for its members will be discussed. [20506]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

Members of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) agreed at their plenary meeting in Ottawa in September 2001 to separate the draft International Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (ICOC) from the regime. The UK has been active in the development of the ICOC and hope that it will become a universally accepted international agreement establishing global standards of practice in an area where currently there are none. France has offered to host the first international negotiation session in February 2002. The next meeting of the MTCR will be in March 2002.

Breakfast Clubs

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the pilot breakfast clubs set up by the Government are going to be extended. [18213]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The Department has funded the piloting of over 250 breakfast clubs across England as part of an evaluation of their effectiveness. In addition, many breakfast clubs have been funded from a variety of different sources. The piloting is now complete and we will be considering the results of the evaluation and assessing the implications for future breakfast club provision in the context of our wider food in schools programme.

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will define nuclear weapon as it is used in the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, clauses 47 to 49. [19875]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

This subject was discussed in another place on 3 December during discussion of this Part of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill. I refer my hon. Friend to 3 December 2001, *Official Report, House of Lords,* columns 643–44.

DEFENCE

Donald Rumsfeld

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many meetings he has had with Mr. Donald Rumsfeld since 11 September. [17206]

Mr. Hoon: I have had one meeting with Donald Rumsfeld since 11 September and have spoken to him many times by telephone.

Nuclear Accidents

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information has been provided to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* emergency services on dealing with an accident involving defence nuclear materials. [17938]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence publishes the Local Authority and Emergency Services Information (LAESI) document to provide information to assist local authorities and emergency services in planning their response in the very unlikely event of an accident during the transportation of defence nuclear materials. The most recent version of the LAESI document (Third Edition) was published on the MOD Internet site in October 2001.

In addition, MOD nuclear sites and defence-related nuclear licensed sites have nuclear accident response contingency plans that are developed in conjunction with local authorities and emergency services.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many armour piercing and hard target penetrating warheads containing depleted uranium have been tested in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Dumfries and Galloway in each of the last 10 years. [18233]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* The number of depleted uranium projectiles fired in Scotland in each of the last 10 years is listed. These tests have all taken place at the Kirkcudbright training area in Dumfries and Galloway.

Year	*Number*
1991	666
1992	781
1993	682
1994	4,555
1995	280
1996	147
1997	749
1998	134
1999	111
2000	272
2001	[1]109

[1] To date

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* items of equipment, *(b)* munitions and *(c)* all other property of his Department (i) which contain depleted uranium and (ii) in which depleted uranium has been used in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [18819]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 29 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 519W, and the answer on 12 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 523W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith) which indicate the uses to which depleted uranium is put by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) in munitions and in other ways which mirror the widespread use of this material in the United Kingdom. No central record exists of where DU is or has been used or held over the past 10 years—in view of the nature of its use in MOD, the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, I can say that DU in munitions will at various times have been found in ammunitions depots at Kineton, Longtown and Dean Hill, on ships fitted with Phalanx weapons systems, at the ranges at Eskmeals and Kirkcudbright, and at locations involved in nuclear weapons programmes. DU used for other purposes has been present in a number of the aircraft listed in the earlier answer that are the property of MOD, at RAF Stafford, at the research establishment at Fort Halstead, at sites involved in the naval propulsion programme, and at the Royal hospital, Haslar.

Gulf War (Immunisation)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what drugs were combined in the vaccine used in the immunisation programme for armed forces personnel in the Gulf War; how many personnel were immunised with the vaccine; whether there were any advance tests done of the effects of combining the drugs into one vaccine; and if he will make a statement. [19765]

Dr. Moonie: The immunisation programme for armed forces personnel in the Gulf conflict involved a number of vaccinations. These can be divided into three categories: those which were part of the anti-biological warfare (BW) immunisation programme; routine service health immunisations and third, travel and specific immunisations against the risks associated with individuals' particular employment.

Details of the anti-BW immunisation programme, including datasheets on the vaccines used, were published in the Ministry of Defence paper: "Background to the Use of Medical Countermeasures to Protect British Forces during the Gulf War (Operation GRANBY)" in October 1997. A further paper entitled: "Implementation of the Immunisation Programme against Biological Warfare Agents for UK Forces during the Gulf Conflict 1990–91" dated January 2000 provides details on how the anti-BW immunisation programme was implemented, including estimates of the numbers immunised. Detailed information on the numbers of routine service, travel and employment specific immunisations administered is not available. Copies of both documents are available in the Library of the House and on the MOD's website at: www.gulfwar.mod.uk.

As the January 2000 paper makes clear, some individuals would have received a typhoid and tetanus vaccination which is routinely given as one combined immunisation referred to as TABT (typhoid, paratyphoid strains A and B plus tetanus). All of the other immunisations were administered singly. No tests were carried out in advance of the effects of combining a number of drugs into a vaccine because no such combination was intended. Details of such tests as were carried out in advance are set out in the October 1997 paper; some of these are being replicated in MOD's vaccines interactions research programme which is studying whether the vaccines used to protect UK personnel during the Gulf conflict can give rise to adverse health effects. This work is due to complete in 2003. The findings will be published in scientific literature.

Afghanistan

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answers of 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 668, on Afghanistan, if he will provide details of *(a)* the number of British armed force casualties suffered to date, *(b)* where, and under what circumstances, the casualties were caused, *(c)* when the injured personnel were evacuated back to the United Kingdom and *(d)* what injuries were suffered; and how many (i) injuries and (ii) deaths have been caused to allied forces operating in Afghanistan. [19877]

Mr. Hoon: I can confirm that four British military personnel were wounded on operations in Afghanistan, one seriously. They are all now back in the UK receiving treatment. An additional member of the armed forces has also had to return to the UK for a medical assessment. I am withholding further details of the circumstances and the injuries in accordance with Exemptions 1 and 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

It would not be appropriate for me to provide information about casualties sustained by other coalition members.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to clear unexploded *(a)* cluster bombs, *(b)* land mines and *(c)* other ordnance from Afghanistan. [20004]

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the steps that will be taken to clear unexploded cluster bombs after the end of the military action in Afghanistan. [20418]

Mr. Ingram: There is a large amount of unexploded ordnance in Afghanistan, a legacy of years of conflict. The international community will provide assistance in clearing it. Detailed plans have yet to be developed, though humanitarian agencies specialising in mine clearance are already present in Afghanistan.

The UK forces at Bagram include a number of Royal Engineers, who have some explosive ordnance disposal capability.

Base Security

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the security issues associated with the Peel Circus/Pockeridge Lane development adjacent to Basil Hill Barracks, Cariton, and Defence Communication Services Agency, Copenacre; and if he will make a statement. [19574]

Mr. Ingram: Security is always a prime concern. The security arrangements at Corsham have been examined in the light of the proposed civilian housing development and appropriate measures will be taken to ensure that military and civilian personnel at the site are properly protected.

Gulf War (Medical Records)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many medical records have been requested by armed services personnel who served in the Gulf War; how many have been found; whether all requests for medical record information have been granted; and if he will make a statement; [20266]

(2) if he will make a statement on the management of medical records from the Gulf War and their accuracy. [20265]

Dr. Moonie: Information is not readily available that would enable the Ministry of Defence to identify, from the large number of requests for medical records received, how many were in respect of individuals who served in the 1990–91 Gulf conflict and, of those, in how many cases medical records were available. However, in view of the Government's undertaking to be as informative and thorough as possible in addressing issues of concern to Gulf veterans, I have asked that the information requested be researched. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible placing a copy of my letter in the Library of the House. The policy of the MOD for some years has been that no medical records should be withheld except where legislation so requires.

In October 2001, MOD's Gulf Veterans Illnesses Unit updated and re-issued a paper previously produced in April 1999 entitled "Medical Records in the Gulf". This is available on MOD's website at: www.gulfwar.mod.uk. I have arranged for a copy of this paper to be placed in the Library of the House. The paper describes arrangements for medical record keeping during the Gulf conflict; discusses a number of reasons why records that were kept may not have been complete, and provides guidance to Gulf veterans on how to obtain their service medical records.

Service Aircraft

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the average age of aircraft is in the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Navy and *(c)* Royal Air Force. [19962]

Mr. Ingram: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

International Military Services Ltd.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who the board members of International Military Services Ltd. are. [20186]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The board members of International Military Services Ltd. are:

Sir Kenneth Macdonald KCB

Mr. D. G. Jones

Mr. N. A. D. Sharvell.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the provisions for contingent liabilities in respect of International Military Services Ltd. have been drawn upon since the company became inactive; and if he plans to change the size of the contingent liability provision. [20187]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The contingent liabilities in respect of International Military Services Ltd. have not been drawn on since the company ceased trading but they remain under review.

Fylingdales

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies have been made of the upgrading requirements of Fylingdales. [20739]

Mr. Ingram: Since RAF Fylingdales was established in 1963, there have been numerous studies that have led to the upgrading of equipment and infrastructure. The most recent addressed security, and its recommendations are currently being implemented.

Aircraft Movements (Nuclear Weapons)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many movements of *(a)* UK aircraft and *(b)* US aircraft occurred within UK airspace in the last year for which figures are available where nuclear weapons were carried; and if he will make a statement. [20170]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* It is current UK policy not to transport UK nuclear weapons by air. The number of US flights carrying nuclear weapons each year within UK airspace depends on programme requirements which are confidential between the two Governments. I am therefore withholding the information requested under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Royal Marines

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on undermanning in the Royal Marines. [20633]

Mr. Ingram: The Royal Marines continue to be challenged by overall undermanning of about 6 per cent., although recruiting is meeting current targets, retention rates need to be improved and a range of measures are in hand to achieve this. We are confident that the Royal Marine forces deployed on operations will be manned to the appropriate level for any likely task arising.

Spanish Airspace

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1055W, on Gibraltar, if he will initiate discussions to permit the overflight of Spanish airspace by UK military aircraft. [20776]

Mr. Ingram: We have no plans specifically to discuss the overflight of Spanish airspace by UK military aircraft, but the on-going discussions with Spain under the Brussels Process aims to resolve all outstanding issues between the UK and Spain over Gibraltar.

Efficiency Savings

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the efficiency savings that have been secured by the United Kingdom armed forces in each of the last three years. [18803]

Mr. Hoon: Since 1998–99, the Ministry of Defence has achieved the following efficiency savings, against the challenging targets in our public service agreement.

£ million

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Cumulative target	505	998	1,499
Cumulative savings	594	1,126	[1]1,472
Annual target	505	475	430
Annual savings	594	511	[1]318

[1] Achievement still being validated

Note:

All figures expressed at outturn prices (uprated where appropriate to take account of inflation)

These efficiency savings help ensure that the MOD is able to invest in increasing the military capability of the armed forces.

Military Personnel

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel are serving *(a)* in and around Gibraltar, *(b)* in and around Cyprus and *(c)* in and around the Falkland Islands; and if he will make a statement. [18797]

Mr. Ingram: The following table shows the number of UK regular forces serving in and around Gibraltar, Cyprus and the Falkland Islands as at 1 September 2001.

	Gibraltar	Cyprus	Falkland Islands
Naval Service	237	8	92
Army	70	2,053	457
RAF	114	1,089	726
Total	421	3,150	1,275

Source:
DASA (Tri-Service)

Armed Forces Housing Stock

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his latest estimate is of the value of the armed forces housing stock; and if he will make a statement. [18811]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Armed Forces (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel have been allocated to service in Northern Ireland for 2001–02; and how many there have been in each of the last 20 years. [18823]

Mr. Ingram: The number of military personnel (Army, Navy and RAF) stationed in Northern Ireland for the last 15 years is set out in the table (figures for the Navy and RAF prior to 1985 are not available):

As at 31 October	Number of security force personnel
1985	16,536
1986	18,851
1987	18,003
1988	18,295
1989	18,626
1990	17,628
1991	17,962
1992	18,982
1993	19,022
1994	18,345
1995	17,070
1996	16,490
1997	16,716
1998	15,566
1999	14,459
2000	13,640
2001	13,820

As well as those troops stationed in Northern Ireland there are troops under the command of the General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland (GOC NI) that are rear based on the mainland and can be called forward to the Province as and when required. In addition other troops can be made available to the GOC NI from Land Command, if required, to help out during the height of the summer marching season.

The security situation is the determinant as to how many security force personnel are stationed in the Province at any given time. Therefore, we cannot say how many personnel may be needed in Northern Ireland next year.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the level of expenditure on armed forces based in Northern Ireland for each of the years 1984–85 to 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [18808]

Mr. Ingram: The General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland was vested as a Top Level Budget (TLB) holder on 1 April 1994. Figures for the total expenditure in his TLB are in the annual Appropriation Account, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Personnel Statistics

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the number of personnel in the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Navy and *(c)* Air Force for each year from 1975 to 2001 and for 2002 to 2004 (planned); and if he will make a statement. [18816]

Mr. Ingram: Estimates of the number of regular personnel by individual service for each year from 1975 to 2001 are shown in the table:

Trained strength of UK regulars

	Naval service	Army	RAF
1975	68,943	151,422	90,329
1976	68.7	151.2	85.6
1977	68.9	150.2	81.7
1978	68.8	143.3	79.1
1979	65.9	138.6	79.7
1980	63.8	139.0	82.2
1981	65,539	146,833	86,180
1982	67,269	150,757	86,485
1983	66,085	147,700	84,488
1984	65,394	145,401	86,116
1985	64,196	145,916	87,119
1986	61,529	145,289	86,945
1987	59,473	145,030	87,578
1988	58,874	142,568	87,639
1989	57,475	139,409	86,149
1990	56,771	137,240	83,475
1991	55,714	135,522	82,621
1992	55,767	133,366	81,973
1993	55,242	126,486	78,863
1994	52,414	116,113	74,209
1995	48,193	104,532	69,431
1996	45,550	100,077	62,510
1997	41,680	97,756	54,196
1998	40,356	97,452	52,677
1999	39,071	96,300	51,761
2000	38,535	96,475	50,993
2001	38,023	96,285	49,847

Note:
The figures for 1976 to 1980 have been rounded because precise data are not available.

Current estimates of the number of personnel planned for 2002 to 2004 for the Navy, Army and Air Force are shown in the table:

	Naval Service	Army	RAF
2002	39,257	96,724	48,641
2003	39,048	97,240	47,690
2004	38,581	98,256	48,717

Kosovo

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on what occasions injured service men have been evacuated from Kosovo in the last month; [20449]

(2) what delays have taken place when providing air transport to evacuate service casualties from Kosovo in the last month; [20450]

(3) what transfers of service men evacuated from Kosovo have taken place between Birmingham hospitals in the last month; and if he will make a statement giving reasons for the transfers. [20451]

Mr. Ingram: Eight service personnel were aeromedically evacuated from Kosovo to the UK in November. The return of three patients to the UN on 6 November took around four hours longer than originally scheduled, due to the distance some members of the Critical Care Team had to travel to reach RAF Lyneham, the subsequent requirement to undertake a crew change in Italy, and the failure of airfield lights there. We would normally expect aeromedical evacuation from Kosovo to take around 24 hours. On this occasion it took around 26 hours.

Seven of the eight patients went to the Centre for Defence Medicine. Six were admitted to the University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust and one was admitted to City Hospital, Birmingham. None of these were transferred from one Birmingham hospital to another. However, one of them was subsequently transferred to a hospital in Scotland for rehabilitative care closer to his family.

EU Deployment

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* tanks, *(b)* fixed wing aircraft and *(c)* military personnel are serving in (i) Germany and (ii) other European Union countries; and if he will make a statement. [18802]

Mr. Ingram: There are currently 216 Challenger 2 Main Battle Tanks in Germany, and none in other European Union countries (excluding the United Kingdom).

There have been no fixed wing aircraft based in Germany since September 2001.

There are 17,350 military personnel serving in Germany and 1,400 serving in other European Union countries (excluding the UK) at 1 September 2001.

Overseas Service

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the proportion of the United Kingdom army serving overseas as at 31 December in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [18820]

Mr. Ingram: The following represents the proportion of UK trained Army personnel (excluding Gurkhas and Full-time Reserve Service) serving overseas as at 31 December in each of the previous 10 years:

Percentage

As at 31 December	*Proportion serving overseas*
1991[1]	44
1992[1]	41
1993	35
1994	31
1995	33
1996	33
1997	31
1998	31
1999	32
2000	30

[1] The figures for years 1991 and 1992 are as at 1 April as these were the only data available from Defence Analytical Services Agency

Departmental Assets

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assets owned by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the armed forces have been sold over the last three years; which of these assets were registered in the National Asset Register; what the sale proceeds were from these assets; and if he will make a statement. [18805]

Dr. Moonie: Information on significant asset disposals in Financial Years 1998–99 and 1999–2000 is contained in the Ministry of Defence section (Section 7) of the National Asset Register (NAR) published by the Treasury in July 2001. The NAR provides information by Top Level Budget Holder and Agency Chief Executive, and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Detailed information on disposals in 2000–01 is not yet held centrally but I will write to the hon. Member when the information becomes available.

Civilian Employees

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent action he has taken to reduce the number of civilian employees of his Department and of the armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [18817]

Dr. Moonie: I assume the hon. Member is referring to civilian employees of the Department whether working in direct support of the armed forces or elsewhere in the Ministry of Defence. As explained in the Strategic Defence Review White Paper (Cm 3999), changes in civilian personnel numbers result from the drive for greater effectiveness and better value for money. Para 30 section 2.1 of the UK Defence Statistics 2001 contains details of the changes and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Aircraft Orders

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to order *(a)* the Eurofighter and *(b)* heavy lift transport aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [18796]

Dr. Moonie: In respect of Eurofighter, the order for the first tranche of aircraft, including 55 for the United Kingdom, was placed in 1998. The contracts for the second and final tranches are expected to be placed during 2003 and 2007, respectively.

On A400M, the UK, together with other nations, signed a Memorandum of Understanding at the Paris Air Show in June 2001 covering the development and production phase of the A400M military transport aircraft. Negotiation of the associated commercial contract is almost complete and the aim is to sign it by the end of this year.

Lynx Helicopters

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the need to renew and refit Lynx helicopters; and if he will make a statement. [18798]

Mr. Ingram: Our assessment of renewing or refitting the Army Lynx helicopters has shown that it could not provide the capability required. The Battlefield Light Utility Helicopter project is intended to replace the capability provided by the Lynx Marks 7 and 9. It is planned to enter service from the middle of this decade. Plans announced in the Strategic Defence Review to convert 10 Naval Lynx Mk3 helicopters to Mk8 standard have been put on hold pending the outcome of studies into a potential alternative, a Surface Combatant Maritime Rotorcraft capability.

Apache Helicopters

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Apache helicopters he has ordered; and what plans he has to increase this order. [18827]

Dr. Moonie: We have 67 WAH-62 Apache helicopters on order. We have no plans to increase this order.

Helicopters

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many helicopters are in service in the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Navy and *(c)* Air Force; if he will break these down by number and type; and if he will make a statement. [18804]

Mr. Ingram: The numbers of helicopters in service in the Army, Navy and Air Force as at 26 November, broken down by number and type are shown in the table.

Helicopter	*Actual operating fleet*	*Sustainment fleet*[1]	*Disposal*[2]	*Comments*
Navy				
Merlin Mk1	20	15	0	—
Sea King AEW Mk2/7	10	3	0	—
Sea King HU Mk5	10	5	2	—
Sea King ASW Mk6	18	0	26[3]	—
Lynx HAS Mk3	31	7	0	—
Lynx HAS Mk8	22	14	0	—
Sea King Mk4	33	4	0	JHC Asset
Army				
Lynx	83[4]	40	0	JHC Asset
Gazelle	120[4]	14	0	JHC Asset
Bell 212	3	0	0	JHC Asset
A 109	3	1	0	JHC Asset
Apache AH Mk1	10	8	0	JHC Asset
RAF				
Sea King Mk3	19	0	0	—
Sea King Mk3a	6	0	0	—
Merlin Mk3	6	1	0	JHC Asset
Wessex HC2	8	2	0	JHC Asset
Puma	35	6	0	JHC Asset
Chinook Mk3	0	4	0	JHC Asset
Chinook Mk2/2a	28	12	0	JHC Asset

[1] The sustainment fleet includes helicopters undergoing scheduled base maintenance, those that are in development and those held in reserve.

[2] Helicopters awaiting disposal.

[3] This figure reflects the airframes awaiting disposal following the introduction of the Merlin aircraft.

[4] Includes nine aircraft that are School of Army Aviation assets.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the *(a)* purchase cost and *(b)* running cost of the two aircraft carriers which he plans to secure for the Royal Navy. [18826]

Dr. Moonie: The purchase of the two new aircraft carriers for the Royal Navy is expected to cost up to £2.9 billion. It is too early in the programme to provide definitive figures on the anticipated running costs of the carriers, since much will depend on the eventual design that is selected. Reliable forecasts for the carriers' running costs are being developed to inform the main investment decision on their build, which is currently scheduled for the end of 2003. As the ships are being designed to reduce support costs from the outset and will not undergo long refit periods while in-service, it is our intention that the overall running costs for the enhanced capability that CVF will offer should be less than that for the current class of ships.

QuinetiQ

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on external expertise and advice in connection with the flotation of QinetiQ. [18242]

Mr. Hoon: Since work began on a PPP solution for the future of DERA following the Strategic Defence Review in 1998, external advice has been received on most aspects of the PPP process. This includes advice in support of the detailed options study and the subsequent further work on selected options, legal and financial aspects of the split of DERA and on the eventual transaction. £6.4 million has been spent so far. These costs are subject to continuous scrutiny to ensure that the services of advisers offer value for money. The costs of QinetiQ's advisers are being met by the company.

Historic Buildings

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* heritage and *(b)* historic buildings are owned by his Department; and what is their value is in each case. [18812]

Dr. Moonie: I have placed in the Library of the House a list of the historic and heritage properties and scheduled monuments, which are in the Ministry of Defence's care. I regard these properties as very valuable in both national and departmental terms, and we seek to maintain them to the highest appropriate standards.

Valuation of such properties is, however, difficult whether in terms of the contribution they make to our business, or in open market terms. For MOD accounting purposes we record only the replacement value of operational assets (for instance, an historic building used for administrative purposes would be valued as an office with certain capacity). The National Asset Register records historic/heritage properties as having nil value. Given the number of properties in the keeping of the MOD, as well as their often unique history and location, the information required is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost, which would in any case be of questionable practical use.

Defence Spending

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the additional planned spending which would be needed to stabilise the share of UK defence spending in relation to UK gross domestic product at the 2001 level until 2005; and if he will make a statement. [18815]

Mr. Ingram: Using the resource based figures announced in the 2000 Spending Review, defence budget expenditure is expected to represent the following share of GDP for 2001–02 to 2003–04:

Financial year	*Percentage GDP*
2001–02	2.4
2002–03	2.3
2003–04	2.3

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 30 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 565–66W, which reported the figures for 2001–02 and 2002–03.

Those figures imply that a further 0.1 per cent. of GDP would be required in 2002–03 and 2003–04 to maintain UK defence spending at a constant percentage of UK GDP, though the figure for 2001–02 includes estimated conflict prevention funding (which cannot be forecast for subsequent years). The defence budget will, however, increase in real terms over each of these years. The defence budget for 2004–05 will be agreed during Spending Review 2002.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what his estimate is of total United Kingdom defence spending over the last 25 years; what value for money assessment of defence expenditure he has conducted; and if he will make a statement; [18818]

(2) what *(a)* underspends and *(b)* overspends have been recorded against his Department's total budget in each of the years 1996–97 to 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [18838]

Mr. Ingram: Defence spending for the last 25 completed financial years was as follows:

	£ million
1976–77	6,158
1977–78	6,788
1978–79	7,596
1979–80	9,408
1980–81	11,451
1981–82	12,806
1982–83	14,630
1983–84	15,732
1984–85	17,450
1985–86	18,263
1986–87	18,410
1987–88	18,922
1988–89	19,221
1989–90	20,777
1990–91	22,207
1991–92	24,438
1992–93	22,910
1993–94	22,757
1994–95	22,562
1995–96	21,517
1996–97	22,345
1997–98	21,610
1998–99	22,475
1999–2000	22,549
2000–01	23,538

Note:

These figures are not adjusted for inflation

The following underspends/overspends were recorded during the period 1996–97 to 2000–01:

Year	*£ million*
1996–97	[1]246
1997–98	[2]225
1998–99	[2]74
1999–2000	[2]318
2000–01	[2]72

[1] Overspend

[2] Underspend

More detailed breakdowns are available in the Department Appropriation Accounts, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is committed to the pursuit of efficiency and value for money. The MOD's Public Service Agreement was published in December 1998, and set key targets for the period 1999–2000 to 2001–02, reflecting the outcome of the Strategic Defence Review. The PSA set many challenging value for money targets, and the Department has made good progress against these. MOD's Departmental Performance Report (DPR) was recently published and set out in detail progress against each target. A copy of the DPR has been placed in the Library of the House.

Warships

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the orders for new warships which he has *(a)* placed and *(b)* plans to place for delivery prior to 2015; what his estimate of the cost of these new ships is; when the in-service expected date is in each case; and if he will make a statement. [18795]

Dr. Moonie: This Government are undertaking the largest programme of new warship building for many years. Since May 1997 the Ministry of Defence has placed:

(a) contracts for four Alternative Landing Ships Logistic (ALSLs) at an overall value of about £300 million, expected in-service between late 2004 and late 2005. The ALSL class is now expected to be in service earlier than previously envisaged, due to good co-operation between the two shipbuilders (Swan Hunter Tyneside and BAE Systems Marine) concerned;

(b) a prime contract, valued at about £1.3 billion, for three new Type 45 Destroyers, the first of which is expected to enter service in 2007. We announced earlier this year our intention, subject to commercial negotiations, to amend this contract to increase our commitment to a total of six ships.

(c) a lease contract for three new offshore patrol vessels, expected to enter service between autumn 2002 and autumn 2003. The total cost of the lease package is approximately £60 million.

(d) a contract for two Survey Vessels, at an approximate cost of £130 million for the vessels and 25 years of support, expected in-service in winter 2002 and summer 2003.

As to our future plans, we expect to purchase two new Future Aircraft Carriers, for which an order is planned in 2004, costing up to £2.9 billion at outturn prices. We currently plan that the first ship will enter service in 2012. Other orders over the next few years will include further ASTUTE class submarines and Type 45 Destroyers.

Our longer-term plans include the future surface combatant programme to replace the current Type 22 and Type 23 Frigates and a variety of other vessels. We are also investigating options to replace the capabilities currently filled by those ships in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary fleet which are scheduled to leave service towards the end of the decade. It is not possible to provide accurate details of the cost or individual in-service dates of these vessels at this stage.

It remains our policy that all new warships will be built in the UK.

Submarines

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many submarines are in service in the Royal Navy; and how many there were in each of the past 25 years. [18799]

Mr. Ingram: The numbers of submarines in service in the Royal Navy, inclusive of vessels which are operational, at extended readiness, or in refit and repair, for this year and in each of the past 25 years is as follows:

	Number
2001	16
2000	16
1999	15
1998	15
1997	15
1996	15
1995	16
1994	21
1993	23
1992	23
1991	27
1990	31
1989	31
1988	31
1987	32
1986	33
1985	32
1984	31
1983	30
1982	31
1981	32
1980	31
1979	30
1978	31
1977	31
1976	31
1975	32

Note:

Figures are as 1 April in each year

Royal Navy

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* aircraft carriers, *(b)* cruisers, *(c)* destroyers, *(d)* frigates and *(e)* mine-sweepers have been in operation with the Royal Navy in each of the last 25 years; and if he will make a statement. [18806]

Mr. Ingram: The numbers of *(a)* aircraft carriers, *(b)* cruisers, *(c)* destroyers, *(d)* frigates and *(e)* mine-sweepers that have been in operation with the Royal Navy, for this year and in each of the past 25 years is as follows:

	Aircraft carriers[1]	*Cruisers*	*Destroyers*	*Frigates*	*Mine Counter measures vessels*[2]
2001	3	0	8	18	19
2000	3	0	10	20	20
1999	3	0	10	22	18
1998	3	0	10	20	16
1997	2	0	10	19	16
1996	2	0	10	22	16
1995	2	0	10	20	18
1994	3	0	10	22	18
1993	2	0	11	27	30
1992	2	0	11	32	31
1991	2	0	10	31	35
1990	2	0	12	31	37
1989	3	0	11	30	36
1988	2	0	11	31	35
1987	2	0	13	33	36
1986	3	0	13	34	39
1985	2	0	12	34	32
1984	3	0	13	39	34
1983	3	0	13	42	34
1982	2	0	11	38	31
1981	2	0	12	35	30
1980	2	0	10	38	34
1979	2	1	10	42	35
1978	3	2	10	43	34
1977	2	2	8	40	34
1976	2	1	8	46	37
1975	3	2	10	47	40

[1] Aircraft Carriers include Commando Carriers and the Landing Platform Helicopter.

[2] Mine Counter measures vessels incorporates Minesweepers and Minehunters.

Note:

Ships 'in operation' include those that were operational or engaged in preparing for service, trials or training as at 1 April in each year, but does not include ships in refit or those held at extended readiness.

Defence Budget

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent estimate he has made of the defence budget as a share of UK gross domestic product; and how this compares with other *(a)* European Union and *(b)* NATO countries; and if he will make a statement. [18807]

Mr. Ingram: The defence budget share of gross domestic product for financial year 2000–01 was 2.5 per cent. From data supplied by nations, we estimate the NATO average to be around 2.2 per cent. for a comparable period. Although there are no equivalent EU data, we believe the average was around 1.8 per cent.

Tanks

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his plans to order a new tank for the Army. [18801]

Dr. Moonie: We are not currently planning to order a new tank for the Army. Deliveries of the Challenger 2 Main Battle Tank (CR2) have only recently been completed. The CR2 provides an excellent capability, ensuring that British forces will continue to be properly equipped to conduct high intensity warfare for many years to come. However, as one would expect, research and evaluation into its potential successor is taking place now. It is too early to properly identity the type of vehicle that will eventually replace the CR2.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many tanks are in service and how many have been operational in each of the past 20 years; and if he will make a statement. [18822]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 913–14W to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), regarding the number of armoured vehicles currently in service. It is not possible to state how many have been operational during the last 20 years as this information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Spending Review

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to make a submission to Her Majesty's Treasury on his Department's expenditure plans for the next comprehensive spending review; and if he will make a statement. [18824]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 June 2001, *Official Report*, columns 38–39W to my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence), which set out the Government's priorities and broad timetable for the spending review 2002.

Low Flying

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a statement on the guidelines which his Department issues in relation to low flying by *(a)* helicopters and *(b)* fixed wing aircraft in UK airspace. [18813]

Dr. Moonie: Routine low flying by fixed wing aircraft takes place between 2,000 feet and 250 feet Minimum Separation Distance and for helicopters from 500 feet Minimum Separation Distance down to ground level. Guidelines for all military aviators on the conduct of flying in the UK Low Flying System are contained in departmental regulations and are reinforced on training courses and supplemented as appropriate by briefings. Information is also promulgated through Notices to Airmen enabling aircrew to plan and execute sorties that reflect the daily situation in the UK Low Flying System. General information is available to the public on the website www.lowflying.mod.uk and in a leaflet entitled "Military Low Flying an Essential Skill", that may be obtained on request from the following address:

Directorate of Air Staff (Lower Airspace) Complaints and Enquiries
Room 664
Ministry of Defence
Metropole Building
Northumberland Avenue
London WC2N 5BP.

Procurement

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the percentage share accounted for by procurement costs as a portion of the total budget of his Department for *(a)* each of the past 10 years and *(b)* the next three years; and if he will make a statement. [18821]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of spending on defence procurement for the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Navy and *(c)* Air Force for each of the years from 1980–81 to 2001–02. [18809]

Dr. Moonie: Figures for Ministry of Defence spending on defence equipment for the years 1980–81 to 1990–91 are contained within the respective "Volume 2 of the Statement on the Defence Estimates". From 1991–92 they have been included in the "UK Defence Statistics". Copies are held in the Library of the House.

The data in these documents are broadly split by type—ie whether it is air, land, sea or 'other' equipment for the years where this information is available. The 'other' category refers to equipment not specific to a particular environment. This division (air, land, sea and other) does not necessarily match the particular end destination of the equipment (ie RAF, Army and Navy). For example, not all aerospace equipment is used by the RAF.

From 1999–2000, the division of equipment expenditure into air, land, sea and other is not available due to changes in the Departments accounting procedures and a move to Tri-Service based procurement.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the 10 most expensive procurement projects planned by his Department for the period 2001 to 2011; and if he will make a statement. [18825]

Dr. Moonie: The Comptroller and Auditor General published his report on the Ministry of Defence Major Projects Report 2001 (MPR 2001) on 23 November. This report contains details of the top 20 projects that have passed the main investment decision based on forecast future spend and a copy is available in the Library of the House.

The 10 projects with the highest total project cost in MPR 2001 are as follows:

Eurofighter
Merlin HM Mk1 Maritime Helicopter
Attack Helicopter
Nimrod Maritime Reconnaissance and Attack Mk4
Astute Class Submarine
Spearfish Heavyweight Torpedo
Hercules C130J
Conventionally Armed Stand-Off Missile
Tornado Mid-Life Update
High Velocity Missile.

Fixed Wing Aircraft

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many operational fixed wing aircraft there are in the Royal Air Force; and if he will break down this figure by aircraft type and number. [18800]

Mr. Ingram: On 23 November 2001, there were 676 fixed wing aircraft in the RAF's Actual Operating Fleet. The Actual Operating Fleet comprises all aircraft which are fully operational or in 1st or 2nd line maintenance. The breakdown of this figure by aircraft type and number is detailed in the table:

Aircraft type	*Number of aircraft*
BAe 125 ccMk3	5
BAe 146 ccMk2	2
C-17	4
Canberra	6
Chipmunk	2
Dakota	1
Dominie	10
Harrier GR7	50
Harrier T10	9
Sea Harrier FA2	27
Sea Harrier T8	4
Hawk	110
Hercules C-130J	23
Hercules C-130K	26
Islander	1
Jaguar	43
Jetstream TMk	21
Nimrod	19
Sentry E-3D AEW Mk1	6
Tornado F3	86
Tornado GR1/4	117
Tristar	8
Tucano Mk1	77
VC10	19

The RAF also operates the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, which comprises seven fixed wing aircraft. The breakdown of this figure by aircraft type and number is detailed in the table:

Aircraft type	*Number*
Hurricane	2
Lancaster B1	1
Spitfire	4

Defence Secondary Care Agency

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how much has been spent on financial arrangements to encourage NHS trusts to achieve waiting time targets set by the Defence Secondary Care Agency in each year since the arrangements have been in place; [18240]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 293W, what financial arrangements exist to encourage NHS trusts to achieve waiting time targets set by the Defence Secondary Care Agency. [18239]

Dr. Moonie: The financial arrangements with Ministry of Defence Hospital Unit (MDHU) Trusts referred to in my answer to the hon. Member of 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 293W, are based on provisions set out in Health Service Circular 1999/112, dated 21 May 1999. They provide financial incentives for the individual trusts to achieve waiting time targets set by the Defence Secondary Care Agency (DSCA), in the form of two stages of premium, set at a percentage of the basic tariff. The first stage premium is payable so long as there is clear evidence that the trust is attempting to achieve the targets. The second, small premium, is payable on a specialty by specialty basis, separately as regards the targets for out-patient attendance and in-patient admissions, and is dependant on the full achievement of the target.

In the two years since these arrangements have been in place, the total expenditure on the premiums has been £1.230 million in 1999–2000 and £1.242 million in 2000–01.

European Security and Defence Policy

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the annual cost to the EU of the EU structures that have been created to support the European Security and Defence Policy. [19826]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

The annual cost to member states of maintaining the European Council structures supporting ESDP on the European Council Secretariat budget for the last financial year was £5,800,000. This has been met within existing EU resources.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

NHS Reform

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list those areas of NHS reform under this Government which he described as having gone backwards on 25 November. [19081]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) on 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 961–62.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on progress with the Public Service Agreement target for delivery of the Civil Service reforms programme. [21238]

Mr. Leslie: My Department continues to drive the Civil Service reform programme across Departments, and good progress has been made against the many actions which were set out in Sir Richard Wilson's initial Reform Report which was published in December 1999. A report on progress was published in December 2000, and a further report is planned early in the new year.

These reports, and information on progress across the many separate strands of the Civil Service reform programme are published on the dedicated website: www.civil-service.gov.uk/reform.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on progress on the Public Service Agreement target for the review of corporate human resources systems which was subsumed within the Civil Service reforms programme. [21275]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office continues to drive forward the programme of Civil Service reform across Departments, and intends to publish the second annual report early in the new year. I am pleased to be able to give some examples of progress already made.

By April 2002, around 80 per cent. of all Departments will have reviewed their pay and performance management systems. A new corporate performance management system for the Senior Civil Service, based on a new competency framework, was introduced in April of this year, and payments under the new system will be made commencing April 2002.

The Cabinet Office has undertaken a review of the Fast Stream, with the aim of retaining the scheme's appeal with the best of the current applicants and adding applications from the best graduates from under-represented groups.

A new E-recruitment gateway has been established, which is currently being used by over 50 Departments and agencies and attracting over 52,000 hits a month.

Following wide consultation, a new and more flexible pension scheme has been developed for Civil Servants and is being introduced with effect from October 2002.

A copy of the Civil Service Reform Report 2000 is available in the Library of the House and can be accessed through the following website: www.civil-service.gov.uk/reform.

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, if he will list the (a) renovations and (b) other works being carried out to the Ripley buildings; when this work was agreed to; and what is the total expected cost of this work. [20344]

Mr. Leslie: The project to refurbish Admiralty Arch, Kirkland House and the Ripley Building was announced to the Public Administration Select Committee by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office on 8 December 1998.

The work to the Ripley and Kirkland Buildings (collectively known as 22 Whitehall) is a major refurbishment including the installation of new lifts, new mechanical and electrical and plumbing services. In addition, both buildings have required major structural repairs.

A contract in 1999 to undertake structural repairs to the Ripley Building cost £2.079 million excluding VAT. The major contract currently under way to undertake the refurbishment of 22 Whitehall as a whole is subject to an incentivised arrangement with the contractor. In the light of this arrangement, the final cost to the Cabinet Office cannot be precisely estimated at this time. However, the current expectation is that the cost will be of the order of £27 million (excluding VAT).

WALES

Local Health Boards

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many local health boards he expects to be created in Wales under the NHS Reform Bill. [20895]

Mr. Touhig: The NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill provides a power for the National Assembly for Wales to establish bodies called local health boards. It will be for the Assembly, through subordinate legislation, to determine how many local health boards are to be set up. The Assembly's Minister for Health and Social Services has stated her intention to set up 22 local health boards following her consultation on the structural proposals for NHS Wales.

Pupils' Transport

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in the National Assembly for Wales regarding the transport of pupils from Llandogo to Monmouth. [15797]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 842.

Energy Review

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what contribution he has made to the Performance and Innovation Unit's Energy Review. [15794]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Wales Office, is a member of the PIU Energy Review Advisory Group and has been engaged in the review since it began in June this year. The PIU held a seminar in Wales on 27 September to take the views of Assembly representatives, Assembly sponsored public bodies and the energy industry in Wales.

Departmental Name Change

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the cost was of rebranding his Department following its name change after the General Election. [17862]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The name of my Department did not change after the 2001 General Election.

HEALTH

Antipsychotic Drugs

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what work his Department has undertaken to explain the trends in prescribing of *(a)* atypical and *(b)* traditional antipsychotic medication within the NHS; what the key findings are; and if he will set out the number of prescription items dispensed within the NHS in England for antipsychotic drugs in each of the last five years for each regional and health authority for the age groups (i) 0 to 15 years, (ii) 16 to 59 years and (iii) 60 years and over. [10998]

Jacqui Smith: No work has been done at this stage to explain the recent trend in prescribing of atypical and traditional antipsychotic medication although the figures are monitored.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is undertaking an appraisal of the use of atypical antipsychotic drugs in schizophrenia. Guidance is expected to be issued this year. The number of prescription items dispensed in the community in England for antipsychotic drugs, 1999 and 2000 by health authority, have been placed in the Library. Similar information for earlier years is not available. Information about antipsychotic drugs dispensed in hospitals is not available.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions were dispensed in *(a)* 1999 and *(b)* 2000 for (i) atypical antipsychotic medicine, (ii) traditional antipsychotic medicine and (iii) all antipsychotic medicine, to hospital patients by each health authority in England for patients (A) up to 16, (B) 16 to 59, and (C) 60 years old and over. [17829]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available centrally.

Private Hospitals (Complaints Procedures)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his discussions with private hospitals on complaints handling arrangements. [14722]

Ms Blears: Independent health care providers will be required to have in place effective arrangements for handling complaints as part of the new regulatory system to be introduced from April 2002 under the Care Standards Act 2000. The regulations and standards that it is proposed to apply were issued for consultation in July 2001. Organisations representing private hospitals were among those consulted. The consultation comments are currently being considered.

Freedom of Information

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date his Department established a working group of officials to prepare his Department for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and on what dates this committee has met since it was set up. [14776]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills) on 21 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 366W.

The Department has established two committees to work on the implementation of Freedom of Information. The steering group was set up on 20 July and first met on 10 October. The working group was set up on 31 August 2001 and first met on 13 November 2001.

Radiation Hazards

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent communications his Department has had with the working party on research implications of health and safety standards of radiation protection measures of the Article 31 Group of Experts appointed by the European Commission. [15576]

Ms Blears: Professor R. H. Clarke, who is Director of the National Radiological Protection Board, which advises the Department and others on radiation hazards, is a member of the Research Implications of Health and Safety Standard Working Party of Article 31. Officials in the Department receive information routinely on the programme of the working party and attend its seminars.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the cost in 2001–02 of the Medicines Control Agency. [16937]

Ms Blears: The budgeted costs of the Medicines Control Agency for the year 2001–02 are £39.6 million. The actual costs for the year will not be available until after March 2002. These costs are funded by fees from industry and others. The MCA does not receive any direct funding from the vote.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total expenditure is on items below £0.5 million in Annex A of the departmental report 2001. [17164]

Ms Blears: Items in Annex A1 through to Annex A8 of the Departmental report that are below £0.5 million are denoted with the sign '#' in the report. These items, in total, relate to planned income, not expenditure, of £181,000 for 2001–02.

Departmental Environmental Strategy

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost is in 2001–02 of his Department's environmental strategy. [16935]

Ms Blears: The Department supports the Government's strategy to put sustainable development—of which environmental matters are but one strand—at the heart of all its business. All activity related to environmental policy and operational matters is an integral part of departmental business and cannot be costed as a discrete item.

Directorate of Counter Fraud Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the cost in 2001–02 of the Directorate of Counter Fraud Services; and what level of fraud it has detected. [16941]

Ms Blears: The Directorate of Counter Fraud Services (DCFS) is the central unit of the National Health Service Counter Fraud Service (NHS CFS). The DCFS budget for 2001–02 is £1,344,200.

Since its inception, the NHS CFS has investigated 1,022 cases of alleged fraud, with an appropriate sanction being applied in every case where fraud has been proven. A 100 per cent. success rate has been achieved in 76 criminal prosecution cases. A further 131 civil and disciplinary sanction cases have been successfully progressed. A total of £11.9 million has been recovered and fraud through evasion of NHS prescription charges has been reduced by £48 million (41 per cent.) by the year 2000–01.

Prescription Fraud

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the level of prescription charge evasion for each of the last five years. [16858]

Ms Blears: The National Health Service Counter Fraud Service has carried out two patient prescription charge evasion exercises, measuring (to an accuracy of plus or minus 0.6 per cent.) the levels of fraud by patients from samples taken in November 1998 and July 1999. The amount of money lost to the NHS is estimated at £117 million in 1998–99 and £69 million in 1999–2000, demonstrating a reduction in losses from evasion of £48 million (41 per cent.). The NHS CFS will continue to measure prescription fraud on a regular basis.

There was no accurate measurement of prescription charge evasion prior to these exercises.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were prosecuted for prescription fraud in each of the last five years. [16856]

Ms Blears: Between the establishment of the Prescription Pricing Authority Compliance Unit on 1 April 1996 and June 2000 there was one criminal prosecution of a patient for fraudulently claiming prescription exemption. This case was handled by the police and occurred in 1999.

The unit was not involved in the prosecution of any contractors.

In June 2000 a new pharmaceutical fraud team was formed from the existing PPA Fraud Investigation Unit and integrated into the National Health Service Counter Fraud Service.

This has so far brought four successful prosecution cases against contractors to the NHS for prescription fraud. Two of these were completed in 2000 and two in 2001.

A further 17 cases are at various stages of the prosecution process, many of which are nearing fruition.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what anti-counterfeiting features have been introduced in prescription forms since 1997. [16857]

Ms Blears: A number of features were introduced in 1998. Among these are an ultra violet light sensitive mark in the forms, as an anti-counterfeiting device and serial numbering, primarily to aid tracking of prescription forms. There are a number of other security features which, for obvious reasons, must remain confidential.

Bed Census

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the 30 November bed census will include an audit of the number of beds in *(a)* mixed sex wards and *(b)* nightingale wards. [16839]

Ms Blears: The bed census scheduled for Friday 30 November is part of preparations for winter and will compare the number of general and acute beds in the national health service with numbers at the same time last year. It will inform the winter plan which is due for publication in December. The census will not collect information on mixed sex wards or nightingale wards.

Welfare Foods

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the breakdown of the funding of welfare foods in 2001–02. [17318]

Jacqui Smith: Plans for this year envisage expenditure of £79 million on liquid milk, £37 million on dried baby milk and £0.03 million on vitamins (England). Administration costs are estimated at £8.5 million (Great Britain).

Health Inequalities

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the £130 million allocated in 2001–02 to health authorities to adjust for health inequalities will be spent in 2001–02. [17316]

Jacqui Smith: The health inequalities adjustment of £130 million forms part of the total allocation to health authorities for 2001–02. It is for health authorities in partnership with primary care groups/trusts and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

Generic Drugs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the savings to public funds in 2000–01 from price reductions in generic drugs and the effect of the maximum price scheme. [17317]

Ms Blears: Following the introduction of the maximum price scheme in August 2000 the resulting price reductions on generic medicines produced estimated savings of £330 million to the national health service in the year to August 2001 compared to March 2000 prices.

Community Dental Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the cost to public funds of community dental services in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02 and *(c)* 2002–03. [17315]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Hospital-acquired Infections

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients from the Buckingham constituency contracted hospital-acquired infections in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [17853]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Comprehensive information about bacteraemias, including MRSA, has been collected from all acute trusts since 1 April 2001 and this will be published showing individual Trust data from 1 April 2002.

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations on residents of the Buckingham constituency have been cancelled in each quarter in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001 as a result of hospital beds being occupied by delayed discharge patients who (i) were awaiting social services funding or assessment and (ii) who had fully funded social services packages arranged. [17855]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not collected centrally in the format requested.

Statistics on the number of operations cancelled for non-medical reasons in each health authority are collected on a quarterly basis. Copies are available in the Library. The latest figures are for quarter 1 (April-June) of the 2001–02 financial year.

Tuberculosis (Buckingham)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of the BCG vaccine against tuberculosis in schools in the Buckingham constituency. [17857]

Jacqui Smith: Our policy is that all school children should be BCG immunised between ages 10–14 if they have not previously been immunised. Initially, in Buckinghamshire, this vaccine was offered to those students who were due to leave school in summer 2001. Where there has been sufficient vaccine and resources year 10 pupils were also offered testing and immunisation. Any current years 10 and 11 pupils who have not yet been offered the vaccine will be offered testing and immunisation during this academic year.

Further local information can be obtained from the chairman of the Buckinghamshire health authority.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Mr. Anthony D. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish the Chief Medical Officer's Working Group report on ME/CSF. [17961]

Jacqui Smith: The myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome working group members are currently considering amendments to their report. We hope to be in a position to publish the final report shortly.

Smoking-related Deaths

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths there have been since May 1997 from stroke; how many of these were smoking related; and what plans he has to introduce a bill on tobacco advertising and promotion. [18463]

Jacqui Smith: The information is not available in the form requested. Based on 1995 figures it has been estimated that each year 18,250 deaths are caused from stroke of which 7,300 deaths are smoking related.

We are committed to bring back the Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship Bill during the lifetime of the current Parliament.

Water Fluoridation

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make drinking water fluoridation more easily available in those areas which express a desire to have such water treatment; and if he will make a statement. [18650]

Ms Blears: We have commissioned the Medical Research Council to provide scientific advice regarding the health effects of water fluoridation and suggest priorities for the further research required. Their report is expected early next year and we will be reviewing our policy in the light of the report.

NHS Direct

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of NHS Direct on the number of patients visiting general practitioners in Leicestershire. [18497]

Ms Blears: Since NHS Direct east midlands was launched in February 1999 it has handled over 695,000 calls. This year alone it has handled over 340,000 calls. Where NHS Direct has acted as the first point of contact for patients seeking medical help out-of-hours, up to 50 per cent. of calls are handled without the need for onward referral to an out-of hours-doctor. By 2004 NHS Direct will be a one-stop gateway to out-of-hours health care passing on calls where necessary, to the appropriate general practitioner co-operative, including those in Leicestershire

NHS Direct is improving access to health care by advising callers which part of the national health service to contact. NHS Direct nurses routinely advise two out of three callers to use a more appropriate setting of care than the caller said they would otherwise have used. One in three callers are advised how to look after themselves at home.

NHS Dentists

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients in *(a)* Leicestershire and *(b)* the Loughborough constituency are registered with an NHS dentist; [18496]

(2) how many dentists in *(a)* Leicestershire and *(b)* the Loughborough constituency provide NHS treatment. [18495]

Jacqui Smith: The number of patients registered with a dentist in the general dental service (GDS) in Leicestershire health authority at 30 September 2001 is shown in the table. The table also shows the number of GDS dentists who carry out the majority of their work in the area covered by Leicestershire health authority.

Information on the number of patients registered and number of GDS dentists is not available by constituency.

General dental service: number of registrations and dentists in Leicestershire health authority at 30 September 2001

	Number
Registrations:	
Adults	330,478
Children	136,141
Total	466,619
Total number of dentists[1]	282

[1] Dentists who do the majority of their work in Leicestershire health authority. Excludes dentists in Leicestershire health area who do most of their work in other health authorities.

Walk-in Centre, Loughborough

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the Loughborough walk-in centre; and if he will make a statement. [18476]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has put in place systems to gather monthly management information on the operation of national health service walk-in centres, which are three-year pilot initiatives. In addition, it has commissioned an 18-month national evaluation of walk-in centres, which is being carried out by the University of Bristol. This began on 1 June 2000 and is due to report at the end of this year.

In Loughborough, general practitioner and primary care group (PCG) support was achieved on the basis that the impact of Loughborough NHS walk-in centre on local GP services would be assessed. To achieve a realistic and effective evaluation, a comparison of the "before" and "after" opening positions was considered essential.

Therefore, data have been collected by Leicestershire health authority since January 2000 until the end of June 2001. This data are in the final stages of being analysed by the local health community and it is expected to be published in a report scheduled for presentation to the local PCG some time early in the new year.

Early indications are that the walk-in centre has rapidly become an integral part of the local health community, which is greatly valued by local GPs, patients and other stakeholders.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue funding he has made available to Leicestershire and Rutland Healthcare NHS Trust for the Loughborough walk-in centre. [18475]

Jacqui Smith: The level of capital and revenue funding for Loughborough national health service walk-in centre since it was established and opened on 3 July 2000 is set out in the table.

£

	2000–01	*2001–02*
Capital	61,000	—
Revenue	363,000	471,000

Loughborough General Hospital

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on the new Loughborough general hospital; and if he will make a statement. [18474]

Jacqui Smith: The full business case (FBC) for the development of Loughborough Hospital was approved by national health service Trent Regional Office in November 1999. Since that time, Leicestershire and Rutland Healthcare NHS Trust has continued to develop the design and costing of the scheme.

Outstanding planning issues have been resolved and construction work started on this £9.4 million, publicly funded scheme earlier this year. The project is on time and within budget with an expected completion date on site of 22 November 2002. It is due to come into use at the end of December 2002.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many operations have been cancelled in Devon, in each quarter in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001, as a result of hospital beds being occupied by (i) delayed discharge patients who were awaiting social services funding or assessment and (ii) delayed discharge patients who had fully funded social services packages arranged; [18285]

(2) how many hospital beds were unavailable in Devon to incoming patients as a result of their occupation by *(a)* delayed discharge patients who were awaiting social services funding and *(b)* delayed discharge patients who had fully funded social services packages arranged in each quarter in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001. [18286]

Ms Blears: Information is not collected centrally in the requested format. The available information on delayed discharges in north and east Devon health authority has been placed in the Library.

MMR Inoculations

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of children aged *(a)* one to two, *(b)* two to three and *(c)* three to four years have been given MMR inoculations in Devon in the last five years. [18280]

Ms Blears: The information available about children immunised against measles, mumps and rubella is contained in the Statistical Bulletin "NHS Immunisation Statistics, England: 2000–01". A copy of the bulletin is in the Library and can also be found on the Department of Health website www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0121.htm.

Nursing and Residential Care Beds

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing and residential care *(a)* homes and *(b)* beds have closed in Devon in each year since 1997. [18287]

Ms Blears: The number of residential and nursing care establishment closures in 1999 and 2000, together with the number of new registrations, are shown in the table. Information is not available centrally on the number of beds associated with closures or new registrations.

Number of care home establishment closures and new home registrations in Devon

	Year ending 31 March	
	1999	*2000*
Number of establishment closures		
Residential[1]	49	99
Nursing[2]	5	18
Number of new registrations		
Residential[1]	58	104
Nursing[2]	6	9

[1] Information for 1999 is presented for Devon county council only as information for Plymouth and Torbay unitary authorities is not available. Information for 2000 is presented for Devon county council and Plymouth and Torbay unitary authorities. Therefore the figures are not strictly comparable.

[2] Information presented for south and west Devon and north and east Devon health authorities.

Source:

Registration and Inspection Survey

Trolley Deaths

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have died while on trolleys in the Leicestershire health authority while awaiting admission in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [18737]

Jacqui Smith: There are no recorded instances of patients dying on trolleys in the Leicestershire health authority area while awaiting admission in accident and emergency, with the exception of Brenda Jones, who died in Leicester Royal infirmary on 20 November.

After being assessed and waiting on a trolley for several hours, Mrs. Jones was being seen by a doctor in Leicester Royal infirmary accident and emergency department when she collapsed. She was taken to a resuscitation room, where sadly she died. A post mortem has revealed that she died of a pulmonary embolus. The trust's initial investigations suggest this could not have been foreseen from her presenting condition. Nevertheless, a full investigation is being carried out and University Hospitals of Leicester NHS trust has already revisited and strengthened its procedures and has apologised to Mrs. Jones' husband.

Mrs. Brenda Jones

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the death of Mrs. Brenda Jones. [18740]

Jacqui Smith: The University Hospitals of Leicester national health service trust is carrying out an urgent investigation into the circumstances surrounding Mrs. Jones' death in the accident and emergency department at Leicester Royal infirmary (LRI) after a considerable time spent waiting on a trolley. Initial investigations indicate that Mrs. Jones' treatment in accident and emergency was appropriate to her presenting condition. A post mortem revealed that she died of a pulmonary embolus and it is believed that this could not have been foreseen. Nevertheless, procedures have been revisited and strengthened and the trust has apologised to her husband.

Following visits to Leicester Royal infirmary by the National Patients Access Team and the Winter and Emergency Services Team (WEST), a remedial action plan has been put in place, to address the problems of long waiting in accident and emergency at the LRI. The regional office continues to work closely with the trust and WEST to help Leicester to meet the new national target, which states that by the end of March 2002 no one should have to wait more than four hours in accident and emergency before admission.

We are determined to tackle the problem of long trolley waits in some parts of the country. The University Hospitals of Leicester NHS trust has received £3.7 million to modernise its accident and emergency department, as part of our £115 million accident and emergency modernisation programme. A further £366,011 was announced last week for extra emergency care nurses at the trust between now and 2003.

University Hospitals of Leicester Trust

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the annual budget of the University Hospitals of Leicester trust for the latest financial year. [18738]

Jacqui Smith: The latest published figures for the University Hospitals of Leicester national health service trust are for the financial year 2000–01. The total income (or turnover) for this period was £346.83 million.

Source:

Summarisation schedules

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultants there are in the University Hospitals of Leicester. [18739]

Jacqui Smith: The number of hospital, public health medicine and community health services medical and dental consultants within the University Hospitals of Leicester national health service trust is 360.

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census, as at 30 September 2000

Strokes

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he is taking to ensure that the stroke standard published within the National Service Framework for Older People is implemented across different health and social care settings; [18916]

(2) what action he plans to take to address the variation in the death rate from stroke in hospitals in England. [18915]

Jacqui Smith: The stroke standard in the National Service Framework for Older People (NSF) provides a detailed service model and specific milestones for the local development of specialised stroke services throughout England. The achievement of milestones will be monitored and will ensure improvements in access to, and delivery of stroke care and as a consequence help to reduce variation in death rate across England. The NSF milestones are:

By April 2002 every general hospital which cares for people with stroke will have plans to introduce a specialised stroke service as described in the stroke service model from 2004.

By April 2003 every hospital which cares for older people with stroke will have established clinical audit systems to ensure delivery of the Royal College of Physicians clinical guidelines for stroke care.

By April 2004 primary care groups/trusts will have ensured that:

> every general practice, using protocols agreed with local specialist services, can identify and treat patients identified as being at risk of a stroke because of high blood pressure, atrial fibrillation or other risk factors
>
> every general practice is using a protocol agreed with local specialist services for the rapid referral and management of those with transient ischaemic attack
>
> every general practice can identify people who have had a stroke and are treating them according to protocols agreed with local specialist services
>
> every general practice has established clinical audit systems for stroke.

By April 2004, 100 per cent. of all general hospitals which care for people with stroke to have a specialised stroke service as described in the stroke service model.

Nursing Cadet Scheme

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Gateshead Health NHS Trust's nursing cadet scheme; and what plans there are to encourage other NHS trusts to practice similar recruitment techniques. [19060]

Jacqui Smith: The Gateshead Health national health service trust nurse cadet scheme, established in partnership by the trust and the University of Northumbria, creates a seamless career pathway for students into nurse training. The two year scheme commenced on 24 September 2001 with 12 participants. Cadets undertake both practice placements, supported by a mentor, and theoretical learning. On completion of their level 3 NVQ in Care they will step immediately into nurse training at the university.

In September 1999 there were only 30 cadet schemes in England. By March 2001 this had more than doubled to in excess of 60 schemes. Following a national seminar on cadet schemes earlier this year, the Department undertook a varied work programme to ensure the continued expansion of cadet schemes throughout England.

Ministerial Visits (North-East)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times since November 2000 Ministers from his Department have visited *(a)* the Teesside area and *(b)* Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency to meet with locally based businesses. [19075]

Jacqui Smith: Visits to the area have been made as follows:

Date	*Minister*	*Place*	*Purpose*
3 November 2000	Secretary of State	New School of Health building, University of Teesside, Middlesbrough	Official opening of the new School of Health
30 March 2001	Secretary of State	University of Durham, Stockton campus, Stockton, Teesside	Extra medical school places announcement
6 September 2001	Minister of State (Jacqui Smith)	Bankfields Court, Normanby, Middlesbrough	Community Care conference at Teesside University followed by visit to Tees and North East Yorkshire Trust

None of these have been set up with the intention of meeting locally based businesses.

Protection of Children Act

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many social services departments have not complied fully with the Protection of Children Act 1999; [19095]

(2) what monitoring of social service departments he has undertaken to ensure that the vetting procedures laid out in the Protection of Children Act 1999 are undertaken; [19102]

(3) what measures he has taken to ensure that the vetting measures contained within the Protection of Children Act 1999 are fully complied with. [19101]

Jacqui Smith: All children's services are regularly inspected by the Department's social services inspectorate. These inspections include scrutiny of the provisions for children's safeguards to ensure that the requirements of the Children Act and subsequent legislation and regulations are being implemented. This scrutiny therefore covers recruitment policies and practices and I can confirm that of the 60 councils whose children services have been inspected since August 1999, all have developed policies and procedures to check the suitability of staff working with children which are consistent with the requirements of current legislation and guidance. All councils will have been covered by 2004.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prosecutions have been brought under the Protection of Children Act 1999 of *(a)* employers who fail to vet applicants for child care jobs and *(b)* individuals who have been banned from working with children applying to do so. [19097]

Jacqui Smith: The Protection of Children Act 1999 makes no provisions for prosecutions in this way. The type of offences referred to are to be found in Section 35 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000. Information is not yet available centrally on the number of convictions relating to offences under this section of the Act.

Victoria Climbié

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Victoria Climbié Inquiry will publish its findings. [19378]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Health and the Home Department will publish the findings of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry as soon as possible after receiving the report from Lord Laming, who is chairing the Inquiry. My right hon. Friends are expecting to receive the inquiry report next year.

Winter Pressures

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* method and *(b)* criteria he will use to apportion and spend the additional £300 million for social services departments to assist in tackling winter pressures. [19283]

Jacqui Smith: The grant determination under section 93 of the Local Government Act 2000 of the Building Care Capacity Grant for 2001–02 was published in November and placed on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/jointunit/delayeddischarge. This sets out the allocations for all councils of the £100 million to be spent this financial year. Fifty five councils have been targeted for extra help on the basis of their high rates of delayed discharge or on the basis of a risk assessment using information drawn from our performance monitoring arrangements. No decision has yet been taken about the allocation of £200 million to be made available for 2002–03.

Child Protection (Unborn Children)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many unborn children were *(a)* placed on the child protection register and *(b)* taken off the child protection register in the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will list the reasons given for (i) placing an unborn child on the child protection register and (ii) removing an unborn child from the child protection register. [19434]

Jacqui Smith: The number of unborn children who were placed on, and removed from, child protection registers during the years ending 31 March 1997 to 2001 are given in the table.

Registrations to and de-registrations from child protection registers, of unborn children, during the years ending 31 March 1997–01 and number of unborn children on the registers at 31 March each year

England *numbers of unborn children*[1]

Year ending 31 March	*On the register at 31 March*	*Registrations during the year*	*De-registrations during the year*
1997	300	600	60
1998	200	600	100
1999	300	800	60
2000	200	900	30
2001	200	1,000	70

[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest 100, figures less than 100 are rounded to the nearest 10

Where inquiries under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 give rise to concern that an unborn child may be at future risk of significant harm, the social services department may need to convene an initial child protection conference prior to the child's birth. Such a conference will have the same status, and should proceed in the same way, as other initial child protection conferences, including decisions about registration on the child protection register. The involvement of midwifery services is vital in such cases.

An unborn child will be registered on the child protection register if a decision is taken at the initial child protection conference that the unborn child is at continuing risk of significant harm. The act of registration itself confers no protection on a child, and should always be accompanied by a child protection plan.

An unborn child will be de-registered from the child protection register if the child dies or it is judged that the child is no longer at continuing risk of significant harm requiring safeguarding by means of a child protection plan. De-registration will also take place if the child's family have moved permanently to another local authority area. In this case, the receiving local authority should convene a child protection conference within 15 working days of being notified of the move, only after which event may de-registration take place in respect of the original local authority's child protection register.

Strategic Health Authorities

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many strategic health authorities will be created in England under the powers in the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill. [20012]

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many strategic health authorities he expects to create under the NHS reform Bill. [20897]

Mr. Hutton: The consultation exercises on the proposed boundaries for 28 new, larger and more strategic, health authorities ended on 30 November 2001. The Department is still considering the final responses to the consultation exercises but expects to be in a position soon to announce the number and configuration of the new health authorities, to be established from 1 April 2002. Subject to passage of the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, the new health authorities should become strategic health authorities by October 2002.

Diabetes

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if the Gluco Watch Biographer will be available on prescription to diabetes sufferers in the NHS; [18145]

(2) if alto sensors will be made available to diabetes sufferers, on prescription, under the NHS; [18144]

(3) what assessment he has made of the Gluco Watch Biographer, for regular blood checking in diabetes sufferers; and what plans he has to use this device in the NHS. [18146]

Jacqui Smith: In order to be prescribed by general practitioners on the national health service, appliances must be listed in Part IX of the Drug Tariff. Such listings are made only in response to, and after consideration of, applications from the manufacturers. No application has been made by the manufacturer of the Gluco Watch Biographer or its accessories. We would expect the applicant to provide any evidence needed to support the application.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Graham Browne

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Solicitor-General what the prosecution costs were in the case against Graham Browne; what the result of the prosecution was; and what further costs arose from the result of the prosecution. [20903]

The Solicitor-General: Graham Browne stood trial at the central criminal court between 29 October 2001 and 7 November 2001 on a charge of blackmail. It was alleged by the Crown that he, a former employee of Barclays bank and the head of an encryption team, wrote to them under an assumed name, informing them that their security was at risk and demanding that 14 named individuals (of whom he was one) should be employed at a cost of £25 million to ensure that security was not breached. Key security codes were included in the correspondence. The jury returned a majority verdict of not guilty.

The time and overhead costs of the lawyer caseworker and administrative staff engaged in the case were about £10,000. A total of £1,942.65 has been paid in witness expenses. The actual costs to the Crown Prosecution Service in bringing the prosecution have not yet been finally determined. These costs do not include the fees of prosecution counsel which are currently being negotiated.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Rail Track Capacity

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what timetable he has for *(a)* work on upgrades to rail track capacity around (i) Birmingham, (ii) Manchester and (iii) Coventry, *(b)* construction of the (1) Thameslink 2000 rail project, (2) west coast main line rail project, (3) upgrade to the London to Stansted train route, (4) upgrade to the north Transpennine train route, (5) Brighton train line upgrade, (6) east coast main line, (7) Sunderland Metro and (8) rail flyover at Shortlands in Kent, *(c)* train station upgrades to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, *(d)* redevelopment of Gatwick train station and *(e)* implementation of (x) the programme of platform extensions and stations into London Waterloo and (y) the Train Protection Warning System; and which targets have been put back in the past month. [13520]

Mr. Spellar: The Strategic Rail Authority will publish shortly their Strategic Plan, setting out their priorities for investment in rail projects to deliver the Government's 10 Year Transport Plan core targets of 50 per cent. passenger growth, 80 per cent. freight growth and a reduction in London overcrowding to SRA standards, by 2010. The SRA continues to base its investment plans on the delivery of these targets. There has been no change to this approach.

London Underground

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the latest available figure is on capacity on the London Underground, broken down by *(a)* movement of passengers per 15 minutes at peak times for each line, *(b)* the amount of spare capacity as expressed in potential passenger movement per 15 minutes at peak times and *(c)* the use of capacity at peak times, expressed as a percentage for each line. [13998]

Mr. Spellar: This is an operational matter for London Underground (LU), but they advise that the measures requested do not form part of their regular monitoring and management reporting process. I understand that the most recent available survey on passenger numbers at peak times was completed by London Underground during 2000 and the resulting information on this and on measures of capacity was given by the then Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Keith Hill), in answer to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) on 22 March 2001, *Official Report,* column 283W. Regrettably, some of the information given in answer to that earlier PQ was inaccurate and the table provides corrected information.

For each line, the table provides a snapshot of the busiest quarter-hour period on the busiest section. The table shows in columns D and E the figures which London Underground record as the "theoretical design capacity" of trains, as determined by the manufacturer and set out in an earlier answer of 2 February 2001, *Official Report,* column 315W; and in columns F and G the actual numbers of people they recorded as using those lines at the busiest period. I regret that the earlier figures were misleading: the corrected figures show that the Underground is not as crowded as the previous answer appeared to show.

However, it should be noted that in practice some trains may have a higher and some a lower crowding. This could be caused by either any unevenness in the time between consecutive trains or in the uneven distribution of customers along platforms.

A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*
			Design capacity		*Actual numbers of people*	
Line	*Busiest section*	*Time*	*Hour capacity*	*¼ hour capacity*	*Hour demand*	*¼ hour demand*
Bakerloo	Charing Cross to Piccadilly Circus	08:45–09:00	27,954	6,989	13,260	3,315
Central	Bethnal Green to Liverpool Street	08:45–09:00	45,582	11,395	22,328	5,582
Victoria	Victoria to Green Park	08:45–09:00	42,363	10,591	22,016	5,504
Waterloo & City	Waterloo to Bank	07:45–08:00	14,818	3,704	6,800	1,700
Jubilee	St John's Wood to Baker Street	08:45–09:00	22,820	5,705	13,108	3,277
Northern	Clapham North to Stockwell	08:45–09:00	35,011	8,753	17,096	4,274
Piccadilly	Earl's Court to Gloucester Road	08:30–08:45	33,216	8,304	17,452	4,363
Circle	Sloane Square to Victoria	17:30–17:45	8,958	2,240	3,948	987
H&C	Liverpool Street to Moorgate	08:30–08:45	8,958	2,240	5,276	1,319
Metropolitan	Finchley Road to Baker Street	08:30–08:45	35,964	8,991	11,616	2,904

A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*
			Design capacity		*Actual numbers of people*	
Line	*Busiest section*	*Time*	*Hour capacity*	*¼ hour capacity*	*Hour demand*	*¼ hour demand*
District	Victoria to St James's Park	08:30–08:45	30,380	7,595	16,092	4,023
East London Line	Surrey Quays to Canada Water	08:15–08:30	6,815	1,704	3,908	977

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who will bear the financial risk for unforeseen circumstances in improving the London Underground under PPP. [20115]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's modernisation plans for the London Underground follow the principle that risk should be allocated to whoever is best able to manage it. The aim is not to transfer risk for its own sake, as this would lead to a decline in value for money, but rather to optimise the transfer of risk. The private sector infrastructure companies will be liable for all cost overruns that result from their acting in an uneconomic or inefficient manner. However, the financial risks associated with 'force majeure' events are retained by London Underground, as long as they are not caused by and are beyond the control of the infrastructure companies.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the changes in London Underground's costs since 1997. [20112]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground's costs have primarily increased because of work to maintain and improve performance and reliability against a background of increased demand and past underinvestment.

The increase in London Underground's operating costs also, however, reflects its adoption in 1999 of the mandatory Financial Reporting Standard (FRS) 15, which set out revised principles of accounting for tangible fixed assets. The impact of the adoption of FRS15 on London Underground's accounts for 1999–2000 was set out in the reply given by the then Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Keith Hill), to my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Coleman) on 23 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 525W. The full impact on its accounts was also confirmed in London Transport's Annual Report 2000–01, published in July of this year.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many delays of 15 minutes or more of trains on the London Underground were caused by problems with *(a)* track, *(b)* signals and *(c)* rolling stock for (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96, (iii) 1996–97, (iv) 1997–98 and (v) 1999–2000. [20596]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for London Underground who inform me that this information is not held in the form requested for full years before 1999–2000, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The table shows the requested information as measured by London Underground during 1999–2000.

Train delays of 15 minutes or more in 1999–2000

Cause	*Total*
(a) Track	142
(b) Signals	713
(c) Rolling Stock	608

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes there were in the rules during the bidding for the public-private partnership for the London Underground. [20362]

Mr. Jamieson: The rules under which these procurements are conducted are determined by European law and have not changed during the procurements.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the urban regeneration implications *(a)* around St. Pancras Station, *(b)* for London and *(c)* for the United Kingdom as a whole, of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. [15737]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department assessed the urban regeneration implications of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link in 1998 to inform the appraisal of the value for money of the restructured financing deal with London and Continental Railways announced in June 1998. The assessment considered the impact of the link on commercial property development, house building and job creation in the main areas affected by the link, that is, around St. Pancras, Stratford, and Ebbsfleet stations and the Royal Docks. Impacts in the rest of the United Kingdom were not assessed. The assessment of the gross direct regeneration implications associated with the link is shown. The cost of creating a similar number of additional jobs through other regeneration programmes was estimated to be £1,000 million (at 1998 prices).

	St. Pancras/ King's Cross	*Stratford*	*Ebbsfleet*	*Royal Docks*	*Total*
Floorspace (sq ft)	4,682,190	5,960,140	12,168,780	2,798,190	25,609,300
Number of dwellings with CTRL	3,285	1,200	16,260	0	20,745
Jobs created:					
With CTRL	14,078	21,587	36,210	6,861	78,736
Without CTRL	10,764	6,457	5,627	5,382	28,230
Additional Jobs	3,314	15,130	30,583	1,479	50,506

The estimated impact of the link on development values was around £650 million (net present value at 1997–98 prices). The table shows the results of the assessment by area.

£ million NPV

	Without CTRL	*With CTRL*	*Uplift due to CTRL*
St. Pancras/King's Cross	175	385	210
Stratford	50	255	205
Ebbsfleet	35	255	220
Royal Docks	10	20	10
Total all areas	270	915	645

Passenger Vehicle Safety

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers a local authority has to terminate a contract with a bus operator for transporting pupils from home to school if the service is deemed to be unsafe. [17876]

Ms Keeble: The Government attach the greatest importance to the safety of all bus passengers, including children, and try to ensure that the highest possible safety standards are maintained. There are various controls on bus operators aimed at ensuring that all their operations are safe. The powers to terminate a contract if a service is found to be unsafe will be determined by the terms and conditions contained in the contract with the bus operator.

Road Accidents (Somerset)

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to reduce road traffic accidents in Somerset. [17929]

Mr. Jamieson: Local transport authorities have a statutory duty to produce a local transport plan (LTP). They are required to set out five-year integrated transport plans which cover all forms of transport and include a set of locally devised aims and objectives, a long-term strategy to meet them, a costed implementation programme and a set of targets and performance indicators to measure progress. They also provide annual progress reports. The first full LTPs were produced in July 2000 and cover the period from April 2001 to March 2006. Capital resources for local transport improvements are provided through the annual local transport capital settlement; we will announce shortly the allocations for 2002–03 which will include provision for road safety improvements.

Road safety is an important component of the local transport plan (LTP) process and we will expect to see all transport authorities to be making progress in this area.

Somerset's first LTP annual progress report reports progress in several inter-related strategies, eg. a 14 per cent. reduction in killed and serious injury (KSI) accidents on the county's roads in 2000 over 1999 and a 50 per cent. reduction (50) in child KSI accidents over the same period. The county has introduced 90 local safety schemes on its roads in the last five years, such as speed management and improving facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, and in 2000–01 nine primary, six middle/secondary schools and one FE college have committed to the Safe Routes to School initiative.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what calculation he has made of the amount of lost interest per day arising from the lack of proceeds from the sale of the Dome site; [19849]

(2) if it is his policy to obtain the best possible value from the north Greenwich peninsular site; if he will publish the conditions of sale of the Dome site; and what discussions he is engaged in with potential bidders for the *(a)* site and *(b)* structure of the Dome. [19851]

Ms Keeble: The process being followed is driven by the need to secure long-term regeneration of the peninsula and the wider area.

Evaluation of proposals for the future use of the Dome and any associated land includes a thorough assessment of value for money. Any sale of the Dome will also be required to provide a worthwhile and sustainable future for the Dome; and we will want to be assured that any proposal can be successfully delivered.

On-going market testing is exploring all avenues, and on the basis of professional advice we are in discussion with a small number of serious contenders. To reveal details of the discussions would not be conducive to a successful conclusion and would be against the public interest.

Renewco

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 607W, on Renewco, for what reason this information is commercially sensitive. [19717]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is covered by the exemption from disclosure under the code of Practice on Access to government Information because it relates to confidential communications between the Department and the Strategic Rail Authority about matters including commercially sensitive issues relating to the financial position of Railtrack.

White Papers

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the date of publication of the *(a)* Regions White Paper and *(b)* the Local Government White Paper. [19888]

Dr. Whitehead: As the Deputy Prime Minister announced to Parliament on 2 July, the Government's White Paper on regional governance in England will be published when it is ready.

The local government White Paper will be published shortly.

Railtrack

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many staff the administrator of Railtrack employs; [19428]

(2) what are the day rates of the administrator of Railtrack; and what different levels of staff has it been using. [19430]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the administrator who was appointed by the High Court.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many speed restrictions are in force on the Railtrack network. [19959]

Mr. Spellar: I understand from Railtrack that as at 26 November there were 659 temporary speed restrictions in force.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the terms of the Hartwell agreement in relation to the west coast main line project; whether members of his Department were involved in that agreement; and what financial guarantees his Department gave to the companies involved with that agreement. [20088]

Mr. Jamieson: The Hartwell agreement was the result of negotiations between Railtrack and Virgin Trains. Neither the Government nor the Strategic Rail Authority were involved in the negotiations or party to them.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when Part 1 of the passenger upgrade agreement for the west coast main line was to be completed; and what plans the Government have for completing Part 2; what stage the Government's discussions with the SRA have reached regarding engineering access from the Virgin cross country franchise to the west coast main line; and whether completion of Part 2 is dependent on price. [20089]

Mr. Jamieson: Finalisation of phase 1 is likely to be in May 2003. Options for completing phase 2 are still under discussion with the Strategic Rail Authority, Railtrack, Virgin, other users and stakeholders. Value for money is one of the considerations in these discussions.

NATS

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment he has made of the financial health of the consortium which will take over the National Air Traffic Services; and if he will make a statement. [20244]

Mr. Jamieson: The role of the Government's strategic partner in the public private partnership for National Air Traffic Services was awarded to the Airline Group, a consortium of seven airlines, on 26 July 2001. We maintain regular contact with the Airline Group over a range of issues including their financial situation.

Standing Committee on Regional Affairs

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will table a motion to call for a sitting of the Standing Committee on Regional Affairs. [19916]

Dr. Whitehead: A motion was tabled on the 3 December calling for the Committee to meet on 18 December to discuss 'Regional Governance in England'.

Urban Regeneration

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of funding for urban regeneration schemes has been spent buying out right-to-buy occupiers in the past three years. [20105]

Ms Keeble: The information is not available centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Property Purchases

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy that acceptance of an offer to purchase a property be a binding legal contract. [20006]

Ms Keeble: There is nothing to prevent buyers and sellers agreeing to building contracts when offers are accepted, but we do not believe it would be right to require this by law. Our 1998 consultation exercise showed widespread support for this stance.

As set out in our manifesto, we are committed to making it easier for people buying and selling homes through a new seller's pack. The seller's pack will provide, at the very start of the process, most of the documents and information needed to enable the transaction to proceed speedily and successfully. It will provide prospective buyers with most of the information they need to make an informed offer. The disclosure of this information at the outset will greatly improve transparency and reduce the risk of the transaction failing or the parties having to renegotiate terms due to problems being revealed later on. The necessary legislation will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on his policy towards gazumping and gazundering in house purchases. [20005]

Ms Keeble: We believe the answer to the problems caused by gazumping and gazundering lie in increasing transparency and speeding up the home buying and selling process. That is what our proposals for seller's packs will achieve. Seller's packs will bring about earlier certainty and reduce the period of time during which gazumping and gazundering can occur. The necessary legislation for this will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Edinburgh Waverley Station

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he has been advised of a request for a financial subsidy towards the cost of a site survey of Edinburgh Waverley Station in connection with its proposed redevelopment; [19926]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with the Strategic Rail Authority regarding funding for the redevelopment of Edinburgh Waverley Station. [19927]

Mr. Jamieson: We are not aware of any request for a financial subsidy towards the redevelopment work at Edinburgh Waverley station. This is a major redevelopment scheme, including retail development and the Strategic Rail Authority are considering a number of proposals put forward by Railtrack.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the increase in the departmental expenditure limit from 2001–02 to 2002–03 will be accounted for by wage costs. [20674]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department's main programmes departmental expenditure limit (DEL) is planned to increase by £2.2 billion between 2001–02 and 2002–03. Based upon expenditure forecasts for 2001–02 and 2002–03, we estimate the increase in departmental pay costs to be £15.5 million which is equivalent to 0.7 per cent. of this increase.

Parking Taxes

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the local authorities which have expressed an interest to his Department in participating in *(a)* workplace parking taxes pilot schemes and *(b)* congestion tax pilot schemes. [20376]

Mr. Byers: Outside London, road user charging schemes are being developed by Durham county council, Derbyshire county council and Bristol city council. Nottingham city council is developing a workplace parking levy scheme.

Other authorities which have indicated in their local transport plans that road user charging or a workplace parking levy might play a part in local congestion management are:

Bath and North East Somerset council
Cambridgeshire county council
Cheshire county council
Cumbria county council
Derby city council
Hampshire county council
Isle of Wight council
Leeds city council
Leicester city council
Greater Manchester (10 authorities)
Milton Keynes council
Reading council
South Gloucestershire council
Southampton city council
Staffordshire county council
Surrey county council
Warwickshire county council
West Midlands (excluding Coventry, Solihull and Walsall)
City of York council.

Statutory Off Road Notification Scheme

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he has in place for determining the impact of the Statutory Off Road Notification Scheme. [20597]

Mr. Jamieson: The Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN) scheme was one of a number of measures introduced to enhance the accuracy of the vehicle register maintained by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). It is designed to keep DVLA's unlicensed vehicle keeper records up to date. Since introduction over 2.5 million SORN declarations have been made recovering revenue of £6 million. The number of SORN declarations received is constantly monitored and DVLA is carrying out an in depth review of the accuracy of the vehicle register.

SORN prevents unlicensed vehicles from "dropping off" the vehicle register and measuring vehicle excise duty (VED) evasion is a useful way to assess impact. At the last full survey in 1999, evasion rates showed a fall from 4.1 per cent. to 3.9 per cent., a saving of £17 million a year.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what has been the cost of enforcing the Statutory Off Road Notification scheme since inception. [20598]

Mr. Jamieson: The cost of enforcing the Statutory Off Road Notification scheme is approximately £1 million a year. Since enforcement commenced in April 2000, enforcement action has raised over £6 million in fines and penalties.

Road Accidents (Fire Service Costs)

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will give fire services powers to claim from car insurers the cost of road accident rescue work. [20489]

Dr. Whitehead: In common with other local authority services, the fire service is funded primarily through the revenue support grant system. Local authorities secure most of their funding from Government grants, supplemented by council tax. Levies on the insurance industry contribute to the central Government funds from which revenue support grant is paid.

The Government raised the general question of charging policies for discretionary services provided by local authorities in the Green Paper "Modernising Local Government Finance" which was published in September 2000. Our conclusions, in the light of the consultation responses, will be set out in the Local Government White Paper which is due to be published shortly.

Single Sky Agreement

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the safety of people from Bromsgrove travelling to Gibraltar following the failure of Gibraltar to be included in the European single skies agreement. [20403]

Mr. Jamieson: The people of Bromsgrove can be assured that when travelling to Gibraltar their safety will not be impaired by the proposed treatment of Gibraltar under the European single sky proposals.

Port Health Budget

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what are the areas of expenditure contained in the port health budget for each of the last three years for which figures are available. [20819]

Mr. Raynsford: English local authorities have reported the following expenditure on port health.

Port health expenditure 1995–96 to 1997–98

£000

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Expenditure			
Employees	2,443	2,671	2,794
Running expenses	3,645	3,612	3,839
Joint arrangements	61	0	0
Total expenditure	6,149	6,283	6,633
Income			
Sales	41	5	0
Fees and charges	1,393	1,675	2,386
Other income	289	204	137
Joint arrangements	91	173	70
Total income	1,813	2,057	2,593
Net current expenditure	4,335	4,226	4,040

No further expenditure details are available.

Audit Commission Inspections

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what directions he has given to the Audit Commission on inspections into the running of services by *(a)* Walsall MBC, *(b)* Hillingdon LBC, *(c)* Derby city council, *(d)* Malvern Hills DC and *(e)* Waltham Forest LBC. [20535]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* I have given the Audit Commission no directions on inspections into the running of services by these authorities.

Special Advisers

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 394W, on records kept under Clause 9 of the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers, if he will list the internal purposes to which he referred. [20384]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* These are set out in the clause to which the hon. Member refers.

Rural Bus Challenge

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 943W, how much of the money spent on Rural Bus Challenge projects was spent in 2001–02; and where it was spent. [20704]

Ms Keeble: Local authorities have to date received the following amounts in Rural Bus Challenge grant in 2001–02. We expect challenge payments in the year as a whole to total about £20 million.

£

Local authority	*Payment to date*
Bedfordshire	116,791
Cumbria	343,500
Devon	271,000
Dorset	201,092
East Riding	166,863
East Sussex	466,888
Essex	571,805
Hampshire	521,260
Herefordshire	41,518
Hertfordshire	87,692
Kent	193,000
Lancashire	396,914
Leicestershire	279,540
Milton Keynes	101,965
Norfolk	75,055
North Lincolnshire	114,313
North Yorkshire	509,000
Northamptonshire	83,050
Northumberland	372,600
Nottinghamshire	185,764
Plymouth	141,400
Redcar and Cleveland	20,000
Shropshire	238,176
South Yorkshire	318,500
Staffordshire	97,548
Stockton-on-Tees	12,000
Suffolk	404,025
Thurrock	97,000
Torbay	111,340
Tyne and Wear	630,050
Warwickshire	135,405
West Yorkshire	208,928
Wiltshire	458,080
Worcestershire	757,645
Total	8,729,707

Building Regulations (Domestic Boilers)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the reduction in anticipated carbon savings in 2010 resulting from the delay in implementation for a further five months of the requirements set out in part L of the Building Regulations for improvements to domestic central heating boilers. [18243]

Mr. Raynsford: Deferring implementation of the replacement boiler efficiency standards by five months will cause a slight reduction in the savings expected to accrue. My Department estimates that the cumulative effect of this reduction will be no more than 0.03 Mtonnes per year in 2010, and could be less. The outturn will be dependent on how market factors influence the take-up of the better heating control requirements that were introduced with the deferral to compensate for the lower boiler performances.

Headlights

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to implement regulations in respect of vehicles' use of headlights during the hours of daylight; and if he will make a statement. [19606]

Mr. Jamieson: During daylight hours vehicles are already required by the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989 to use headlamps in seriously reduced visibility.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has no plans to amend the regulations to mandate their use throughout the hours of daylight.

The European Commission's proposals to introduce pedestrian protection features in new cars by a negotiated agreement with car manufacturers included a commitment to fit daytime running lamps. This element of the agreement has been deferred for further consideration.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many Health and Safety Executive inspectors are working in the field carrying out inspections; and how many *(a)* routine visits and *(b)* accident site examinations they made in 2000–01. [20722]

Dr. Whitehead: There are 1027.4 full-time equivalent inspectors working in the field carrying out inspections. This number does not include 125.3 full-time equivalent specialist inspectors who in the main carry out investigations rather than planned inspections.

In the year 2000–01 they made 80,447 planned inspections and investigated 15,489 incidents. There is no available data on the number of accident site examinations, instead HSE records the number of incidents investigated. In more serious cases several inspectors may make several site examinations for an individual incident investigation.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total funding provided to the Health and Safety Executive for 2001–02 is; and what the proposed funding is for 2002–03. [20721]

Dr. Whitehead: The total funding for HSC/E for 2001–02 and proposed funding for 2002–03 is set out in the table. Budget data are provided in the HSC Strategic Plan 2001–04 published in October 2001.

Budget settlements for 2001–02 to 2002–03

£ million

	2001–02 plan	*2002–03 plan*
Administration costs	193.7	195.9
Programme expenditure	49.4	54.4
Income	–59.4	–58.3
Total HSE resource budget	183.7	192
HSE capital budget	6.9	9.9
HSL resource budget	–2.2	–2.2
HSL capital budget	4.2	4.2
Total managed expenditure	192.6	203.9

Note:

From 2001–02, the Government have changed the way they budget and account for public expenditure. Under the new resource accounting and budgeting arrangements Departments and bodies such as HSE have to budget for non-cash costs such as depreciation on fixed assets and a 6 per cent. capital charge on net assets. This budget is reviewed on an annual basis. HSC/E's budget for non-cash costs in 2001–02 is £12 million. (The figures do not include this.)

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received on the promptness of the response of the Health and Safety Executive following the gas explosion in Newton Heath, Manchester on Saturday 17 November; and if he will make a statement. [17148]

Mr. Byers: Pursuant to the answer of 22 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 393W, I personally received representations from my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central. I share his concerns about this issue and have asked the Director General of the Health and Safety Executive to provide my hon. Friend with full progress reports of the investigation being conducted by Transco.

Fire Authorities

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make extra funding available to fire authorities to pay for anti-terrorist strategies; and if he will make a statement. [20720]

Dr. Whitehead: In the light of the events of 11 September, we have established with the fire service stakeholders a group, chaired by HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services. The group is evaluating, among other things, the existing response capabilities of, and the need for specialist appliances and equipment for, local authority fire and rescue services. The group will be reporting shortly and we shall consider the implications of its report, including the resource requirements, as a matter of urgency.

Electoral Pilots

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether local authorities operating electoral pilots for the May 2002 local elections involving all-postal ballots will be required to *(a)* ensure that ballot papers are fully accessible to visually impaired voters through the use of (i) standard ballot papers which conform to clear print guidelines, (ii) tactile templates, and (iii) notices in alternative formats and *(b)* offer visually impaired and other print disabled people an alternative means of casting a secret ballot independently. [19846]

Dr. Whitehead: The criteria for assessing applications to conduct electoral pilot schemes at the May 2002 local elections include the criterion that no elector, including anyone who is visually impaired, should be disadvantaged in casting their vote in any proposed pilot compared with the standard procedure for conducting elections. We will consider any alternative means for visually impaired electors to vote in secret provided the basic principles for secrecy of the ballot are maintained.

Visually Impaired Voters

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his Department is taking to ensure that electoral administrators comply with the duty to display at least one large print notice and have available a voting template for the benefit of visually impaired voters at every polling station in the May 2002 local elections; and what assessment he has made of the availability of these devices at the 2001 General Election. [19847]

Dr. Whitehead: Returning officers are under a legal duty to display a large print ballot paper and to provide a voting device for the visually impaired in each polling station. Any returning officer failing to comply may, therefore, be subject to prosecution. The Home Office ensured that sufficient voting templates were available to every returning officer free of charge to supply each polling station at the 2001 General Election.

Public Service Agreements

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress is being made in concluding local public service agreements. [21426]

Mr. Raynsford: The national roll-out phase of local PSAs is now under way. Almost 120 local authorities have said they want to take part in the programme over the next two years. We have signed the first of these further agreements with East Riding of Yorkshire council, and expect to sign agreements with Leeds city council, Peterborough city council and Buckinghamshire county council before Christmas. Copies of local PSAs will be placed in the House Library as they are concluded.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Livestock Markets

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of loss in *(a)* turnover and *(b)* tax revenue caused by the closure of livestock markets. [1974[illegible]]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* The Department is working to establish the economic losses resulting from the closure of livestock markets. The tax revenue losses from closure are very uncertain.

Rural Bus Services

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 28 November 2001, how many rural households were within 10 minutes walk of an hourly bus service in *(a)* 1992 to 1994, *(b)* 1995 to 1997 and *(c)* 1998 to 2000. [20703]

Alun Michael: It is not possible to provide figures of numbers of households because the appropriate total numbers of households in rural areas for multiplying up the proportions are not available. Rural areas are all areas which are not defined as urban areas, plus urban areas with a population less than 3,000, as defined by the 1991 census. Information on the proportion of households within 10 minutes walk of an hourly bus service (based on information from the National Travel Survey) was provided for the hon. Member on 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 327–28W, by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble).

Energy Policy

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what submission her Department has made to the performance and innovation unit's inquiry into long-term energy policy. [18238]

Mr. Meacher: The Department submitted six papers to the performance and innovation unit's energy review, all of which can be seen on its website. The papers are entitled: Introduction and Projections Methodology; Low Carbon Options for the Domestic Sector; Scope for Demand Side Measures in Industry; Energy Projections for the Service Sector; Transport Energy Efficiency; and Additional Savings and Associated Costs. I am a member of the advisory group to the review, and my Department has also been in regular contact with the unit throughout the review.

Animal Holdings

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many holdings in each of the last 10 years had *(a)* one animal, *(b)* two to five animals, *(c)* five to 10 animals, *(d)* 10 to 100 animals, *(e)* 100 to 200 animals and *(f)* more than 200 animals. [20715]

Mr. Morley: Number of main holdings in England by animal size group is provided in the table.

Animal size groups

	1	*2–5*	*6–10*	*11–100*	*101–200*	*201 and over*	*Total*
1990	537	3,438	3,878	34,806	17,148	37,885	97,692
1991	569	3,586	3,930	34,644	16,850	37,160	96,739
1992	665	3,677	3,988	34,849	16,689	36,745	96,613
1993	779	3,825	4,161	34,864	16,557	36,414	96,600
1994	745	3,874	4,080	34,495	16,446	36,164	95,804
1995	593	3,173	3,517	32,891	16,177	35,102	91,453
1996	589	3,279	3,447	32,254	16,162	34,524	90,255
1997	648	3,036	3,207	32,657	15,647	34,192	89,387
1998	645	2,995	3,381	31,433	15,337	33,984	87,775
1999	476	3,291	3,311	31,070	15,200	33,640	86,988
2000	665	4,088	3,510	27,372	13,649	31,650	80,934

Note:

Animals include total cattle and calves, total pigs, total sheep and lambs, total goats and farmed deer (except for 1990 where no figure for farmed deer is available).

Source:

June Agricultural and Horticultural Census (main holdings only).

Trade Effluent

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 46W, on trade effluent, if she will answer all the questions listed. [20691]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* In my answer of 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 46W, I informed my hon. Friend that the information he requested was not held centrally. I now have this information which I am pleased to make available to him. The following tables contain this information.

The total number of prosecutions for breaches of trade effluent discharge consents between 1 April 1999 and 31 July 2001 is 21, with total fines of £141,500. Unfortunately no information is available for 1998 as records only began in April 1999.

Environment agency region/sector	*Total fines (£)*
Anglian	
None	None
Midlands	
None	None
North East	
Food Processing	32,000
Mining/quarries	500
Local authority	1,500
North West	
Brewery	9,500
Board Manufacturer	10,000
Timber Merchants	2,000
Mining/quarries	4,000
Paper Manufacturers	17,500
Southern	
Food Processing	14,000
Mining/quarries	2,000
Food Processing	2,000
South West	
Textiles	2,000
Mining/quarries	1,000
Food Processing	3,000
Mining/quarries	500
Mining/quarries	[1]—
Thames	
Brewery	9,000
Wales	
Water	4,000
Water	2,000
Water	10,000
Energy	15,000

[1] 3 year conditional discharge

Percentage

	Compliance of discharge consents in force		
Environment agency region	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Anglian	73.5	74.3	78.6
Midlands[1]	83.5	85.9	84.7
North East	85.9	86.5	83.8
North West	88.6	86.4	82.3
Southern	62.8	59.6	70.7
South West	49.2	61.3	61.9
Thames	87.0	84.2	86.5
England	80.1	81.5	79.5
Wales	77.3	52.2	71.8
All regions	79.6	78.3	78.5

[1] Midlands Region data for 1998 and 1999 are for all trade discharges as it is not possible to breakdown this historic data to significant discharges only

	Percentage of consents in force monitored		
Environment agency region	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Anglian	91.1	92.8	87.3
Midlands	82.5	72.8	66.6
North East	45.7	45.0	49.2
North West	73.5	58.5	61.6
Southern	77.7	77.3	56.0
South West	100.0	91.0	80.4
Thames	93.5	87.4	59.2
England	74.8	69.1	64.1
Wales	62.2	72.9	89.8
All regions	72.7	69.6	67.3

	Percentage of trade discharge consents reviewed		
Environment agency region	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Anglian	2	1	1
Midlands	5	6	19
North East	2	2	2
North West	3	5	2
Southern	9	17	9
South West	12	8	14
Thames	35	18	18
England	7	6	9
Wales	15	20	19
All regions	8	8	10

	Percentage of discharge consents containing red list substances		
Environment agency region	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Anglian	7.0	6.1	6.1
Midlands	3.0	2.8	5.1
North East	2.2	2.3	2.2
North West	3.9	2.8	0.7
Southern	12.2	16.3	9.9
South West	11.6	9.7	8.5
Thames	4.0	3.5	2.9
England	4.6	4.2	4.4
Wales	0.5	0.8	0.8
All regions	4.0	3.8	3.9

	Number of industrial discharge consents in force		
Environment agency region	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Anglian	313	374	378
Midlands	1,186	1,329	680
North East	982	958	950
North West	559	675	586
Southern	188	141	232
South West	362	442	541
Thames	277	317	377
England	3,867	4,236	3,744
Wales[1]	740	531	528
All regions	4,607	4,767	4,272

[1] The figure for 2000 is an estimate, accurate data are unavailable

Advisory Group on Veterinary Medicines

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 850W, on veterinary medicines, for what reasons the minutes of the Advisory Group on Veterinary Medicines are considered confidential. [20701]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* The Advisory Group on Veterinary Residues (AGVR) was set up in 1995 under different arrangements from those that are currently in place for its successor, the Veterinary Residues Committee. Members of the AGVR included a number of independent experts from several fields, including a consumer representative. They were aware that a summary of their deliberations would be published each year in the Annual Report on Surveillance for Veterinary Residues. However, at no stage were they advised that their comments in meetings, which were minuted, would be made public. There are also elements in the minutes which may be commercially sensitive.

As indicated in the answer of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 850W, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) is considering how the minutes might be released. However, before they can be released the VMD will need to seek the agreement of all of the former members of the AGVR to the release of information since they had supplied the information in confidence. This is in accordance with Part II, Paragraph 14 (a) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, Second Edition (1997).

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government are taking to eradicate fuel poverty in the UK. [7753]

Mr. Meacher: The UK fuel poverty strategy was published on 21 November. This set out the Government's goal to seek an end to the problem of fuel poverty, with the first target to ensure that by 2010, no vulnerable household—older people, families, disabled and long-term sick—need risk ill health due to a cold home or spend more than 10 per cent. of income to keep warm.

The strategy is based on a range of programmes and measures to tackle the root causes of fuel poverty: programmes to improve the energy efficiency of fuel poor households. These include the individual home energy efficiency schemes within each country as well as programmes to improve the standard of social housing. As part of their reports under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1996, we have asked energy conservation authorities to report on their efforts to tackle fuel poverty; continuing action to maintain the downward pressure on fuel bills, ensuring fair treatment for the less well off; continuing action to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

We will also be working with interested groups to further improve these programmes, and also to develop programmes that can identify and assist those healthy adult households at risk from longer-term fuel poverty.

Foot and Mouth

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will update and publish the information given in the letter of 6 August from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to the hon. Member for the Vale of York concerning the contingency plans to stop the spread of foot and mouth disease in the Vale of York, North Yorkshire and the Humber region (ref 3469). [12071]

Mr. Morley: My letter of 6 August provided the following information:

> "On 9 July you tabled a parliamentary question which I was unable to reply to before the House rose for summer recess. You asked what contingency plans there were to stop the spread of foot and mouth disease in (a) Vale of York, (b) North Yorkshire and (c) Yorkshire and the Humber region.
>
> I am sorry that I was unable to reply, but had I had done so, I would have told you that a contingency plan has been drawn up that will enable the Department and field staff to respond rapidly to an outbreak occurring in any of the three areas. The current plan emphasises the continued adherence to and rigorous enforcement of the existing control strategies, including tight bio-security. It is a working document that will be refined in the light of any developments including up to date advice. In addition, DEFRA has now announced that in an area surrounding Thirsk, additional, stronger biosecurity measures will be introduced. A Press Release (59/01) was issued on 23 July."

A copy of my letter was placed in the Library of the House.

Since the date of that letter, the plan has been further developed to ensure that strict biosecurity measures, along the lines of those applied in the Thirsk area, can be rapidly implemented should a new case occur in any part of the region. These measures coupled with the ongoing message on biosecurity continue to be successful in preventing the spread of the disease.

In addition, we maintain the capability, both in terms of infrastructure and resources, to respond to any recurrence of disease expeditiously. This capability is being taken forward so that it forms part of an integrated contingency response for the north of England as a whole.

It is encouraging that North Yorkshire has had no outbreaks since 18 August, but we continue to maintain our guard.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many diagnoses of foot and mouth disease in the current outbreak have subsequently been proved incorrect; and if he will make a statement. [R] [12924]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 November 2001]:* As of 27 November 2001, the total number of infected premises (IPs) in Great Britain was 2,026. In 299 confirmed cases samples were not taken, for example where clear clinical signs of FMD were observed and where disease had already been confirmed in the locality. Of the 1,727 cases where samples were taken, 1,326 (74 per cent.) were recorded as having a positive laboratory result. However, a negative laboratory result does not necessarily mean the disease was not present and does not change the status of an IP confirmed on clinical grounds.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what scientific evidence her Department has evaluated which supports the assumption that animals vaccinated against foot and mouth can pass the disease on to uninfected animals. [15667]

Mr. Morley: The Department has drawn on all of the available scientific research conducted worldwide, as well as relevant epidemiological findings from natural outbreaks of disease, on vaccination against foot and mouth disease in examining potential control policies involving vaccination. A comprehensive review of the use of emergency vaccines against foot and mouth disease will be published shortly in the scientific journal *Vaccine*.

The current scientific evidence is that ruminants can, but not invariably, become infected following vaccination and this depends on the strain of the virus and the length of time between vaccination and exposure to the virus. Such animals therefore present a potential risk and the international guidelines on the movement of vaccinated animals take this risk into account. More research of the long-term carrier state is needed in countries with the disease, and where vaccination has been used, as long-term studies of sufficient size are not possible in the laboratory.

More information about the science of vaccinating against foot and mouth disease is on our website www.defra.gov.uk/footandmouth/vaccination/science.htm.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what are the criteria for imposing a ban on animal movements in Devon; and when these criteria were last met; [15592]

(2) when she expects to lift the ban on the movement of animals in Devon following the restrictions introduced as a result of foot and mouth disease. [15627]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 November 2001]:* Livestock movement restrictions are imposed throughout Great Britain using powers contained in the Foot and Mouth Disease Order 1983 (as amended). A total ban on movements applied only for one week (23 February to 2 March). Since then, movements have been permitted under licence to abattoirs and from farm to farm subject to conditions. Movement restrictions reflect the disease status of the county, which is based on veterinary advice. FMD free status is awarded on the basis of extensive blood testing of sheep. Devon was classified as an FMD free county on 27 November.

Details of permitted movements, county classification (updated weekly) and the criteria for classification may be found on the DEFRA website at www.defraweb/footandmouth.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 196W, (Ref. 12294), what percentage of the payments made to valuers in the foot and mouth disease epidemic totalled £1,500. [17712]

Mr. Morley: Seventeen per cent. of the payments made to valuers during the foot and mouth epidemic totalled £1,500.

Cattle Markets

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what risk assessment she has received on the reopening of cattle markets; when she plans to allow Chippenham cattle market to reopen; and if she will make a statement. [15531]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 November 2001]:* The decision to reopen livestock markets in England and Wales will depend on scientific and veterinary advice, taking account of the inherent risks of farmers and animals mixing and potentially spreading the disease mechanically or biologically. An initial veterinary risk assessment is currently being considered and will be published shortly. Depending on progress towards eradicating the foot and mouth disease, it is hoped that it may be possible to reopen cattle markets in the early part of next year.

Livestock Movements

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will relax the regulations which prevent farmers moving livestock on the hoof in the area surrounding their farms. [15532]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 November 2001]:* The provisions of a "sole occupancy" licence on animal movements do permit 'on the hoof' movements up to 500 m as long as they are made in accordance with the regulations. All the licensing provisions on animal movement are kept under review in the light of the developing disease situation. I will continue to announce changes as they are introduced.

Elvaston Landfill Site, Derbyshire

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many complaints have been received by the Environment Agency concerning smells from the Elvaston Landfill site in Derbyshire since October 2000; and if she will make a statement. [17305]

Mr. Morley: Since October 2000, the agency has received 189 complaints in respect of smells from the Elvaston Landfill site.

I am aware that the site was affected by the serious flooding across the country that occurred on 7 November 2000. The Environment Agency is working with the licence holder to ensure that human health and the environment are protected. As a result of the odour problems, a notice was served on the site operator on 19 November 2001 under section 42(5) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 requiring the operator to provide the agency with a plan for controlling leachate from the site. The operator complied with notice by the deadline set by the agency, who are in the process of reviewing the proposed plan.

Fishing (Scotland)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what occasions Scottish Ministers have spoken formally at the Council of Ministers on Scotland's fishing interests. [18179]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* I lead for the United Kingdom at the Council of Fisheries Ministers and speak to an agreed line on matters affecting all parts of the UK. Following the long-standing tradition of Scottish ministerial participation in Fisheries Councils, the Scottish Minister attends as part of the United Kingdom delegation and speaks in support of the agreed UK line—usually on issues of particular concern to Scotland. No record is kept of the occasions on which Scottish Ministers speak.

Sea Fishing

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the need for *(a)* consolidation and *(b)* updating of the legislation and regulations under which Sea Fisheries Committees operate. [19276]

Mr. Morley: The primary legislation was consolidated in the Sea Fisheries Regulation Act 1966. Subsequently, section 102 of the Environment Act 1995 has added to the 1966 Act provisions to allow each Committee to act for marine environmental purposes. In addition the Sea Fisheries (Wildlife Conservation) Act 1992 requires appropriate Ministers and relevant bodies (including the Sea Fisheries Committees) to have regard to the conservation of flora and fauna in the discharge of their functions under the sea fisheries Acts.

It would be sensible to wait for consolidation and/or updating of the legislation and regulations under which Sea Fisheries Committees operate until the EU review of the Common Fisheries Policy has been completed at the end of 2002.

Timber

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to ensure that all timber imports into the UK come from sustainable sources. [19605]

Mr. Morley: The Government are working with the timber trade, environmental pressure groups and other stakeholders to encourage a greater demand for sustainable timber across all sectors of the economy. The Government are also working with many stakeholders in different producer countries to promote sustainable forest management as well as tackling illegal logging. The Forest Law Enforcement Conference held in Bali in September, which the Under-Secretary of State for International Development attended on behalf of the Government, has added a new dynamism to efforts to curb illegal logging through effective measures at a national, bilateral and international level.

For their own operational activities the Government are committed to actively seek to purchase the timber and timber products they need from legal and sustainable sources. To this end Government buyers have been instructed to implement this policy and to report annually on their purchases. An interdepartmental working group is monitoring progress and will provide further guidance and advice to buyers. The Government's approach should help to transform the market into supplying more timber and timber products from sustainably managed sources. More information is given in the Third Annual Report on Greening Government, published on 27 November 2001 and available on the internet (http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk).

These steps are a tangible measure of the Government's commitment to implement the G8 Action on Forests agreed at its 1998 Birmingham summit.

Fridges

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to enable local authorities to collect and dispose of old fridges and freezers free of charge. [19539]

Mr. Meacher: Waste disposal authorities have a statutory duty to provide reasonably accessible sites where householders can dispose of their waste free of charge but they may restrict the availability of particular sites to specified descriptions of waste. Waste collection authorities have a statutory duty to arrange for the collection of household waste. However, they are entitled to impose a collection cost charge for certain wastes, including items over 25 kg.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for facilities to recycle foam from fridges. [19538]

Mr. Meacher: In order to speed up investment in domestic treatment facilities my Department has finalised guidance on standards to be applied to treatment facilities. Decisions on investment in plant are for individual companies to take.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the Government will be able to comply immediately with the EC regulation on the disposal of fridges. [19541]

Mr. Meacher: As from 1 January 2002, there will be an obligation to recover ozone depleting substances (ODS) (including CFCs and HCFCs) from insulation foam in refrigeration equipment before such appliances are scrapped. Stakeholders are aware of the requirements of the regulation and measures have been put in place to facilitate the storage of waste refrigeration units pending treatment facilities becoming available.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans she has to part-fund the costs incurred by local authorities storing end-of-life refrigerators prior to recycling; [19955]

(2) what plans she has to launch a local government funding initiative to part-fund the costs incurred by local authorities storing end-of-life refrigerators prior to recycling. [19954]

Margaret Beckett: I announced on 4 December an extra £6 million in the local government finance settlement to help local authorities with the extra costs of dealing with fridges to the end of this financial year. We are urgently assessing the impacts of the Ozone Depleting Substances Regulation (EC Regulation No 2037/2000) and will determine what further action will be necessary beyond that.

Flood Prevention

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what impact she anticipates *(a)* flood clean-up expenditure and *(b)* flood prevention expenditure will have on the level of council tax in English local authorities in the next financial year; and if she will make a statement. [19750]

Mr. Morley: Through the Bellwin arrangements, Government expect to contribute some £26 million to the costs incurred by local authorities affected by flooding in 2000. Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs) for flood defence for English local authorities were announced on 4 December. Government provide grant which covers some three quarters of SSA with the remainder assumed to be raised from the standard level of council tax.

The Government's expenditure under Bellwin, coupled with their meeting a major proportion of the SSA, will substantially mitigate the effect on council tax bills arising from flooding, though the actual effect will depend on each local authority's spending decisions across all its functions.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much new public money *(a)* has been spent in 2001 and *(b)* will be spent in 2002 on improving flood defences in (i) Bewdley, (ii) Hertfordshire, (iii) Shrewsbury, (iv) Malton, Yorkshire, (v) Norton, Yorkshire and (vi) East Anglia. [19540]

Mr. Morley: This Department provides grants for flood and coastal defence capital works, and associated studies, which meet essential technical, economic and environmental criteria and achieve an appropriate priority score. Further to increases in spending plans in the last two spending reviews, additional funding of £51 million over the four years from 2000–01 was announced in November 2000 following the severe flooding last year. An increased priority was given to urban flood defence and the grant rates for all river flood defences was increased by 20 per cent.

Operational responsibility for flood management measures rests with the local operating authorities, normally the Environment Agency, internal drainage boards and local councils, who decide which projects to promote and their timing. The operational authorities are invited to submit applications for DEFRA funding, and we do not differentiate between "old" and "new" money. The information given relates to flood defence improvement works to be undertaken by the Environment Agency (information on the same basis, from internal drainage boards and local councils, is not readily available).

	£000
Bewdley	
Spent in 2001–02	750
Planned expenditure in 2002–03	2,500
Hertfordshire	
Spent in 2001–02	480
Planned expenditure in 2002–03	3,230
Shrewsbury	
Spent in 2001–02	750
Planned expenditure in 2002–03	2,500
Malton/Norton	
Spent in 2001–02	800
Planned expenditure in 2002–03	5,000
East Anglia	
Spent in 2001–02	24,600
Planned expenditure in 2002–03	28,800

Flooding Costs

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the overall cost of flooding in the last three years in *(a)* Bewdley, *(b)* Shrewsbury, *(c)* East Anglia, *(d)* York, *(e)* Hertfordshire, *(f)* Stratford upon Avon, *(g)* Leamington Spa, *(h)* Yalding, *(i)* Uckfield, *(j)* Lewes, *(k)* Malton, Yorkshire and *(l)* Norton, Yorkshire. [19533]

Mr. Morley: Such information is not available though the Environment Agency has commissioned research into the costs of flooding in areas affected by the late 2000 floods.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what are the objectives of the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme. [19629]

Mr. Meacher: The objective of the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme is to improve the energy efficiency of private sector homes occupied by those householders most vulnerable to cold-related ill-health who are either in, or at risk from, fuel poverty.

Older householders, families with young children, the disabled and long-term ill are all regarded as being vulnerable to cold-related ill-health.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time staff from her Department have been assigned to deal with tuberculosis in cattle in each of the last 12 months. [19800]

Mr. Morley: Figures are not available in the format requested. However, various figures are available which show the staff input into the TB programme. These are shown in the tables.

In order to make a reasonable comparison, the figures have been recalculated as number of staff days worked on TB each month.

Number of days spent on dealing with tuberculosis in cattle

	SVS and LVIs	TVIs	Administration
2000			
November	3,760	315	585
December	3,112	218	624
2001			
January	4,584	361	615
February	2,910	242	518
March	725	23	314
April	609	24	160
May	407	13	119
June	561	20	156
July	780	26	202
August	533	13	227
September	521	18	242
October	557	32	[1]242
Total	19,059	1,305	4,004

[1] Estimate

Note:

The figures for the State Veterinary Service, local veterinary inspectors and temporary veterinary inspectors are for England only. The figures for administrative staff are for England, Wales and Scotland although the bulk will be for England.

Tuberculosis eradication—administration staff

	ADC	CVO	US	ED+Z	EXO	TSE	Total
Staff employed on TB eradication[1,2,3]							
November 2000	23.77	0.40	—	2.30	—	0.13	26.60
December 2000	31.26	0.80	0.20	2.25	—	0.15	34.66
January 2001	24.06	0.40	—	3.30	0.02	0.15	27.93
February 2001	23.47	—	0.30	2.10	0.01	—	25.88
March 2001	13.07	—	—	1,20	—	0.01	14.28
April 2001	7.77	—	0.02	0.60	—	0.02	8.41
May 2001	4.17	—	0.02	1.45	—	0.02	5.66
June 2001	5.72	—	0.02	1.65	—	0.02	7.41
July 2001	7.33	—	0.04	1.80	—	0.02	9.19
August 2001	8.15	—	0.04	2.10	—	0.02	10.31
September 2001	10.00	—	—	2.10	—	0.02	12.12
October 2001[4]	8.49	—	0.03	2.00	—	0.02	10.54
Total	167.26	1.60	0.67	22.85	0.03	0.58	192.99
Recalculated in days—above figures multiplied by the number of working days in the month—eg November 2000: 23.77 × 2[illegible]							
November 2000	522.9	8.8	0.0	50.6	0.0	2.9	585.2
December 2000	562.7	14.4	3.6	40.5	0.0	2.7	623.9
January 2001	529.3	8.8	0.0	72.6	0.4	3.3	614.5
February 2001	469.4	0.0	6.0	42.0	0.2	0.0	517.6
March 2001	287.5	0.0	0.0	26.4	0.0	0.2	314.2
April 2001	147.6	0.0	0.4	11.4	0.0	0.4	159.8
May 2001	87.6	0.0	0.4	30.5	0.0	0.4	118.9
June 2001	120.1	0.0	0.4	34.7	0.0	0.4	155.6
July 2001	161.3	0.0	0.9	39.6	0.0	0.4	202.2
August 2001	179.3	0.0	0.9	46.2	0.0	0.4	226.8
September 2001	200.0	0.0	0.0	42.0	0.0	0.4	242.4
October 2001[4]	195.3	0.0	0.7	46.0	0.0	0.5	242.4
Total	3,463.0	32.0	13.3	482.4	0.6	12.0	4,003.4

[1] Totals include full-time and part-time

[2] Figures from GIS sheet

[3] Average last three months

[4] Estimated over previous three months

Note:

Average last three months

All figures are in days

	2000		2001									
Office	*November*	*December*	*January*	*February*	*March*	*April*	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*
WRS output for chapter 23 for all SVS staff excluding TVIs												
Carlisle	56.3	49.1	74.4	38.0	0.0	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Leeds	30.4	25.7	21.8	18.9	0.6	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.4	1.2	0.6
Preston	27.0	21.9	26.2	16.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Stafford	127.1	125.9	267.6	150.3	53.7	60.06	32.6	26.3	51.2	46.0	39.1	47.2
Lincoln	12.6	14.0	30.4	19.5	6.2	7.8	8.7	2.5	2.6	3.1	1.9	2.3
Leicester	32.9	23.6	44.9	28.2	9.7	7.8	6.5	10.8	13.2	5.9	4.0	4.3
Chelmsford	7.7	8.1	20.4	11.1	1.0	0.5	1.0	0.8	1.0	0.4	0.0	0.5
Reading	59.0	47.6	68.2	45.8	11.9	5.1	6.9	18.0	18.9	6.7	10.3	15.9
Bury	13.1	7.8	22.1	13.4	5.2	4.4	4.4	10.7	6.5	4.7	3.7	0.6
Reigate	26.8	29.0	51.7	24.4	27.9	22.6	15.6	12.0	19.2	15.8	14.2	20.4
Gloucester	510.0	463.9	656.4	359.4	10.1	16.1	29.1	41.0	91.9	59.4	67.2	9.3
Taunton	177.9	154.5	236.1	122.3	38.7	60.8	32.6	38.1	80.5	49.8	53.0	52.0
Exeter	448.6	413.0	550.0	325.8	48.8	43.8	32.3	21.0	26.9	40.3	43.8	87.5
Truro	312.3	255.2	384.7	351.4	207.5	197.7	109.7	191.4	250.1	154.3	155.8	140.1
Worcester	257.9	235.4	318.9	186.7	19.1	23.8	17.1	17.8	41.6	38.6	41.8	65.2
WLU Exeter	27.1	20.2	34.9	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	5.9	7.2	13.5
WLU Aston Down	762.3	521.2	795.8	518.6	145.2	80.7	64.7	95.6	95.0	40.2	24.8	0.0
WLU Polwhele	871.2	696.5	979.4	659.5	139.5	76.3	45.3	73.8	81.0	61.8	53.3	97.1
Total	3,760.1	3,112.4	4,583.9	2,909.8	724.9	609.0	406.6	560.8	780.3	533.4	521.3	556.5
Grand total						19,059.1						
WRS output for chapter 23 for TVIs only												
Carlisle	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Leeds	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Preston	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Stafford	5.7	4.9	3.4	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Lincoln	0.0	3.4	1.0	1.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Leicester	3.0	2.2	1.9	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.0	1.3
Chelmsford	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Reading	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Bury	2.3	2.3	4.3	4.4	0.5	3.6	1.5	1.4	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Reigate	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

All figures are in days

	2000		2001									
Office	*November*	*December*	*January*	*February*	*March*	*April*	*May*	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*
Gloucester	100.8	74.2	121.5	83.2	0.0	4.0	2.0	1.0	10.6	6.8	3.3	8.5
Taunton	0.0	1.8	9.4	5.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.5	0.0	0.0	4.2
Exeter	68.3	50.1	79.5	64.4	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.0
Truro	74.7	43.1	73.6	51.0	20.9	15.8	8.3	17.2	10.3	3.8	13.8	14.3
Worcester	60.6	35.7	66.1	29.4	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	2.6	0.5	3.6
WLU Exeter	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
WLU Aston Down	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
WLU Polwhele	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	315.4	217.6	360.8	241.7	22.5	23.9	12.5	19.5	26.4	13.3	17.7	31.9
Grand total						1,303.3						

Waterways (Freight)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what policies she has for maximising the use of inland waterways for *(a)* carriage of freight, *(b)* leisure and *(c)* tourism. [19532]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's policies for the inland waterways are set out in the publication "Waterways for Tomorrow", published in June 2000, copies of which are available in the Library. The Government want to promote a modern, integrated and sustainable approach to the use of inland waterways. This includes greater carriage of freight, when this is practical, economic and environmentally desirable, and to encourage people to make more use of the waterways for leisure and tourism.

Scrapie

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects the national flock to be free of scrapie; and if she will make a statement. [19602]

Mr. Morley: The elimination of scrapie from the national flock is the objective of the national scrapie plan for Great Britain which I launched in July. Modelling work undertaken early last year suggested that it would be possible to have a significant increase in the resistance of the national flock within 10 years. We are currently updating the model to reflect current information, including the level of actual uptake under the plan. We will then be taking the views of stakeholders on what would be an appropriate target date, or dates, to work towards for the achievement of a scrapie-resistant sheep flock. The Animal Health Bill currently before Parliament would give the Government the ability to underpin a target date by using compulsory genotyping powers.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's policy towards people working after the age of 65 years; and how many such people are so employed *(a)* by her Department and *(b)* on a sub-contracted basis. [19904]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* The Department's maximum age of retirement for staff of all grades is 65. Exceptionally staff may be retained beyond that age, for a short period, where it is essential to meet business needs. Two such staff are currently employed.

In addition, records show that 110 temporary veterinary inspectors aged 65 and over were appointed during the foot and mouth disease emergency.

Departmental contracts for subcontracted work do not specify an age criterion.

Farm Incomes

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 319–20W, on farm incomes, if the *(a)* total farming, *(b)* individual, *(c)* total off-farming and *(d)* individual off-farming income levels include income from subsidy payments; and what the (i) total income from farming and (ii) total off-farming income was by region in (A) England, (B) Wales and (C) Scotland in each year since 1996. [19238]

Mr. Morley: The figures for farm incomes presented in the answer of 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 319–20W, included all the subsidies to farming. In addition to that answer, the figures show the total incomes from farming and the average off-farm income per farm in England, Scotland and Wales. These figures will be revised next year to be consistent with the latest UK figures. The total off-farm income is not available at country level.

Total income from farming (TIFF)

£million

March/February	*England*	*Wales*	*Scotland*
1996	3,904	343	524
1997	2,452	180	344
1998	1,986	68	246
1999	2,093	59	261
2000	1,552	–2	228

Total off farm income per farm

£000

March/February	*England*	*Wales*	*Scotland*
1996–97	5.0	4.5	7.2
1997–98	4.9	4.2	6.0
1998–99	5.3	4.3	6.9
1999–2000	4.6	4.6	8.0

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the qualifying criteria are for the countryside stewardship scheme; and what assessment she has made of the practicability of the conditions of the scheme with reference to *(a)* grazing levels and sward height, *(b)* winter housing of bovine livestock and *(c)* use of outdoor cattle feeders in winter. [20135]

Alun Michael: The principal qualifying criteria for the countryside stewardship scheme are:

(a) meeting the scheme's objectives for landscape, wildlife, history and amenity;

(b) meeting the national and regional environmental priorities of the England Rural Development Programme;

(c) being within one of the scheme's county target areas; and

(d) representing good value for money.

Depending on the scheme options involved, most stewardship agreements include detailed requirements for reduced grazing levels and sward height, and the need to prevent poaching caused by, for instance, the use of outdoor cattle feeders in winter. Full account is taken of individual circumstances when setting these requirements.

The winter housing of bovine livestock is a farm animal welfare issue and not dealt with by the scheme.

Finisher Feed

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what proportion of poultry was slaughtered in the United Kingdom before the withdrawal period for finisher feed was completed in November and December of *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000; [17103]

(2) what proportion of poultry was slaughtered in the United Kingdom before the withdrawal period for finisher feed was completed in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001. [17102]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 November 2001]:* DEFRA do not collect these statistics. It is the responsibility of producers of livestock destined for the food chain to ensure that the appropriate withdrawal period for a veterinary medicine or feed additive has been observed before slaughter.

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) carries out a large-scale annual residues surveillance programme which fulfils our obligations under EC Directive 96/23.

The results of the programmes for 1998, 1999 and 2000 are fully reported in the VMD's Annual Reports on Surveillance for Veterinary Residues for those years, which are available free of charge from the VMD and are accessible on the VMD's website. The results of the 2001 surveillance programme to date are published in the VMD's quarterly newsletter Medicines Act Veterinary Information Service (MAVIS) and are also regularly updated on the VMD's website in the interests of openness.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Human Rights

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what progress has been made in implementing the Human Rights Act 1998; [19972]

(2) what action *(a)* has been taken and *(b)* is planned by the Human Rights Unit to promote the awareness of human rights in the UK. [19973]

Mr. Wills: The Human Rights Act 1998 was brought into full effect on 2 October 2000. Courts, Government Departments and public authorities received written guidance, training and publicity material about the Act. All Departments reviewed their legislation and procedures in the light of the new provisions. In addition, measures were put in place for necessary co-ordination and monitoring across Whitehall. A £1.2 million blitz advertising campaign was mounted last autumn with advertisements in the national, local and ethnic press. A competition for young people, centred on the Act, attracted over 280 entries involving over 1,000 young people. Research showed that awareness among the public of the Act and the fundamental rights it protects nearly doubled during the period of the campaign.

The Human Rights Unit has continued after commencement of the Act, and maintains a dedicated helpdesk and an extensive website. It remains a focal point of knowledge and good practice on human rights. Its activities include presentations at a range of seminars, conferences and training events, as well as providing 'roadshow' training events outside London. The Unit has contributed to the work of the Department for Education and Skills to introduce the subject of citizenship in schools, which will be a part of the national curriculum for secondary schools from September 2002, and is working with other organisations on an ambitious new youth awards scheme directed at all UK schools and youth organisations based on the values of the Human Rights Act. The Unit is currently revising guidance for Whitehall Departments about the Act and, with the Bar Council, the popular Study Guide to the Act. These will be re-issued early in the New Year.

Freedom of Information Act

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement (1) on the date for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; [19974]

(2) on the decision to defer the implementation of Freedom of Information Act 2000. [19971]

Mr. Wills: There has been no decision to defer the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Act itself makes it clear that it must be implemented by November 2005 and the timetable announced on 13 November by my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor ensures that the Freedom of Information Act will be fully implemented by January 2005, 11 months before the deadline set out in the Act itself.

The Publication scheme provisions of the Act will be implemented first, on a rolling programme, starting with central Government in 2002. This roll out will be completed in June 2004 and the individual right of access to information held by all public authorities will be implemented in January 2005.

This approach will give public authorities the time they need to put into effect the change of culture necessary to ensure that new legal rights are delivered effectively in practice. It also aligns with the 2004 target for the completion of the Government's electronic records management. This initiative will enable the fast retrieval and accurate creation and storage of records that will be necessary to meet the demands of the Freedom of Information Act.

Criminal Courts

Andrew George: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of Lord Justice Auld's report on the operation of the criminal courts. [20323]

Mr. Wills: The Government are grateful to Sir Robin Auld for his very substantial and important review of the criminal courts at every level. The Government have taken no decisions on his report and we are keen to encourage wide debate on these issues before we reach decisions. The on-going period of public comment ends on 31 January.

Gravesend County Court

Mr. Pond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 830W, on Gravesend county court, how many cases were dealt with by Gravesend county court in each six month period beginning in January 1999. [20821]

Mr. Wills: The table contains the total number of default and fixed date claims issued and the number of small claims hearings held during the period requested. It should be noted that Gravesend county court has one district judge assigned to it and as such hears no civil trials, which are dealt with by the trial centre at Croydon county court. Further, the court does not have divorce, family or bankruptcy jurisdictions.

Claims issued, small claims hearings and possession applications heard at Gravesend county court during selected periods

	Total claims issued[1]	Small claims hearings	Mortgage and rent possession applications
January to June 1999	769	46	197
July to December 1999	802	34	252
January to June 2000	699	33	215
July to December 2000	724	35	182
January to June 2001	575	17	190
July to October 2001	531	21	187

[1] Includes default and fixed date claims

Victims of Crime

Andrew George: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what means of communication there are between a *(a)* victim and *(b)* victim's family and the prosecuting counsel during court sittings; and if measures are under review; [20327]

(2) what plans he has to ensure that *(a)* victims and *(b)* victims' families have the opportunity to draw the attention of the prosecutor to material matters with which they disagree. [20328]

The Solicitor-General: Communications between the prosecuting advocate and witnesses prior to a trial are governed by the Bar's Written Standards for the Conduct of Professional Work. The standards provide that a barrister may have contact with a witness with a view to introducing himself or herself, explaining the court's procedure and answering any questions about it which the witness may have. They also place upon the barrister a responsibility to ensure that witnesses are put as much at ease as possible. Victims, or the members of a victim's family, should be treated in the same way. Crown Prosecutors who are solicitors should also adhere to the same standards.

In the Crown court the prosecuting barrister will be supported by a CPS caseworker. If the victim or members of the victim's family wish to contact the prosecution barrister during the hearing itself, the first point of contact will be the caseworker. In many cases, the caseworker will be able to deal with the query without reference to the prosecuting barrister. In some cases the caseworker will need to refer the victim's comments to the prosecuting barrister. If the caseworker is engaged on another case in a different court, the usual means of communication between the victim or the victim's family and the prosecuting barrister will be via the usher or a police officer.

In the magistrates court the prosecutor will not have the support of a caseworker and is, as a result, reliant in practice on the usher or a police officer to communicate to him or her any comments that the victim or the victim's family may have during the hearing.

The Crown Prosecution Service believes that more could be done to encourage victims or the families of victims to make the prosecutor aware of things said in court that are material and are factually incorrect.

The CPS is therefore currently considering in consultation with Victim Support how victims could be better informed as to when it is appropriate to communicate with the prosecutor and the means by which it can be done.

Andrew George: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Bar Code of Conduct in respect of guidance that defence counsel should advise the prosecution with sufficient advance notice of the proposed use of any derogatory remarks to be made against an alleged victim; [20330]

(2) what *(a)* representations he has made to and *(b)* discussions he has had with the Bar regarding its Code of Conduct (i) in respect of the notice given by the defence to the prosecution of any derogatory remarks proposed to be made by them about the alleged victim of a crime and (ii) in respect of other matters where the reputation, honour or naming of a victim is liable to be drawn into controversy or in any other way besmirched. [20329]

The Solicitor-General: The guidance to defence counsel is set out in the Standards Applicable to Criminal Cases, which are annexed to the Code of Conduct for the Bar of England and Wales. The relevant paragraph (Annex F12.2(k)) is worded as follows:

> "A barrister acting for the defence . . . should as to anything which he is instructed to submit in mitigation which casts aspersions on the conduct or character of a victim or witness in the case, notify the prosecution in advance so as to give prosecuting counsel sufficient opportunity to consider his position. . .".

All practising members of the Bar are expected to be familiar with the Code of Conduct and to apply its principles and standards. The Code is issued subject to the approval of the Lord Chancellor. Neither the Bar nor the Lord Chancellor routinely monitors compliance with the Code but the Bar, through complaints referred to its Professional Conduct Committee, is able to assess the effectiveness of particular parts of the Code upon which a complaint is based. No complaints have been made about individual barristers failing to observe the guidance set out above.

I have made no representations, nor had any discussions with the Bar in relation to the Code of Conduct and the operation of the specific guidance on derogatory mitigation. I am able to confirm that no such discussions have taken place involving the Attorney General or the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Andrew George: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to ensure that alleged victims of crime have adequate time in which to *(a)* consider the decision of the CPS to accept an alteration of a plea and *(b)* be told when the appeal is to be heard. [20326]

The Solicitor-General: The right hon. Lord Williams of Mostyn QC, published guidelines 12 months ago outlining the approach that should be adopted by a prosecution advocate when considering the acceptability of a defendant's plea. The guidelines emphasise that the prosecution should keep victims or victims' families attending court informed of developments in a case and, whenever practicable, speak to them so that their views and interests can be taken into account as part of the decision-making process.

The police are responsible for keeping the victim or victim's family informed of the progress of Court of Appeal cases. The police receive this information from the Criminal Appeals Office in all cases involving a death or sexual offence and in any other case in which the victim has indicated that he or she wishes to be kept informed of case progress.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Supply Teachers

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many supply teachers are on register; and how many were on the register in each of the past five years. [6548]

Mr. Timms: My Department does not hold a central register of supply teachers.

The numbers of qualified occasional teachers (short-term supply teachers on contracts of less than one month) employed in the maintained schools sector in England for the whole day, on the third Thursday in January were as follows:

January	*Number*
1997	13,600
1998	13,200
1999	14,100
2000	16,700
2001	19,600

Supply, temporary and agency teachers on a contract of at least one month cannot be separately identified from teachers in regular service.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what measures she is taking to ensure that agencies which supply temporary teaching staff check their qualifications; [20518]

(2) what guidance she offers head teachers employing supply teachers; [20519]

(3) what measures she is taking to ensure that head teachers who discover supply teachers lack appropriate qualifications report them to the police; [20520]

(4) what measures she is taking to ensure that head teachers who discover supply teachers behaving in an inappropriate manner report them to the police; [20521]

(5) what measures she is taking to ensure that supply teachers are properly vetted. [20522]

Mr. Timms: My Department's "Guidance Notes for Teacher Employment Businesses and Agencies" describes the requirements for checks which the Department considers must be made by agencies providing supply teachers to schools in order to comply with the law. These include checks to establish that supply teachers have the necessary qualifications and checks of identity, health and fitness to teach, as well as against criminal records and the register of barred teachers. Regulation of agencies and employment businesses is provided under the Employment Agency Act 1973 and Conduct Regulations, which are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate enforces this legislation.

Circular 7/96, issued to schools in parallel with the "Guidance Notes for Agencies" mentioned, provides guidance to head teachers taking on temporary teachers. It emphasises that schools should be clear about the checks that have been carried out, even where by an agency; that it is a school's responsibility to ensure that all checks have been made; and that schools should ask for written assurance that any agency used has carried out these checks.

My Department also issued further guidance to local education authorities (LEAs), schools and agencies in 1998 reminding them about the checks that should be made on teachers, and others seeking to work with children. Schools were advised that cases of serious or deliberate deception by an applicant might constitute a criminal offence, and should be reported to the police and to my Department.

The White Paper "Schools Achieving Success" proposed a Quality Mark for agencies and LEAs. I would expect any Quality Mark to lay out expectations of agencies and LEAs in terms of their recruitment and management practice and their relations with schools.

Teacher Vacancies (Upminster)

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time teacher vacancies there are in (i) secondary, (ii) primary and (iii) special schools in Upminster; and if she will make a statement. [6550]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the form requested.

Numbers of full-time vacancies for teachers in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in Havering local authority at January 2001 were as follows:

	Number of vacancies
Nursery/primary	0
Secondary	38
Special	0

Teacher Vacancies (Havering)

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there were on 31 March *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001 in the London borough of Havering; and if she will make a statement. [6551]

Mr. Timms: The numbers of vacancies for full-time teachers in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in Havering local authority were as follows:

January[1]	Number of vacancies
1999	13
2000	18
2001	38

[1] Teacher vacancy details at 31 March of each year are not available

School Repairs and Maintenance (Upminster)

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the backlog of school buildings repair and maintenance work in Upminster; and if she will make a statement. [6632]

John Healey: We have not made an estimation of the backlog of buildings repair and maintenance work in Upminster. Havering local education authority may be able to provide this information.

In connection with the Department's arrangements for appraising asset management plans, we are planning to begin publishing asset management plan data on the condition of school buildings later this year.

Teachers (East Yorkshire)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary teacher vacancies there were in the East Riding of Yorkshire on 31 March in each year since 1996. [10730]

Mr. Timms: The table shows full-time teacher vacancies in maintained schools at January of each year.

Year	Nursery/Primary	Secondary
1997	0	0
1998	1	0
1999	4	0
2000	2	0
2001	0	6

The East Riding of Yorkshire authority was created as part of the April 1996 local government reorganisation.

Public Bodies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will list those public bodies which are the responsibility of her Department and which are not listed in Public Bodies 2000; [17583]

(2) if she will list those public bodies to which her Department appoints members and which are not listed in Public Bodies 2000. [17582]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Public Bodies 2000 sets out information on non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), certain public corporations (including nationalised industries) and NHS bodies. There are four types of NDPB: executive NDPBs; advisory NDPBs; tribunal NDPBs; and boards of visitors to penal establishments. The next edition will be published around the end of the year. Information about taskforces, annual reports and ad hoc advisory groups is set out in an annual report, published by Cabinet Office. Copies of Public Bodies 2000 are in the Library of the House and this publication may be accessed via Cabinet Office's website ("http://www.official-documents.co.uk/document/caboff/pb00/pboo.htm)". Copies of the annual report on taskforces and similar bodies have also been placed in the Library of the House and the annual report is being made available on Cabinet Office's website.

The NDPBs to which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills makes appointments which are not listed in Public Bodies 2000 are: the Adult Learning Inspectorate; the Learning and Skills Council; and, the National College for School Leadership.

Public Spending Bodies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list those local bodies which were set up under legislation which is the responsibility of her Department and its predecessors since May 1997. [17584]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Since May 1997 11 new local public spending bodies have been established, nine are Further Education (FE) Institutions, two are Higher Education (HE) Institutions. They are:

New Institutions

The Brooke House Sixth Form College (FE)

The Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (HE)

New Institutions established as a result of the merger of existing Institutions

The Bolton Sixth Form College (FE)

The Leicester College (FE)

The East Durham and Houghall Community College (FE)

The Harrow College (FE)

The Wiltshire College (FE)

The Thurrock and Basildon College (FE)

The Sussex Downs College (FE)

The Derby College (FE)

Former Private Institution designated to receive public funding

The Royal Agricultural College (HE).

Nursery Education

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the average cost of a full-time nursery place in *(a)* England and *(b)* the Buckingham constituency. [17842]

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average cost is of a full-time nursery place in *(a)* England and *(b)* Arundel and South Downs. [18329]

Margaret Hodge: Information on the average cost of full-time nursery education places is not collected by my Department.

All funding for full and part-time nursery education places for 4-year-olds, along with the majority of funding for 3-year-olds, in the local authority maintained sector, is determined locally.

In 2001–02, the Government are funding new, free, part-time early education places for 3-year-olds at the rate of £1,188 per child. This funding can purchase five two and a half hour sessions per week, for 11 weeks per term, for 33 weeks per year. Government funding of nursery education for 4-year-olds is channelled through the standard spending assessment. This Government have increased spending on nursery education from £1 billion in 1996–97 to £1.8 billion in 2001–02. Expenditure is planned to rise to £2 billion by 2002–03.

Class Sizes

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on average class sizes in primary and secondary schools in the Leicestershire local education authority from 1992 to the most recent year for which figures are available. [18504]

John Healey: Information on average class sizes in maintained primary and secondary schools in Leicestershire local education authority area is shown in the table.

Average class sizes[1] in maintained primary and secondary schools

Year/Local education authority	Maintained: Primary schools	Maintained: Secondary schools
Leicestershire LEA[2] area		
1992	25.8	20.7
1993	26.1	21.4
1994	25.8	21.5
1995	26.5	22.2
1996	26.7	22.4
1997	26.7	22.3
1998	n/a	n/a
1999	n/a	n/a
2000	n/a	n/a
2001	n/a	n/a
Leicestershire LEA[2] area		
1992	n/a	n/a
1993	n/a	n/a
1994	n/a	n/a
1995	n/a	n/a
1996	n/a	n/a
1997	n/a	n/a
1998	26.9	22.3
1999	26.7	22.4
2000	26.7	22.8
2001	26.3	23.2
Leicester City LEA[2] area		
1992	n/a	n/a
1993	n/a	n/a
1994	n/a	n/a
1995	n/a	n/a
1996	n/a	n/a
1997	n/a	n/a
1998	27.4	23.1
1999	26.6	22.7
2000	26.8	22.9
2001	26.1	23.3
Rutland LEA[2] area		
1992	n/a	n/a
1993	n/a	n/a
1994	n/a	n/a
1995	n/a	n/a
1996	n/a	n/a
1997	n/a	n/a
1998	25.6	23.8
1999	25.8	23.3
2000	24.9	22.6
2001	26.2	24.0
England		
1992	26.4	20.6
1993	26.6	21.2
1994	26.9	21.4
1995	27.1	21.5
1996	27.3	21.7
1997	27.5	21.7
1998	27.7	21.7
1999	27.4	21.9
2000	27.1	22.0
2001	26.7	22.0

n/a = Not applicable

[1] Classes taught by one teacher

[2] As a result of local government reorganisation in April 1997, Leicestershire local education authority divided to form the following local education authorities: Leicestershire, Leicester city and Rutland

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if data showing the average class sizes in *(a)* individual primary and *(b)* individual secondary schools (i) are and (ii) could practically be made available centrally to her Department. [18267]

John Healey: Information about class sizes has been collected from maintained primary and secondary schools as part of the Annual Schools Census in January for over 20 years. In order to provide a true representation of the sizes of classes experienced by children, each school is randomly allocated a specific time on the census day at which class sizes should be reported. The current collection asks for the number of pupils, teachers and teaching assistants in the class at the appropriate time and also for its Key Stage and National Curriculum Year Group. The activity in which the class is engaged is also requested.

The September Class Size Count is a separate collection started in 1998, introduced to monitor class sizes at Key Stage one. The statistical method used is the same as in the January Census, but, in order to lessen the burden on schools, information is collected only from primary schools and about classes where the majority of children will reach the appropriate age during the school year. The information required about each class in September 2001 was the number of pupils, teachers and teaching assistants and the activity in which the class was engaged and, for classes of 31 or more, the number of excepted pupils.

Information on individual schools is not normally published. Where individual school information is published as in the School Performance tables, the information is first checked with the schools concerned.

Asset Management Plans

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 15 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 366W, on asset management plans, if she will place a copy of the results in the Library. [18334]

John Healey: A copy of the results was placed in the Library on 30 November.

Wiltshire Schools

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the state of the fabric of Wiltshire schools. [18414]

John Healey: Detailed information on the condition of school buildings in Wiltshire should be currently available from the Local Education Authority.

The Department plans to publish information on the national condition needs of schools at the end of this month, based on data collected as part of the Department's arrangements for appraising asset management plans.

Sixth Forms

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many school sixth forms there are with *(a)* 50 and *(b)* 100 or fewer pupils in each local learning and skills council. [18430]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The Learning and Skills Council will be responsible for the funding of school sixth forms from April next year.

The information requested is contained in the following table.

Number of maintained secondary schools with sixth forms in each learning and skills council, January 2001

Learning and skills council	*Total number of maintained secondary schools with sixth forms*	*Number of maintained secondary schools with sixth forms with 50 or fewer pupils aged 16–19*	*Number of maintained secondary schools with sixth forms with 100 or fewer pupils aged 16–19*
Bedfordshire	18	0	1
Berkshire	46	1	11
Birmingham and Solihull	45	0	7
Bournemouth/Dorset/Poole	25	1	5
Cambridgeshire	24	2	4
Cheshire/Warrington	39	1	6
Coventry and Warwickshire	38	4	10
Cumbria	27	2	6
Derbyshire	34	0	8
Devon and Cornwall	56	1	4
Durham	17	0	5
Essex	56	2	6
Gloucestershire	28	2	7
Greater Manchester	28	0	0
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	16	0	3
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	27	0	8
Hertfordshire	74	3	16
Humberside	25	1	7
Kent/Medway	98	4	25
Lancashire	19	0	1
Leicestershire	22	0	0
Lincolnshire	32	2	6
London Central	36	0	11
London East	68	0	10
London North	46	0	7
London South	46	1	12
London West	58	3	11
Merseyside/Halton	68	1	15
Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire	69	4	21
Norfolk	25	0	6
North Yorkshire	28	1	3
Northampton	35	1	7
Northumberland	15	0	0
Nottinghamshire	52	5	20
Shropshire	11	0	5
Somerset	8	0	1
South Yorkshire	30	0	2
Staffordshire	51	2	17
Suffolk	29	0	1
Surrey	29	1	4

Number of maintained secondary schools with sixth forms in each learning and skills council, January 2001

Learning and skills council	*Total number of maintained secondary schools with sixth forms*	*Number of maintained secondary schools with sixth forms with 50 or fewer pupils aged 16–19*	*Number of maintained secondary schools with sixth forms with 100 or fewer pupils aged 16–19*
Sussex	38	0	4
Tees Valley	4	0	0
The Black Country	47	4	13
Tyne and Wear	31	1	4
West England	40	0	9
West Yorkshire	85	5	15
Wiltshire and Swindon	20	0	1
England	1,763	55	345

Research Assessment

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to assess the parameters of the Research Assessment Exercise. [19460]

Margaret Hodge: The operation of the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise will be reviewed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the other UK funding bodies after the exercise has been completed. The current review of higher education announced by the Secretary of State on 22 October is considering research more generally.

Community Colleges

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many UK students are studying at *(a)* the European Union Institute, Florence and *(b)* at Community colleges of a similar nature; what subjects they are studying; and if she will make a statement. [19599]

Margaret Hodge: In the 2001–02 academic year, my Department is supporting 16 English and Welsh students (six of whom are in their second year of study) at the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence. In addition the Scottish Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly support two students. EUI students undertake study and research in one of four departments; Economics, Law, History and Civilisation or Political and Social Sciences. Most of these students are undertaking a three year doctorate, but there are some students who undertake a one year Masters in Law.

There are two other European institutions where students are supported by my Department. Scotland and Northern Ireland have separate arrangements. Fifteen students are supported at the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium and Natolin, Poland. Students follow a one year course and enrol in one of four departments; Economics, Human Resource Development, Political Sciences or Administrative Sciences. All follow a compulsory programme of European General and Interdisciplinary Studies.

In addition two students are supported at the Bologna Center, part of John Hopkins University, in Bologna, Italy. Students study an interdisciplinary course, including a modern language, International Economics, International Relations and European Studies.

The Government are keen to see greater collaborative links between Higher Education Institutions across Europe, both by encouraging EU students to study in the UK and by funding students at the three institutions to which this question refers.

School Budgets (Spending Streams)

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of the average *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school budget in England was covered by specified funding streams in 2000–01. [19610]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not held centrally.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many individuals are repaying student loans through the Student Loans Company. [19812]

Margaret Hodge: At the end of the 2000–01 financial year, there were 1,170,000 borrowers repaying loans of which 652,000 had accounts retained in the ownership of the Government and repayable to the Student Loans Company (SLC). The remaining borrowers had accounts which were sold to the two private sector owners, but where the administration remains with the SLC. The number of borrowers with accounts classified as being in repayment status includes some 543,000 borrowers whose repayments were deferred because their income level was below the repayment threshold.

The accounts in the retained portfolio include mortgage style loans where repayments are made directly to the SLC, and income contingent loans where accounts are administered by the SLC but repayments, for those within the UK taxation system, are collected by Inland Revenue and refunded to the Department. Repayments from borrowers outside the taxation system, and from those with small loans, are made to the Company.

Sure Start

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answers of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 927W and 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 601W, on Sure Start, if she will provide data on the same basis for each Sure Start area. [19837]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* The following table shows the funding allocation for Sure Start programmes in 2000–01 and the amount claimed by each programme. The allocated revenue and capital columns show the funding agreed at the start of the year, it does not include any changes to allocation made during the year.

(£)

Programme name	Allocated Revenue	Capital	Claimed Revenue	Capital
Programmes announced January 1999				
Abingdon—Middlesbrough	405,405	710,117	342,989	716,566
Aylesbury Plus—Southwark	1,297,173	332,250	1,082,909	89,231
Barkerend—Bradford	698,000	721,000	496,988	20,695
Barrow—Barrow-in-Furness	477,104	955,242	477,104	368,998
Beaumont Leys—Leicester	775,163	1,088,838	566,986	372,377
Billesley—Birmingham	525,351	1,497,087	565,337	70,928
Bilston and Ettingshall—Wolverhampton	763,900	461,450	542,950	229,250
Bridgwater—Sedgemoor	729,200	906,500	477,016	436,161
Brighton and Hove Centre—Brighton and Hove	670,560	619,216	670,561	96,183
Clayton—Manchester	704,158	798,854	505,147	752,811
Denaby Main—Doncaster	583,600	680,000	592,564	767,000
East Cleveland—Redcar and Cleveland	468,627	722,250	344,617	455,294
Edmonton—Enfield	923,796	478,083	824,406	109,357
Euston—Camden	570,340	702,390	397,203	108,965
Huyton—Knowsley	845,608	485,567	564,343	152,106
Foxhill and Parson Cross—Sheffield	941,302	255,000	923,354	218,000
Great Yarmouth—Great Yarmouth	928,465	719,615	476,868	67,411
Greenwich—Greenwich	713,674	288,550	360,286	106,758
Hailsham—Wealden	404,000	1,230,000	201,907	1,154,000
Hartcliffe, Highridge and Wiithywood—Bristol	946,712	889,462	559,141	272,265
Hollinwood—Oldham	350,390	575,000	411,618	293,796
Howdon—North Tyneside	521,183	945,183	374,940	704,586
Lawley and Overdale—Telford and Wrekin	299,322	673,294	240,770	375,092
Marsh Farm—Luton	655,300	322,280	203,231	0
Mereside and Clifton—Blackpool	442,441	870,270	463,808	1,026,085
North Canning Town—Newham	793,000	100,000	179,041	0
North Prospect—Plymouth	535,092	266,000	215,000	258,000
North West Nottingham—Nottingham	647,767	725,073	593,216	48,512
Northern Hull—Kingston Upon Hull	977,056	68,119	14,750	0
Nunsthorpe and Bradley Park—North Ease Lincolnshire	633,300	657,500	680,443	145,080
Ocean Estate—Tower Hamlets	405,401	270,000	252,036	0
Ore Valley—Hastings	923,790	335,740	661,185	253,953
Osmaston/Allenton—Derby	744,235	500,000	586,860	136,000
Parr—St. Helens	519,000	745,000	300,600	15,700
Pen Green—Corby	981,807	824,500	787,236	129,500
Lescudjack—Penwith	739,182	815,000	222,429	176,962
Queensbridge—Hackney	1,476,627	314,800	435,834	188,707
Ravensdale—Mansfield	718,200	406,500	525,824	329,068
Rawmarsh—Rotheram	[illegible]20,410	400,000	239,992	133,457
Rose Hill/Littlemore—Oxford	812,573	1,038,766	803,992	517,589
Rowley Regis—Sandwell	551,402	1,125,273	110,841	36,922
Seedley, Langworthy and the Precinct—Salford	582,200	807,000	383,374	741,367
South Fenland—Fenland	717,729	499,256	444,164	104,995
South Seacroft—Leeds	678,000	246,000	396,170	74,974
St. James Street—Waltham Forest	381,400	632,000	211,628	0
Stoke on Trent North—Stoke on Trent	1,070,690	366,027	886,907	357,848
Sudell and Central Darwen—Blackburn with Darwen	705,823	1,146,655	335,150	217,254
Thorney Close—Sunderland	735,586	814,100	835,192	1,140,291
Thornhill—Kirklees	455,868	1,058,943	218,661	1,003,252
Thorpe Hamlet—Norwich	538,992	690,500	270,675	114,202
Tilbury—Thurrock	746,081	1,136,618	567,646	902,679
Tulse Hill—Lambeth	1,125,601	905,000	452,212	0
West Everton and Breckfield—Liverpool	433,356	1,289,564	253,616	78,570
West Green—Haringey	869,627	696,762	523,172	746,762
Weston—Southampton	227,000	482,000	173,734	436,740
Whitehaven—Copeland	677,232	739,173	586,942	168,733
Widnes—Halton	844,761	457,680	605,466	238,912

(£)

Programme name	*Allocated*		*Claimed*	
	Revenue	*Capital*	*Revenue*	*Capital*
Programmes announced November 1999				
All Saints—South Tyneside	267,598	135,000	61,866	0
Ashfield—Ashfield	330,000	363,000	126,691	0
Barton Tredworth and White City—Gloucester	413,001	545,000	37,328	24,622
Bedlington and Scotland Gate—Wansbeck	165,000	390,000	76,505	0
Bellingham—Lewisham	212,321	45,000	157,834	0
Benchill—Manchester	475,611	233,400	259,715	9,882
Birchwood—Lincoln	250,000	195,000	156,760	0
Birkenhead North—Wirral	394,500	266,500	140,806	21,519
Blaydon Winlaton—Gateshead	196,880	50,000	86,619	0
Blyth—Blyth Valley	121,000	257,000	68,136	0
Bolton—Bolton	334,916	217,350	334,916	26,690
Boston—Boston	200,175	0	70,455	0
Bournemouth—Bournemouth	179,224	299,360	115,941	50,000
Bramley—Leeds	407,257	626,000	396,507	119,200
Brierley Hill—Dudley	345,360	0	101,562	0
Britwell—Slough	588,000	365,000	89,540	47,333
Broad Green—Croydon	259,079	200,000	41,580	0
Burngreave—Sheffield	200,000	77,000	220,000	0
Cannock Chase—Cannock Chase	408,360	306,610	170,000	0
Chatham—Medway Towns	311,700	62,000	47,503	0
Chelmsley Wood—Solihull	247,704	39,775	87,262	0
Church Street—Newcastle	222,766	147,000	97,398	43,400
Coningham—Hammersmith and Fulham	275,300	100,000	176,044	0
Copenhagen—Islington	448,250	200,000	1,711	0
Coventry—Coventry	377,658	274,113	10,000	0
Daneshouse and Stoneyholme—Burnley	219,870	0	112,872	0
Dover—Dover	525,000	210,000	165,362	0
East Bolsover—Bolsover	218,089	49,880	90,668	15,686
Elland—Calderdale	171,000	0	103,359	0
Ferryhill and Chilton—Sedgefield	404,000	150,000	158,844	0
Gladstone—Peterborough	276,000	98,573	192,817	60,000
Hattersley—Tameside	316,480	35,000	112,701	11,949
Hindley/Hindley Green—Wigan	238,493	143,000	86,304	0
Hounslow—Hounslow	152,000	62,500	101,001	19,418
Hyndburn—Hyndburn	254,404	100,000	132,157	5,573
Keighley—Bradford	175,000	100,000	160,245	45,810
Kendray—Barnsley	252,300	137,300	88,109	7,230
Knowle West—Bristol	382,900	195,000	49,025	34,500
Ladywood—Birmingham	214,462	193,871	197,029	34,498
Litherland—Sefton	386,904	397,000	271,136	183,729
Loxford—Redbridge	200,000	244,180	100,689	0
Lupset, Thornes and Lawfield Lane—Wakefield	354,762	150,000	199,463	33,237
Marfleet—Kingston Upon Hull	350,000	720,000	157,637	281,733
Newcastle East—Newcastle	208,069	322,500	87,289	37,068
Newcastle Westgate—Newcastle	377,650	0	202,239	0
North Washington—Sunderland	464,995	459,000	214,516	31,100
North West Kensington—Kensington and Chelsea	300,000	100,000	36,129	0
Nuneaton—Nuneaton and Bedworth	300,949	91,899	169,670	0
Parnall Wood—Harlow	236,210	89,000	161,179	0
Pendle—Pendle	299,592	141,350	179,546	10,022
Peterlee—Easington	262,399	145,000	10,000	0
Ribbleton—Preston	268,356	326,798	89,449	20,551
Rochdale—Rochdale	236,369	400,000	134,528	100,000
Ryde—Isle of Wight	93,000	76,200	53,160	0
Seaton Grange, Owton Rossmere—Hartlepool	230,607	105,000	144,588	27,529
Somerstown—Portsmouth	375,200	430,000	172,445	47,000
South East Ipswich—Ipswich	356,600	688,250	309,365	100,000
South Northolt—Ealing	158,000	45,885	93,771	17,067
Speke—Liverpool	291,864	93,000	107,600	0
St. Ann's—Nottingham	331,603	109,450	118,779	0
St. Matthews—Leicester	225,897	117,772	84,194	3,942
Stanley—Derwentside	303,467	50,000	10,000	0
Stockton—Stockton on Tees	242,406	326,400	138,668	0
Thames View—Barking and Dagenham	200,000	135,000	46,590	0
Trevu—Kerrier	698,908	314,182	171,740	372,000
Battersea—Wandsworth	290,000	500,000	111,042	14,210
Wear Valley—Wear Valley	225,500	100,000	10,000	0

Student Loans

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many individuals repaid student loans early in the last year for which figures are available. [19913]

Margaret Hodge: In the 2000–01 financial year, there were 1,600 borrowers with accounts paid off in full before liability for repayment had arisen. This figure does not include borrowers who have made accelerated repayments nor borrowers who have made repayments even though their obligation to repay has been deferred because their income has fallen below the repayment threshold.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance is issued to the Student Loans Company Ltd. to enable individuals to make early repayments of a student loan. [19914]

Margaret Hodge: The Student Loans Company Ltd. (SLC) operates under the terms of a remit letter, which I send to it annually. This requires the company to administer the student loans schemes in line with the legislative framework.

Provisions for the early repayment of mortgage style loans are covered under schedule 2 of the Education (Student Loans) Regulations 1998, which state that the borrower can make early repayments at any time, and that he should ask the SLC for a written statement giving the exact amount owed. A borrower can repay all or any part of their income contingent student loans at any time under Education (Student Loans) Regulations 2000, regulation 11 (1). The Student Loans Company Ltd. makes arrangements directly with the borrower for the method of repayment.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many individuals are repaying student loans in Wales. [19915]

Margaret Hodge: Information broken down by home country of domicile is not held centrally but we are asking the Student Loans Company Ltd. to write to my hon. Friend further on this.

Parliamentary Ombudsman

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 926W, Ref. 18771, on the Parliamentary Ombudsman, on which date each of the five new statutory statements of complaint was received; and on which date the response was made. [20099]

Estelle Morris: Information on the outcome of the statutory investigations which were concluded during 2000–01 are set out in the Parliamentary Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2000–01, copies of which are available in the Library of the House, or on the Parliamentary Ombudsman's website at www.ombudsman.org.uk/pca/document/par01/index.

Between 1 April 2001 and 31 October, my Department received five new statutory statements of complaint from the Parliamentary Ombudsman. Each was received and responded to as follows:

1. Letter received 11 April 2001, responded 2 May 2001
2. Letter received 3 May 2001, responded 17 May 2001
3. Letter received 30 July 2001, responded 15 August 2001
4. Letter received 31 August 2001, responded 21 September 2001
5. Letter received 14 September 2001, responded 27 September 2001.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 926W, Ref 18771, on the Parliamentary Ombudsman, how many formal notices her Department received between 1 November 2000 and 31 March 2001; and in respect of each notice, how long it took to respond. [20100]

Estelle Morris: Information on the outcome of the statutory investigations which were concluded during 2000–01 are set out in the Parliamentary Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2000–01, copies of which are available in the Library of the House, or on the Parliamentary Ombudsman's website at www.ombudsman.org.uk/pca/document/par01/index.

Between 1 November 2000 and 31 March 2001, my Department received six new statutory statements of complaint from the Parliamentary Ombudsman. My Department has responded to all six of these cases. The average time taken to respond overall is 21 days.

Teachers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many full-time teachers have become supply teachers in the past three years. [20108]

Mr. Timms: This information is not collected centrally.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there are in special schools. [20111]

Mr. Timms: In January 2001 there were 280 full-time teacher vacancies in maintained special schools in England.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teacher vacancies there were in Buckinghamshire in October *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [20130]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available for the dates requested. Full-time teacher vacancies in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools reported by the Buckinghamshire local authority were as follows:

As at January	*Number*
1998	35
2001	59

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will reply to the letter to her dated 23 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. C. K. Abbass. [20365]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State replied yesterday to my right hon. Friend's letter of 23 October.

Companies (Financial Assistance)

Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the companies listed by guarantee which received financial assistance from her Department in financial year 2000–01. [20422]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Admissions Criteria

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if an appeal panel hearing an appeal against a primary school's decision not to admit a child to their school is entitled to alter that school's approved admissions criteria; and if she will make a statement. [20502]

Mr. Timms: No—an appeal panel cannot alter a school's general admission arrangements, including admissions criteria. Their role is to decide in individual cases whether the school should admit a child, having regard to the case presented by both the admission authority and the parents. The panel decides first whether one of the statutory grounds for refusing admission applies. But even if the panel decides that it was proper to refuse to admit the child, they proceed (except in the case of infant classes, to which special rules apply) to a second, discretionary stage of consideration. At this stage, they balance the effect on the school of admitting another child against the parents' reasons for wanting the child to be admitted.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the grounds on which an appeal panel hearing an appeal against a primary school's decision not to admit a child to their school can overrule the school's decision, if the school has followed its approved admissions criteria; and if she will make a statement. [20503]

Mr. Timms: There are no grounds on which an appeal panel can overrule a primary school's decision not to admit a child to an infant class size because that would take the class size above 30, if the school has followed its published admission arrangements. The panel can uphold that infant class appeal only if the decision was not one which a reasonable admission authority would make in the circumstances of the case or the child would have been offered a place if the admission arrangements had been properly implemented.

For appeals other than for infant class size, the panel must weigh up the cases of the school and the parents. The effect on the school of admitting another child is balanced against the parents' reasons for wanting the child to be admitted. If the panel decides that the parents' case is the stronger, the school must admit the child.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many appeals against decisions not to admit a pupil by primary schools in England and Wales were *(a)* heard and *(b)* granted by appeal panels in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01. [20504]

Mr. Timms: The figures for primary schools in England are:

Appeals heard for 1998–99: 21,219

Appeals decided in parents' favour: 9,341

Appeals heard for 1999–2000: 18,712

Appeals decided in parents' favour: 7,290.

Figures for 2000–01 will not be available until summer 2002.

The National Assembly for Wales does not keep statistics on appeals lodged by parents against non-admission of their children to maintained schools.

Teacher Vacancies

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans her Department has to reduce the number of primary and secondary school teacher vacancies. [20627]

Mr. Timms: We have put in place a range of measures to boost the recruitment and retention of teachers including: £6,000 training bursaries for graduates starting postgraduate teacher training and £4,000 "Golden Hellos" for those who train in and go on to teach shortage subjects; above-inflation pay increases for the third year running; measures to encourage returners back into teaching such as "refresher" courses with training grants of up to £150 a week and child care for those taking part; and £33 million extra funding distributed direct to those schools in the areas with the highest vacancies to put in place local initiatives. These are starting to pay off with 12,500 more teachers than in 1998 and an increase in the number entering teachers training for the second year running. We are also working on a scheme that will pay off, over a set period of time, the student loans of new teachers who enter and remain in state education and we are determined to tackle issues about teacher workload. It is all part of our strategy of recruitment, retention and reward that will deliver 10,000 extra teachers and 20,000 more support staff over the Parliament.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the different accounting headings under which further education colleges in England must apply for standard fund grants, *(a)* immediately before and *(b)* after the establishment of the learning and skills council. [20694]

John Healey *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* In 2000–01 the standards fund had six categories: College Improvement; Improving Teaching and Learning; Training and Development for Principals and Senior Management Teams; the Good Governance Programme; Dissemination of Good Practice; and the Achievement Fund.

This year, which is the first year of the learning and skills council, there are five categories for the standards fund for 2001–02: Provider Improvement; Professional Development; The Good Governance Programme; Centres of Vocational Excellence; and Dissemination of Good Practice.

From April 2002 there will be a single, unified Learning and Skills Standards Fund with no individual ring-fenced funding streams within it.

Funding Agency for Schools

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the administration costs of the Funding Agency for Schools were in 2000–01; and what she expects them to be in 2001–02. [21293]

Mr. Timms: The Funding Agency for Schools was dissolved on 1 November 1999.

Language Teaching

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on progress in improving language teaching in primary schools. [20386]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In the White Paper "Schools Achieving Success", we have stated our commitment to actively promote modern language teaching in primary schools so that more older primary children learn a second language. We are already doing a great deal to support language teaching in primary schools, although we do not have a statutory curriculum for languages at primary age. The National Curriculum contains guidance for teaching 7 to 11-year-olds, and we have published a scheme of work for primary French, and further materials for primary German and Spanish. We are supporting the Early Language Learning initiative, through which we are piloting approaches to extend language teaching in primary schools, and developing a curriculum guide to good practice and classroom materials. A national advisory centre on early language learning has been set up with an accompanying website.

We will be building on existing links between primary schools and specialist language colleges. The increasing number of specialist colleges and the developing focus on their roles as "hubs" of excellence will enhance opportunities for primary schools to access language expertise.

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what studies her Department has made of the impact on language learning in the UK of the emergence of English as a world language. [20389]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Despite the importance of English as a world language, we recognise the valuable contribution that foreign language learning makes to our social and economic success. The Department has not studied the impact on language learning in the UK of the emergence of English as a world language, but we are doing a great deal to support and enhance foreign language teaching and learning. All pupils in England have a statutory entitlement to learn at least one foreign language from the age of 11. The growing number of specialist language colleges, with their role as "hubs" of excellence, means that more schools are able to benefit from access to languages expertise.

Commercially and vocationally, languages have a great deal to offer. We have committed over £900,000 over three years to support regional language networks. These networks will address language skills needs, demands and provision within regions and sectors. They will raise awareness of the importance of language skills for companies and will provide a point of contact and a support structure for regional initiatives to promote language learning.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what proportion of letters received by his Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days. [18594]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Information on the volume of correspondence received by Departments, and their performance in handling them, is published annually by the Cabinet Office. The most recent report, covering 2000, was announced by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office on 6 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 325W.

Information on letters received between 20 June and 20 July 2001 is not available in the format required. However, Ministers sent a total of 516 replies in this period. 483 (93 per cent.) were sent within 20 days, 18 (4 per cent.) between 21 and 40 days, and 15 (3 per cent.) in over 40 days.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many letters his Department received from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. [18572]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Information on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament received by Departments, and their performance in handling them, is published annually by the Cabinet Office. The most recent report, covering 2000, was announced by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office on 6 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 325W.

Between 20 June and 20 July 2001, this Department received 1,176 letters for ministerial reply. most of which were from right hon. and hon. Members.

Second State Pension

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the second state pension, how to qualify for it and the future of SERPS. [19365]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* From 6 April 2002, the State Second Pension reforms SERPS to boost the state additional pension of low earners, and allow qualifying carers and long-term disabled people to build up an additional pension. People accruing SERPS will automatically start to accrue State Second Pension. Already accrued SERPS rights will be fully protected.

The reforms introduce a Low Earnings Threshold (£10,400 in today's terms). Employees earning up to the threshold will have their additional pension calculated as if they earned at that level. In addition, the amount of additional pension they receive will be twice the amount that they would have got from SERPS.

Qualifying carers who look after a young child, or a sick or disabled person at home, and disabled people who have lost their link with the labour market will also be treated for additional pension purposes as if they had earnings at the threshold.

Employees earning up to about £23,600 (in today's terms) will also benefit from the reforms, with the amount of extra help tapering off as earnings rise.

Those earning above about £23,600 (in today's terms) will receive the same from the State Second Pension as they would have done from SERPS.

Pension Credit

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the changes to cost and coverage of the proposed pension credit if the maximum savings credit were revised to *(a)* £14.80 single/£18.60 couple, *(b)* £15.80 single/£19.60 couple and *(c)* continuing for each £1 up to a maximum of £18.80 for single people and £23.60 for couples. [20297]

Mr. McCartney: Pension credit will ensure that no pensioner need live on an income below a guaranteed minimum level and will provide a reward through the savings credit for those who have made their own provision for their retirement. The formula for the savings credit is set out in "The Pension Credit: the Government's proposals" published on 28 November, copies of which are in the Library. The cost and coverage of the savings credit depends on a number of factors including the range of income rewarded and the percentage of this specified as the savings credit.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the size of a pension fund which would generate an annuity capable of establishing eligibility to an element of pension credit on its introduction in 2003 on a *(a)* single life flat and *(b)* single life indexed basis for (i) men and (ii) women, assuming no change in current rates. [20298]

Mr. McCartney: The introduction of pension credit will mean that no pensioner need live on less than £100 a week, or £154 for couples. For the first time we will reward, not penalise, savings to ensure those who have worked hard to save modest amounts will gain from having done so. Even small private pension funds will attract the savings credit.

The information in the table shows the estimated funds required to generate an annuity sufficient to raise people above the point they are eligible for the savings reward element of pension credit.

£

	Flat-rate	*Index-linked*
Male	36,000	48,000
Female	39,000	52,000

Notes:

All figures rounded to nearest £1,000.

Figures calculated using annuity rates provided by Annuity Direct.

Assumes retirement at age 65.

Assumes entitlement to Basic State Pension only.

Bereavement Allowance

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to extend the period of payment of bereavement allowance to widows and widowers following the death of a spouse. [19328]

Malcolm Wicks: Bereavement benefits were introduced on 9 April 2001 and are available to both men and women for the first time. They concentrate the help available where and when it is needed most, on immediate needs and on families with children.

We recognise that people need breathing space to come to terms with the emotional and practical upheaval caused by the loss of their spouse. Bereavement allowance is therefore payable for 12 months. As with all benefits this will be kept under review.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what are the *(a)* local authorities who have been subject to an inspection by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate and *(b)* authorities who have implemented all the recommendations made by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's report. [11817]

Malcolm Wicks: A list of those local authorities which have been subject to an inspection by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) has been placed in the Library. Copies of those inspection reports which have been published can also be found in the Library.

BFI recommendations are not binding on local authorities, who may put forward alternative proposals for improving performance. Where there are continuing concerns, authorities are asked to submit progress reports to ensure that their planned improvements are being implemented and achieved. If it is thought necessary to gain additional assurance that improvements have been implemented, the BFI may be asked to undertake a further inspection. Where following a further inspection it is considered that the authority has failed to improve its performance to a satisfactory standard, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, will seriously consider using his powers to direct the authority to attain specified standards within a set timescale.

Therefore information is not available in the format requested.

New Deal

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what independent expert studies he has commissioned into each of the New Deal programmes since January 2000; [11592]

(2) what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the effect of the New Deal for Partners on levels of unemployment and benefit take-up. [11650]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: New Deal independent research projects commissioned by the Department since January 2000 (with dates where reports have been published) are:

New Deal for Young People (NDYP):

New Deal for Young People: Young Rough Sleepers Awareness and Attitude Survey, A Report to the Employment Service—December 2000

New Deal for Young People: Implications for Employment and the Public Finances—December 2000

New Deal for Young People: Survey of Leavers to unknown destinations—January 2001

New Deal for Musicians: Report on programme leavers—March 2001

Experiences of New Deal: Qualitative Profiles of Young Participants—March 2001

Evaluation of the New Deal Innovation Fund—Rounds One and Two—July 2001

New Deal for Young People: Third Summary Report

The Impact of the 26 week Sanctioning Regime

New Deal 25+:

Evaluation of New Deal for Long Term Unemployed People Enhanced National Programme—June 2001

Evaluation of re-engineered New Deal 25 plus

New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP):

Employers, Lone Parents and the Work-Life Balance—February 2001

Jobfinders Grant: Research Among Lone Parents—April 2001

Case Studies on Delivery—July 2001

NDLP: An Evaluation of the Innovative Pilots—August 2001

An Evaluation of Lone Parent Personal Adviser Meeting Pathfinders—September 2001

BA Visiting Officer Pathfinders Evaluation

Synthesis Report 2002

In-Work Training Grants

Innovation Fund

Personal Adviser meetings: National Case Studies on Delivery

Personal Adviser meetings: National Qualitative Research with individuals

Personal Adviser meetings: National Quantitative Survey

Personal Adviser meetings: National Administrative Data Analysis

New Deal for Partners:

New Deal for Partners of Unemployed People: Case studies on Delivery Phase 1—June 2001

New Deal for Partners: Case Studies on Delivery Phase 2—August 2001

Workless Couples: Characteristics and Labour Market Transitions—June 2001

Workless Couples: Modelling Labour Market Transitions—October 2001

New Deal for Partners: Qualitative study of participants and non participants

New Deal 50+:

Evaluation of New Deal 50 plus: qualitative evidence from clients: first phase—July 2000

Evaluation of New Deal 50 plus: qualitative evidence from ES and BA staff: first phase—August 2000

Evaluation of New Deal 50 plus: qualitative evidence from ES and BA staff: second phase—March 2001

Evaluation of New Deal 50 plus: qualitative evidence from clients: second phase—March 2001

Evaluation of New Deal 50 plus: Research with Individuals (Wave 1)—September 2001

Evaluation of New Deal 50 plus: Research with Individuals (Wave 2)—September 2001

Evaluation of New Deal 50 plus: qualitative evidence from clients: third phase—November 2001

Evaluation of New Deal 50 plus: Summary Report

New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) Extension:

Innovative Schemes Evaluation (phase 2)—July 2001

Evaluation of NDDP Extension.

Ageism

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action his Department has taken to tackle discrimination against older people. [14956]

Mr. McCartney: Since 1997, this Government have consistently shown their commitment to tackling age discrimination against older people through a wide-ranging programme of research, consultation and development initiatives.

We have overseen a range of co-ordinated strategies through consultation with older people and representative groups, that identify and address their needs including overcoming age discrimination. These include the Better Government for Older People Programme, the 10-year Transport Plan, Quality and Choice for Older People's Housing: A Strategic Framework, the National Service Framework for Older People and the Performance and Innovation Unit report "Winning the Generation Game".

Our jobcentre network, including the new employer direct call centres, are working to eliminate age discrimination through a range of options. They have a policy of not accepting job vacancies with an upper age limit unless the employer can show genuine reason for the restriction. They deliver a wide range of programmes which are available to older people including new deal 25+, new deal for disabled people, work based learning for adults, work trials and programme centres.

In April 2000, the new deal 50 plus was launched and up to September this year had helped over 51,000 over 50s back to work. The programme is currently developing third age apprenticeships, which are new work based training opportunities designed to help older people retrain, particularly in sectors which have been reluctant to recruit older people.

The Government are committed to implementing age legislation in employment by 2006 and in the lead up to legislation, our AgePositive campaign will be intensified; vigorously promoting the business benefits of employing young and older people in the workplace.

The campaign includes three national and regional annual awards for employers who demonstrate their commitment to employing an age diverse work force, promotion of the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment, a wide ranging research programme and a range of media advertising.

On 3 December the campaign launched a new AgePositive website www.agepositive.gov.uk and new research studies including the Evaluation of the Impact of the Code of Practice and Good Practice in the Recruitment and Retention of Older Workers.

Winter Fuel Allowance (Residential Care)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the cost of payment of winter fuel allowances to fully funded residents of residential and nursing homes. [18087]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* Winter fuel payments are not made to people who are permanently resident in a residential care or nursing home, and receiving higher rates of income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance. This is because they already receive public assistance with their living costs. Details of how many of these people receive full funding is not available.

Pensioners

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Amber Valley will be affected by the measures contained in the pre-Budget announcement. [19093]

Mr. McCartney: There are 16.9 thousand people in receipt of Retirement Pension in Amber Valley. They will all gain from the measures which increase pensioners' income.

Notes:

1. Figure has been rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Based on a 5 per cent. sample from the Pension Strategy Computer System at 31 March 2001.
3. Parliamentary constituencies derived by matching claimant postcodes on PSCS with ONS Postcode Directory, version 1 2000.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency are *(a)* benefiting from the minimum income guarantee and *(b)* entitled to claim that benefit. [19978]

Mr. McCartney: As at May 2001, there were 3,500 minimum income guarantee (MIG) recipients in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency.

Estimates of the numbers of people who may be eligible for, but who have not claimed the MIG, are not available below national level.

Benefit Reductions

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what reductions are applied to a payee's *(a)* disability living allowance, *(b)* attendance allowance, *(c)* state retirement pension, *(d)* invalidity benefit and *(e)* income support during a period of in-patient (i) NHS hospital treatment and (ii) private hospital treatment. [19114]

Mr. McCartney: Disability living allowance is withdrawn after four weeks in hospital, or after 12 weeks in the case of a recipient aged under 16. Attendance allowance is withdrawn after four weeks.

A limited reduction is made to retirement pension and incapacity benefit after six weeks in hospital. The reduction is currently £28.30 a week, or £14.50 if the recipient has a dependant. After 52 weeks payment is reduced to 20 per cent. (£14.50) of the basic retirement pension for a person without a dependant and by 40 per cent. of the basic retirement pension for a person with a dependant.

Income support for a single person is reduced to £18.15 a week after six weeks and to £14.50 after 52 weeks. In the case of a couple, it is reduced by £14.50 a week after six weeks. Each partner should make a separate claim after 52 weeks, and the one in hospital will receive £14.50 a week.

People who pay the whole cost of accommodation and services provided for them by the hospital are not subject to these reductions.

Knowsley Local Authority

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the cost of the partnership with Knowsley local authority to introduce e-mail links through digital television. [18984]

Mr. McCartney: The Department secured £1.9 million from the Treasury Invest to Save fund to run a two year iDTV for the pensions project starting in April 2001. The original intention was to deliver a local pilot, partnering Knowsley local authority. However, we decided on a national pilot and have partnered with Inland Revenue to deliver information and services through satellite and cable iDTV providers to approximately 7 million users across Great Britain. The pilot service, which will be evaluated, is due to be launched in the spring of 2002 and will run for an initial one year period. Further developments beyond the pilot period will be dependent on the pilot evaluation findings.

Office of the Pensions Ombudsman

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the reasons for the increase from 1997–98 to 2002–03 in the administrative costs of the Office of the Pensions Ombudsman. [19525]

Mr. McCartney: The staffing and workload levels of the Office of the Pensions Ombudsman have remained constant throughout this period. The increase in administrative costs largely reflects the year on year increases for pay and prices. The administrative costs for 1998–99 and 2000–01 reflect a reduction in the level of expenditure on non staff costs in those years.

Pension Provision Group

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will publish the Pension Provision Group's reports on pension provision and self-employment and on pensions and the labour market. [21457]

Mr. McCartney: The Pension Provision Group have completed their reviews and both reports have been placed in the Library. These are the group's final reports and we would like to thank the group for their work and commitment over the last four and a half years.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 6 December 2001

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Fire Brigade, East Sussex

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will increase East Sussex Fire Brigade's SSA budget in 2002 in order to help meet the demands placed on the brigade as a result of last year's flooding. [19928]

Dr. Whitehead: Under the provisional local government finance settlement announced on 4 December, the fire standard spending assessment for the constituent local authorities of East Sussex Fire Authority will be increased by 4 per cent. from £21.646 million to £22.503 million for 2002–03. The figure has been calculated using the funding distribution formula that applies in respect of all fire authorities in England.

House Sales

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many private homes were sold in each of the last five years, broken down by region. [18913]

Ms Keeble: According to HM Land Registry, the number of private homes sold in each of the last five years was as follows:

Number of private homes sold in England, 1996–2000

Region	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
North East	36,362	42,805	43,070	45,351	47,787
North West	107,121	124,420	124,314	135,235	139,192
Yorkshire and the Humber	81,043	92,959	90,794	100,401	102,377
East Midlands	76,358	89,308	88,009	98,771	97,622
West Midlands	84,561	97,957	93,249	105,530	102,041
East	115,377	134,598	128,142	147,500	131,549
London	138,336	163,800	154,055	176,843	156,044
South East	160,247	208,967	195,148	220,832	193,964
South West	106,955	128,897	122,299	140,044	124,908
England	906,360	1,083,711	1,039,080	1,170,507	1,095,484

Railtrack

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the elements of the £3.5 billion needed by Railtrack plc in administration, including that sum which was due to be paid to the company by the Government over that period under previous agreements. [19798]

Mr. Byers: The sum of £3.5 billion is the Administrator's current estimate of the maximum that would probably be required to meet pre-administration debts to 31 March 2002, including allowances for contingencies.

The figures are made up as follows:

	£000
Pre-administration trade creditors	1,673,498
Finance parties principal, interest and lease payments	624,084
Working capital	811,000
General contingency	170,000
Insurance premium	9,000
Estimated value of subsidiary companies	31,500
Provision for utility companies	79,000
Losses on close-out of interest rates SWAPS	118,000
Purchase of Rail Grinding train	5,000
Professional fees	50,000
Maximum total estimated funding required to 31 March 2002	3,571,082

The Government have paid Railtrack all the moneys that were legally due to the company, and these are being used to meet day-to-day running costs.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list *(a)* track, *(b)* signals and *(c)* other infrastructure, operated as part of the London Underground, which is (i) owned by Railtrack and (ii) used by mainline train operating companies; and if he will place in the Library (A) contract and (B) other documentation associated with the use and maintenance of such infrastructure. [20531]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* This is a matter for Railtrack and London Underground. All track, station and other infrastructure related agreements are commercially confidential between the parties and it would therefore be inappropriate to place them in the Library.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the supplementary note to the original notes of his meeting with John Robinson, as sent to the Transport Sub-Committee, was drafted. [20421]

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date the supplementary note to the official minute of his meeting with the chairman of Railtrack on 25 July was *(a)* drafted, *(b)* circulated for comments and *(c)* agreed by him. [20377]

Mr. Byers: The information requested is exempt from disclosure under Section 2 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which *(a)* officials and *(b)* special advisers in his Department were consulted on the content of the supplementary note to the official minute of his meeting with the Chairman of Railtrack on 25 July. [20533]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* The information requested is exempt from disclosure under Section 2 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Bus Operators (Fuel Duty)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the criteria are for paying fuel duty rebate to bus operators providing scheduled services; and in what circumstances it can be withheld. [20021]

Ms Keeble: To be eligible for the receipt of this rebate a bus service must be registered with the Traffic Commissioner as a local service. It must also meet a number of other strict criteria to ensure that it is a service available to the general public and that it stops at registered stopping places.

The payment of rebate can be withheld if there is doubt that these conditions have been met or about the amount of entitlement. Examples of the latter are where an operator's estimates of FDR eligible mileage or fuel consumption appear unreasonably high in view of the operator's performance in recent years, where an operator consistently over estimates, where an operator fails to submit a certified claim form within the time allowed and if an operator fails to maintain adequate daily records of mileage run and fuel consumption.

Housing (Isle of Sheppey)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent infrastructure analysis has taken place of *(a)* general practitioners, *(b)* police, *(c)* school places and *(d)* public transport on the Isle of Sheppey with regard to new build housing schemes. [20510]

Ms Keeble: The assessment of the need for local facilities is a matter for the local planning authority and the service providers. The Government's policies in Planning Policy Guidance note 3: Housing seek to create a more sustainable pattern of housing development and deliver accessibility to transport, health, education and other facilities. It is for the county and district councils to consider these issues and work with service providers when drawing up the development plan. The availability of services should also be taken into account when considering individual proposals for housing schemes.

The Government have already announced the new bridge across the Swale making the Isle of Sheppey more accessible. We are also investing £5 million, through the Sure Start scheme, to help children in two of the most deprived areas on the Island.

On-Shore Windfarms

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps the Government have taken to reduce the delays in planning decisions concerning on-shore windfarms. [20635]

Ms Keeble: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave her on 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 285W-86W.

Housing

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answers of 29 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 479W on housing, and of 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 611W, on affordable housing, on what basis he stated that Chorley borough council considered Eaves Green unsuitable for affordable housing. [20527]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* This information was based on Chorley borough council's local plan, review (revised deposit edition, September 2000). Under policy HS5 this edition considered sites suitable for affordable housing. The Eaves Green site was excluded.

Track Lines

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reasons the SRA have stopped publishing punctuality figures for track lines. [20747]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) continue to publish detailed public performance measurement data quarterly; in their twice-yearly "OnTrack" publication, and on two other occasions to coincide with their quarterly "National Rail Trends" publication.

M4

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what reasons he based his decision that it would be inappropriate to widen the M4 between junctions 3 and 4b; for what additional external factors he took into account other than the recommendation of the Planning Inspector set out in paragraph 87 of the summary of the inspector's report on Heathrow Terminal 5; and if he will make a statement. [20536]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* The Secretary of State's decision to approve the development of Terminal 5 and the reasons for it are set out in full in his decision letter dated 20 November 2001. Paragraphs 56 and 57 of that decision letter deal with the inspector's conclusions and recommendation in respect of the M4 widening and the reasons for the Secretary of State's agreement that the draft scheme and orders relating to the M4 widening should not be made. I cannot add anything to what is said in the decision letter.

Electoral Pilots

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether local authorities applying to run electoral pilot schemes in the May 2002 elections will be required to demonstrate how their schemes will be accessible to *(a)* visually impaired and *(b)* other disabled people before receiving approval. [19844]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* Enabling greater access for sections of the community currently less likely to vote is one of the criteria for selecting local authorities to pilot electoral innovations in the May 2002 local elections. Local authorities will be expected to demonstrate how their proposed pilot meet this criterion, including in the case of people with a visual impairment or other disability, as part of the selection process.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether his Department intends to initiate discussions with disability organisations over the accessibility of electoral pilot schemes for the May 2002 local elections to *(a)* visually impaired and *(b)* other disabled people. [19845]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* My officials, together with representatives of the Electoral Commission, are meeting RNIB and SCOPE early in the new year to discuss, among other things, progress with the 2002 local election pilots.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the e-voting equipment to be procured by his Department for the electoral pilots in the May 2002 local elections will include an *(a)* screen magnification software, *(b)* screen reader software, *(c)* Braille displays and *(d)* other adaptive technology for visually impaired people. [19843]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* Enabling greater access for sections of the electorate less likely to vote is one of the criteria for selecting e-voting pilots for the May 2002 local elections. Local authorities and suppliers chosen as pilots will be expected to show how they meet this criterion. At this stage the Government do not want to anticipate the outcome of these pilots about the best technology to help people with a visual impairment, but technologies such as screen magnification software and Braille displays could well feature in proposals put forward by local authorities and suppliers.

Strategic Rail Authority

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make statement on the SRA's responsibility for providing electrical power. [21110]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack together with the electricity generating industry are responsible for the supply of electrical power to railways. The Strategic Rail Authority has a primary role in evaluating the case for new investment in railways which may include the choice of motive power.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the London Underground activities for which he is responsible; what responsibility he has for London Underground's advertising; and if he will make a statement. [21107]

Mr. Jamieson: Responsibility for the activities of London Underground Ltd., as a subsidiary of London Regional Transport (LRT), lies with the board of LRT. London Underground's activities support those of LRT, whose general duty is to provide or secure the provision for Greater London of public passenger transport services by railway in accordance with principles approved by the Secretary of State.

The responsibilities of the Secretary of State under the LRT Act 1984 are limited. He has powers designed for specific purposes such as issuing approvals, consents, determinations and directions to LRT. He does not have power to direct LRT's day to day business.

The Secretary of State has no responsibility for London Underground's own advertising.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the Deloitte and Touche report on the PPP for the London Underground's commentary on the concept of reputational externalities; and if he will make a statement. [18690]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on 10 May 2001, *Official Report,* column 255W. Deloitte and Touche's report is a matter for Deloitte and Touche.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what maintenance teams London Underground has dedicated to working around the clock to clean *(a)* buildings and *(b)* trains affected by graffiti; and how many staff are employed to perform these functions; [20732]

(2) when *(a)* he and *(b)* one of his ministerial colleagues last met a mystery shopper employed to survey the environmental state of London Underground's stations and trains; and whether (i) he and (ii) they have ever accompanied such a person while performing their duties under the normal conditions experienced by those who commute to London; [20726]

(3) what conclusions he and his ministerial colleagues have drawn from the conference held last March with experts from New York and with officials from the Home Office on tackling graffiti on the London Underground; [20730]

(4) what recent discussions he has had with Transport for London about graffiti on the underground; [20723]

(5) whether he expects Mr. Bratton to pursue a zero tolerance policy on graffiti on the London Underground; [20734]

(6) if it is possible to measure accurately changes in the level of recorded litter at London Underground's stations and to include the weighted results of surveys by mystery shoppers in the public-private partnership contracts; [20728]

(7) how many representations he has received from the Greater London Assembly, from London boroughs and other organisations since June on the need to tackle graffiti on the London Underground; and if he will allow local authorities to remove graffiti from London Underground's buildings and then to recover the costs from London Underground; [20729]

(8) what formal qualifications are required for appointment as a mystery shopper employed to survey the ambience of London Underground's environment; [20727]

(9) how those mystery shoppers appointed to undertake periodic surveys of graffiti at London Underground stations measure its level; [20733]

(10) how many high-pressure *(a)* jet washers and *(b)* gritting devices London Underground possesses for cleaning graffiti from bridges and brick walls at its stations; and what use has been made of them in the last three years for which figures are available; [20731]

(11) if he will list the criteria used by the mystery shoppers employed to survey the levels of graffiti and litter at London Underground stations; and how their findings are weighted in order to calculate the quarterly average score for ambience at particular stations; [20724]

(12) how often London Underground's stations and trains are subjected to environmental surveys by mystery shoppers; and whether these surveys are checked simultaneously. [20725]

Mr. Jamieson: The management of litter and graffiti and the conduct of the mystery shopper survey are operational matters for London Underground (LU). I understand from LU, that they have contracted NOP, an independent market research agency to conduct the mystery shopper survey on their behalf for the next couple of years. The results of the survey are collected and reported every three months. Under LU's tube modernisation plans, one of the factors which will determine the level of payments to the infrastructure companies will be their performance in keeping stations and trains clean.

Underground Environment

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 750W, on the underground environment, if he will list the equipment used to measure the factors to make up the values of QUTAS j and QUTAS k; and which factors will be the product of human judgment. [20548]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for London Underground. I understand that QATAS j and QATAS k represent scores for different aspects of the passenger environment on the underground. The attributes included in QATAS j are measured by Mystery Shopper Surveys. The attributes included in QATAS k include public address audibility, ride quality, in-car noise, train lighting and in-car heating and ventilation. London Underground intends that these should be measured by physical tests, using the appropriate equipment for measuring these attributes. Initially, however, they too will be tested using mystery shopping techniques.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 750W, on the underground environment, what are the *(a)* values and *(b)* limits of the letters applied to the weights which are in turn applied to London Underground to calculate a weighted average. [20547]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for London Underground. The letters referred to represent different attributes of the passenger environment of the underground. Where these attributes are measured by Mystery Shopper Surveys then they are scored out of 10. Where they are measured by physical tests, the attributes are given a score between 0 and 100. The weights applied to these attributes are calculated by London Underground according to the importance given by passengers to the attribute and the station or train on which the attribute is being measured. A higher weight is given to busier stations and trains on more heavily used lines.

Electric Train Units

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list by region for each of the next 10 years the planned change in electrical power available to power electric train units. [21109]

Mr. Jamieson: No specific figures are available. This will depend on progress with development of infrastructure within the 10 year plan.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he list by region for each of the last 10 years the electrical power available to power electric train units. [21108]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Rate Relief (Village Businesses)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, (1) pursuant to the answer of 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1094–95W, on rate relief (village businesses), what was the *(a)* total number and *(b)* proportion of sole village pubs and petrol stations of a rateable value of £9,000 or less that have received rate relief since April, [20942]

(2) pursuant to the answer of 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1094–95W, on rate relief (village businesses), what is the *(a)* total number and *(b)* proportion of food shops with a rateable value under £6,000 in designated villages of less than 3,000 population. [20943]

Dr. Whitehead: These figures are not kept centrally.

Rough Sleepers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date the most recent head count of rough sleepers took place; and what requests were made by her Department to shelter providers to extend the nights in shelter over the period of the head count. [21224]

Ms Keeble: The street count figures were placed in the Library of the House on 3 December 2001 and show the dates that street counts took place. Local authorities in partnership with local charities organised the latest round of street counts in England, which took place from 19 September 2001 to 29 November 2001.

The results announced on 3 December confirm the success of the Government's strategy in reducing rough sleeping by more than two-thirds ahead of time.

Outreach sessions occur every night including nights when there is a count, and it is never the intention at any time to move a person off the streets for only a single night.

Organisations were not asked by the RSU to keep clients in for an extra night purely for the purpose of keeping them off the streets on the night of the counts.

Pensions (Fire Authorities)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what consideration he has given to the future pension costs of English fire authorities; if he will list the total costs for the three financial years up to 2000–01; and what he estimates those costs to be in each of the three succeeding years. [20907]

Dr. Whitehead: Total net expenditure under the firefighters' pension scheme is as follows:

	£ million
1998–99	214.5
1999–2000	221.6
2000–01	[1]249.9

[1] Provisional

In its report for the period 2001–02 to 2003–04 the local authorities' Fire Service Expenditure Forecasting Group provided the following estimates of pensions expenditure under the Central/local Partnership process.

	£ million
2001–02	275
2002–03	302
2003–04	332

Local Authority Assets

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list those local authorities that have failed to sell assets at best value within the last 10 years; and what discussions his Department and its predecessor have had with them on this subject; [20789]

(2) what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Local Government Association and *(b)* its predecessors on selling assets for best value; and if he will make a statement. [20790]

Ms Keeble: The Department does not maintain a central record of those local authorities that have sold assets at less than the best consideration reasonably obtainable. Local authorities do, however, have discretionary powers under Part VII of the Local Government Act 1972 to dispose of land at an undervalue with the Secretary of State's consent. The Secretary of State has issued general consents for particular classes of disposals of land, for less than the best consideration that can reasonably be obtained, without needing specific ministerial consent.

The Department issued revised general disposal consents in December 1998 following consultation with interested bodies including the Local Government Association.

This consent regime is one of a number under review with a view to abolition. The Secretary of State has had several discussions with the Local Government Association in central/local partnership meetings about the review in the context of broader deregulation.

National Association of Local Councils

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the National Association of Local Councils on the subject of developing partnerships; and whether this includes new funding arrangements. [20906]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department works closely with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) on a number of issues including: best value, quality parishes, accounting and audit regulations and a national training strategy for town and parish councils.

Discussions have covered financial assistance for NALC, such as the recent research project on the development of Performance Indicators for town and parish councils.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the National Association of Local Councils on the question of restoring a share of the uniform business rate to *(a)* parish and *(b)* town councils. [20905]

Dr. Whitehead: We have had no discussions with the National Association of Local Councils on this issue. Parish and town councils have never had a share of the revenue from the national non-domestic rate—or uniform business rate—since its introduction in 1990. Their main source of funding is the council tax.

Amateur Sports Clubs

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what financial help his Department is giving to local authorities who grant *(a)* mandatory and *(b)* discretionary rate relief to community and amateur sports clubs. [20944]

Dr. Whitehead: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport announced on 30 November 2001 *Official Report*, column 1150W, that Community Amateur Sports Clubs may now apply for charitable status. The Charity Commission has said that they will now recognise the following activities as charitable purposes: the promotion of community participation in healthy recreation by the provision of facilities for the playing of a particular sport; and the advancement of the physical education of young people not undergoing formal education. Those community sports clubs which meet the criteria for charitable status can benefit from mandatory rate relief of 80 per cent., which is already available for all premises used wholly or mainly for charitable purposes and is fully funded by central Government. Local authorities have discretion to increase the amount of rate relief to 100 per cent. in these cases, with central Government meeting 25 per cent. of the cost of this element of rate relief.

Local authorities also have discretion to give rate relief of up to 100 per cent. to other non-profit making bodies, including community amateur sports clubs whose activities are not regarded as charitable. Central Government contribute 75 per cent. of the cost of rate relief in these cases. To qualify, the organisation must be philanthropic, religious, or concerned with education, social welfare, science, literature or the fine arts, or the property must be occupied by a non-profit making body and wholly or mainly used for the purpose of recreation.

Galileo Global Satellite

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement about the UK's membership of the Galileo global satellite navigation system. [21223]

Mr. Jamieson: The Galileo global satellite navigation system is a joint initiative by the European Community and the European Space Agency and the UK participates through its membership of both organisations. But the UK has a number of concerns about the project, including its costs and how these could be funded through a viable public-private partnership, and the benefits that the system would provide to users. A study by PricewaterhouseCoopers on behalf of the European Commission published only on 22 November reinforces these concerns.

The Transport Council at its meeting on 7 December is scheduled to consider the release of Community funds and the establishment of a Joint Undertaking to manage and procure the development and validation phase of Galileo. We will seek a deferment of the decisions on the basis that further work as highlighted by the study should be carried out.

Night Flights

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will ask the Civil Aviation Authority whether there has been an increase in *(a)* air traffic using and *(b)* night flights in the corridor four miles either side of Detling Beacon in Kent since 11 September. [20412]

Mr. Jamieson: The Civil Aviation Authority has advised that it is not aware of any increase in either air traffic users or night flights in the corridor four miles either side of the Detling Beacon since 11 September.

Unitary Authorities

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many local councillors there are in each unitary authority with a population of less than 100,000. [20545]

Dr. Whitehead: There are two unitary authorities in England with an estimated population of less than 100,000—Rutland and Hartlepool with 20 and 47 councillors respectively.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the applicable community charge or council tax charged by each unitary authority with a population of less than 100,000 (i) in the year immediately preceding their creation and (ii) in the following year. [20544]

Dr. Whitehead: The information is given in the tables.

Hartlepool borough council—unitary status created April 1996

	1995–96	*1996–97*	
	Average band D council tax:		
	The year before creation (£)	*The following year (£)*	*Percentage change*
Hartlepool[1]	155	791	—
Cleveland county council	558	—	—
Cleveland police authority	45	46	—
Total area council tax[2]	759	837	10.3

Rutland county council—unitary status created April 1997

	1996–97	*1997–98*	
	Average band D council tax:		
	The year before creation	*The following year*	*Percentage change*
Rutland[1]	103	741	—
Leicestershire county council	483	—	—
Leicestershire police authority	45	52	—
Total area council tax[2]	632	793	25.5

[1] Figures are not on a like-for-like basis because each authority did not have responsibility for upper tier functions, such as education or social services, before reorganisation took place

[2] Figures rounded to the nearest pound

The other English unitary authorities created during local government reorganisation have a population of over 100,000.

Ministerial Resignations

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will resign. [20953]

Mr. Byers: No.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the condition of the lining of the Millennium Dome; and what the estimated cost is of cleaning the lining. [21364]

Ms Keeble: I understand from English Partnerships, who assumed ownership of the dome from 1 July 2001, that the roof of the dome is in good condition. There are three small holes in the internal lining, which do not need repairing. However, English Partnerships, will of course keep under review all matters relating to management and maintenance of their assets.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what dates *(a)* he and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department have visited (i) the Millennium Dome and (ii) the site surrounding the Dome since 1 July. [21363]

Ms Keeble: I visited the Greenwich Peninsula, including the dome, on 10 September 2001, as part of my visit to the Greenwich Millennium Village. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the

Regions, has also frequently visited the Greenwich Peninsula, but not the dome, since 1 July 2001, as a constituency MP and as a private individual. No other DTLR minister has visited the dome or the Greenwich Peninsula recently.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which of the unsuccessful bidders for the Millennium Dome have had *(a)* any and *(b)* all of their costs reimbursed; and if he will publish the names of each such bidder together with the amount of their reimbursement. [21365]

Ms Keeble: None.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have to use the Millennium Dome over the Christmas period; and if he will open it as a refuge for the homeless. [20247]

Ms Keeble: While the process of securing a long-term sustainable use is continuing, English Partnerships is following up expressions of interest it has received about possible events at the dome. The first of these will be the Ministry of Sound event on new year's eve. As preparation works will be under way in advance of this event, it will not be possible to accommodate any other uses during this period.

Primary School Location (Road Speed Limits)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of how many primary schools in England are on roads with speed limits in excess of 30 miles per hour. [17446]

Mr. Timms: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available centrally.

Fire Appliances

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many available fire appliances are *(a)* less than one, *(b)* between one and three, *(c)* between three and five and *(d)* over five years old; and if he will make a statement; [20615]

(2) how many fire appliances have been in road accidents while on operational duty in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995, *(c)* 1996, *(d)* 1997, *(e)* 1998, *(f)* 1999 and *(g)* 2000; and if he will make a statement; [20616]

(3) how many fire appliances are available in each *(a)* county and *(b)* London borough; [20612]

(4) how many of the total number of fire appliances are in active service. [20613]

Dr. Whitehead: The number of fire appliances available in fire brigades in England and Wales at 31 March 2001 are shown in the following table. The pumps provide fire cover as required by the Fire Services Act 1947. Special appliances include hydraulic platforms, turntable ladders, foam tenders, emergency tenders, control units, hose laying lorries, chemical incident units and fire boats.

The cost of determining the age of each appliance would be disproportionate but a brigade would expect to replace appliances over 12 to 15 years.

In 2000 there were 1,534 accidents involving appliances. It is not known how many of these were due to road accidents while on operational duty. Again the cost of determining this for 2000 and for earlier years would be disproportionate.

Number of front-line and reserve fire appliances in fire brigades in England and Wales at 31 March 2001

	Front-line		Reserve	
	Pumps	*Specials*	*Pumps*	*Specials*
Avon	37	21	8	0
Bedfordshire and Luton	22	19	4	0
Buckinghamshire	31	12	4	0
Cambridgeshire	38	11	6	0
Cheshire	37	22	5	0
Cleveland	23	7	3	0
Cornwall	43	35	8	0
County Durham and Darlington	27	6	5	0
Cumbria	50	12	6	1
Derbyshire	44	13	6	0
Devon	81	20	9	1
Dorset	41	26	6	1
East Sussex	38	13	5	1
Essex	71	21	16	1
Gloucestershire	33	13	5	0
Greater Manchester	67	30	14	8
Hampshire	76	44	14	0
Hereford and Worcester	42	18	6	0
Hertfordshire	43	9	6	1
Humberside	50	13	9	0
Isle of Wight	16	9	3	0
Isles of Scilly	2	3	0	1
Kent	87	23	13	4
Lancashire	63	17	7	2
Leicestershire	33	17	4	0
Lincolnshire	48	11	4	0
London	170	43	43	15
Merseyside	42	13	10	0
Mid and West Wales	72	36	12	0
Norfolk	52	11	9	0
North Wales	54	31	9	1
North Yorkshire	45	18	5	2
Northamptonshire	28	9	4	0
Northumberland	23	0	3	0
Nottinghamshire	36	9	6	3
Oxfordshire	36	8	6	1
Royal Berkshire	24	10	6	1
Shropshire	33	15	3	1
Somerset	40	17	5	0
South Wales	64	57	12	3
South Yorkshire	32	8	6	1
Staffordshire	48	17	7	0
Suffolk	47	18	4	0
Surrey	36	19	9	0
Tyne and Wear	33	9	7	2
Warwickshire	26	8	4	1
West Midlands	62	13	14	6
West Sussex	46	28	6	0
West Yorkshire	66	14	10	3
Wiltshire	38	18	6	0
Total	2,296	874	382	61

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

School Discipline

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of levels of indiscipline in *(a)* state primary and *(b)* state secondary schools since the abolition of corporal punishment. [13396]

Mr. Timms: Corporal punishment was abolished in state schools in 1987 and we have no plans to reintroduce it. Data on levels of indiscipline are not available on a consistent basis since 1987, so it is not possible to give an assessment of how levels of discipline have changed since then.

Class Sizes

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children there were in classes of 30 or more, by year group, in each of the last five years. [20181]

Mr. Timms: The following is the information:

Number of pupils in classes of 30 or more, by year group, in maintained primary and secondary schools

	Maintained primary[1]			
	2001	*2000*	*1999*	*1998*
Reception	102,892	113,773	147,223	163,243
Year group 1	111,542	134,987	152,845	189,117
Year group 2	111,793	146,357	191,460	217,346
Year group 3	195,681	224,968	228,135	216,348
Year group 4	222,042	226,862	212,128	197,954
Year group 5	213,879	201,652	188,442	192,969
Year group 6	192,371	186,438	196,775	175,773
Year group 7	4,357	987	1,472	[3]—
Mixed	320,592	374,445	419,725	482,822

	Maintained secondary				
	2001[1]	*2000*[2]	*1999*[2]	*1998*[2]	*1997*[2]
Year group 5	8,423	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Year group 6	8,837	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Year group 7	131,250	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Year group 8	163,879	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Year group 9	146,462	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Year group 10	73,741	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Year group 11	65,838	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Year group 12	1,299	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Year group 13	485	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Mixed	28,489	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Aged under 14	[3]—	427,000	399,939	355,465	317,647
Aged 14 and 15	[3]—	133,596	124,759	115,926	104,866
Aged 16 plus	[3]—	2,566	1,974	2,419	2,219

[1] Includes middle schools

[2] Excludes middle schools

[3] Not available

Note:

Information on class sizes by year group in primary schools was not collected prior to 1998

Schools Adjudicator

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the right of hon. Members to make representations to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator about constituency issues. [20773]

Mr. Timms: The role of the Schools Adjudicator is to decide on LEA school organisation plans, and individual school proposals and admission arrangements, where it has not been possible to reach agreement locally and there has been a statutory objection. Adjudicators must consider each case on its merits, taking into account all the information available to them and the views expressed by all interested parties. Hon. Members do not have statutory objection rights but are free to make representations to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator on cases under consideration, in the same way as any member of the public with a local interest. Decisions of the Schools Adjudicator are binding on the parties concerned.

Sixth Forms

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools *(a)* opened a new sixth form and *(b)* closed their sixth form in each of the last three years; in which learning and skills councils area they are located; and what the average A level points score was of each school listed under (a). [18380]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Proposals have been approved for the following schools to open new, or close existing, sixth forms during the past three years.

(a) New sixth forms

Year/name of school	*LEA*	*LSC area*	*Average point score per student based on 2001 A/AS/AGNVQ results*
2001			
Kesgrave High School	Suffolk	Suffolk	n/a
2000			
Hamstead Hall School	Birmingham	Birmingham and Solihull	16.6
The Axe Valley Community College	Devon	Devon and Cornwall	n/a
St. Edwards RC/CofE VA School	Poole	Bournemouth/Dorset/Poole	15.2
1999			
The Compton High School and Sports College	Ealing	London West	4.7
Filsham Valley School	East Sussex	Sussex	10.3

(b) Closed sixth forms

Name of school	*LEA*	*LSC area*
2001		
St. Edmunds Catholic School	Portsmouth	Hampshire and Isle of Wight
Normanton Freeston Voluntary Controlled High School	Wakefield	West Yorkshire
The Petersfield School	Hampshire	Hampshire and Isle of Wight
Hull Trinity House School	Kingston upon Hull	Humberside

(b) Closed sixth forms

Name of school	*LEA*	*LSC area*
2000		
Beaumont Leys School	Leicester City	Leicestershire
Breckfield Community Comprehensive School	Liverpool	Merseyside and Halton
Campion Catholic High School	Liverpool	Merseyside and Halton
St. Benedict's Catholic High School	Wirral	Merseyside and Halton
1999		
Babington Community Technology College	Leicester City	Leicestershire
Malory School	Lewisham	London East
Our Lady's Catholic High School	Liverpool	Merseyside and Halton
Broadoak Community School	North Somerset	West of England

n/a = not available

Learning and Skills Council

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria she has established for the distribution of the Learning and Skills Council's standards fund in 2002–03. [19617]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The Learning and Skills Council is responsible for setting the criteria for distribution of its standards fund. The council will publish the criteria to post-16 providers in time for the 2002–03 financial year.

School Links

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assistance is available to schools wishing to establish links with other schools in the *(a)* European Union and *(b)* Commonwealth. [20867]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The Department for Education and Skills provides assistance for schools to establish links with schools in the EU, Commonwealth and worldwide through its funding of organisations such as the British Council. Programmes include practical help with finding a school as well as a range of assistance to help with the cost of visiting the partner school.

Increasingly, school links are being made by utilising information and communication technology. For instance, schools seeking partner schools anywhere in the world can consult the Windows on the World website on the internet at http://www.wotw.org.uk or the Montage Plus website at http://www.montageplus.co.uk which supports joint curriculum projects between schools in this country and abroad.

EU funding is also available through the Socrates Programme, the European Action Programme in the field of education that focuses specifically on schools in the EU through the Comenius action. The programme is open to the member states of the EU as well as all the applicant countries of central and eastern Europe, Cyprus and Malta. Contact seminars for schools wishing to find partners are held regularly across Europe. The British Council publicises the action, and holds UK regional briefing meetings on the Socrates Programme to advertise the opportunities. The Partbase database (partbase.eupro.se) provides schools with an on-line search facility for finding Comenius partners.

DEFENCE

Combat Arms

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on undermanning in the Army's combat arms. [20631]

Mr. Ingram: Combat arms are those which are trained and equipped to be in contact with the enemy and those who provide direct offensive and combat support. Manning in these arms as at 1 November is given in the table.

Arm	*Liability*[1]	*Strength*	*Deficit*	*Percentage*
Officers				
Royal Armoured, Corps/Household, Cavalry Regiment	861	823	–38	–4.4
Royal Artillery	1,062	1,028	–34	–3.2
Royal Engineers	1,139	1,112	–27	–2.4
Infantry	2,766	2,795	+29	+1.0
Army Air Corps[2]	459	411	–48	–10.5
Soldiers				
Royal Armoured, Corps/Household, Cavalry Regiment	5,011	4,916	–95	–1.9
Royal Artillery	7,439	6,923	–516	–6.9
Royal Engineers	7,662	7,401	–261	–3.4
Infantry	23,971	22,561	–1,410	–5.9
Army Air Corps[2]	1,309	1,324	+15	+1.1

[1] Liability figures quoted are In-Year.

[2] Pilot shortfalls in the AAC are made up by attachees from other Arms and Services. At any one time there are approximately 100 attachees, which are not reflected in the table.

The Army remains committed to achieving full manning by around 2005. We have always said that returning the Army to full manning would be a long haul and recognise that this represents a significant challenge. It requires a three pronged approach; maximising recruitment while reducing wastage during training and improving the return of service of trained personnel. The package of measures we have introduced has already delivered some benefits with improvements in retention and we are pursuing a number of recruitment initiatives at regional and national level.

Students (Defence Research)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements his Department has in place to assist school students researching defence topics. [21302]

Dr. Moonie: It is important that young people—the voters and taxpayers of tomorrow—should have an understanding of defence. In addition, defence has much to offer the curriculum. The Ministry of Defence produces a wide range of publications which are available to assist school students in their research, or to inform members of the public who wish to find out more about defence. These include a series of leaflets on various aspects of defence activity, a new series of leaflets describing the impact of defence activity in each region of the country, and a series of booklets including one—Defence Matters—that is tailored specifically for students and has been sent to schools across the country. All our publications are available on demand and can also be found on the MOD website together with a wide range of other material about defence.

In addition, each of the services has a student presentation team or teams, which visit schools and colleges across the country, and we are currently in the process of appointing a schools adviser who will develop a range of defence related material that can be used to help deliver the curriculum.

Army Recruitment (Scottish Regiments)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* establishment strength, *(b)* actual strength and *(c)* level of undermanning in percentage terms of establishment against actual strength was for the (i) Highlanders, (ii) Black Watch, (iii) Royal Scots, (iv) Royal Highland Fusiliers, (v) King's Own Scottish Borderers, (vi) Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, (vii) Royal Scots Dragoon Guards and (viii) Scots Guards on 1 November; what initiatives are under way in Scotland to address issues of (A) recruitment and (B) retention; and if he will make a statement. [18931]

Mr. Ingram: The establishment and actual strengths and level of undermanning in percentage terms for each of the Scottish regiments listed is shown in the table.

We recognise the need to maximise recruiting levels across the Army as whole. The Army launched a major recruiting campaign in autumn 2000 aimed at targeting a more diverse and well-qualified audience as well as encouraging those who have already expressed an interest in the Army as a career to make the commitment. We are also aiming at reducing the number of recruits withdrawing during training by combining Phase I and Phase II Infantry Training.

As part of the overall recruiting campaign, the Army appointed a Glasgow recruiting company, Search, to manage all the Army's recruitment in the Glasgow area for an initial one-year trial period from the beginning of April 2001. Search will undertake promotional and marketing activity to highlight the many different career opportunities available in the Army with the aim of boosting the numbers of young people choosing the Army as a career.

Retention levels among soldiers have held steady over the last 12 months or so. However, we are not relaxing our efforts in this area and have introduced several Operational welfare initiatives including: Guaranteed Post Operational tour leave, electronic blueys and 20 minutes free telephone call per week for personnel on Operations. We also recognise the importance of providing soldiers and their families a decent standard of accommodation and have several projects in hand to effect improvements to current housing stock.

Scottish regiments as at 1 November 2001

	Establishment	*Strength*	*Percentage*
Scots Dragoon Guards	590	498	−15.6
One Scots Guards	620	687	+10.8
One Royal Scots	620	512	−17.4
One Royal Highland Fusiliers	620	544	−12.3
One Kings Own Scottish Borderers	620	642	+3.5
One Black Watch	741	640	−13.6
One Highlanders	667	[1]614	−7.9
One Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders	620	593	−4.4

[1] Includes 108 personnel in the Gurkha Reinforcement Company (GRC).

Defence Spending (Scotland)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much of the defence budget was spent in Scotland in the most recent year for which figures are available *(a)* in actual terms and *(b)* as a percentage of the total defence budget. [21358]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 959–60W.

Operation Veritas

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of RAF flying hours accrued for Operation Veritas. [18404]

Mr. Ingram: As of 3 December, the RAF had accrued over 2,600 flying hours during Operation Veritas. Approximately 1,100 of these flying hours related to reconnaissance missions and almost 1,500 to air to air refuelling flights. Hours accrued during other RAF missions, primarily resupply flights from the UK, are not included in this figure.

Polish Pilots

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received on the exclusion of Polish pilots from the Battle of Britain war memorial at Dover; and if he will make a statement. [20993]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has received no representations about the exclusion of Polish pilots from the Battle of Britain war memorial at Dover.

DARA

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies have been carried out in the Defence Aviation Repair Agency which recommends the closure of *(a)* Fleetlands, *(b)* St Athans and *(c)* Sealand in Flintshire. [20915]

Mr. Ingram: No studies have been carried out that recommend the closure of any of the DARA sites.

C-17s

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if C-17s have the capacity to drop cargo by parachute. [20392]

Mr. Ingram: The C-17 aircraft is capable of dropping cargo by parachute and it is used in this role by the United States Air Force. However, the UK does not currently envisage using the aircraft in this role and has not sought the clearances necessary to do so.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if paratroop insertion for C-17s is possible. [20394]

Mr. Ingram: The C-17 aircraft is capable of dropping paratroops and it is used in this role by the United States Air Force. However, the UK does not currently envisage using the aircraft in this role, and has not sought the clearances necessary to do so.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many flying hours are permitted per annum for C-17s. [20393]

Mr. Ingram: Our lease contract for the RAF's four C-17s does not restrict flying hours. However, the contracted support package is based on an assumed annual fleet usage rate of 3,000 hours. Additional flying hours will give rise to an additional charge for the associated support.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the operation of the C-17s is constrained by the Health and Safety regulations; and if he will make a statement. [20395]

Mr. Ingram: C-17 aircraft have been in service with the United States Air Force for several years. Nevertheless, prior to the aircraft entering service with the Royal Air Force, the Ministry of Defence contracted an independent safety assessor to undertake a risk-based safety analysis in relation to UK Health and Safety legislation. This analysis contributed to the overall safety case on the basis of which the aircraft was cleared for operational service.

Weapons

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what dense metals are used in the hard-target penetrators of the *(a)* GBU-24, *(b)* GBU-32 (upgraded), *(c)* GBU-37, *(d)* AGM-86D, *(e)* AGM-65G, *(f)* AGM-154C and *(g)* M220-TOW weapons systems. [20340]

Mr. Ingram: Only two of the weapons listed—a variant of the GBU-24 and a variant of the AGM-65—are in service with UK armed forces. Neither use depleted uranium or any other "dense metal" in their warheads.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what dense metals *(a)* are and *(b)* have been used in the (i) development, (ii) testing and (iii) operational use of the BEe/RO BROACH MWS warhead systems. [20333]

Mr. Ingram: The only dense metal contained in the BROACH MWS is a tungsten-based alloy. No other dense metal is or has been used in its development or testing. The BROACH MWS is not forecast to enter service before August 2002.

Forces Personnel (Health Care)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many armed forces personnel have been treated in the independent health care sector at his Department's expense in each of the last eight years; and if he will make a statement; [18431]

(2) how much has been spent on treatments in the independent health care sector by his Department in each of the last eight years. [18432]

Dr. Moonie: Information is not readily available for the costs and numbers of personnel treated in the independent health care sector for the period of the last eight years. However, a series of initiatives undertaken in 2000 and 2001 have covered in total some 2,600 personnel at a cost of £4.7 million. These figures include investigations and out-patient appointments as well as treatment.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the time scale for ratification of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; and what plans the Government have for the deployment of under-18s after its ratification. [19534]

Mr. Hoon: Officials in both the Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office are actively working on ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and we aim to ratify as soon as possible. We hope this will be in early 2002. The UK made a statement on signature of the Optional Protocol in September 2000 clarifying its understanding of the obligation on states (Article 1) to take all feasible measures to prevent the direct participation in hostilities of personnel under 18 years of age. The current work is aimed at finalising the detailed administrative guidelines for the armed forces which will give form to that commitment. Meanwhile, we take great care of the types of duty on which personnel under the age of 18 may be employed and ensure that none are deployed unless fully trained.

No service personnel under the age of 17 are deployed on operations. No personnel under the age of 18 carry out operational patrols in Northern Ireland, although 17-year-olds can be based in the Province. Also, under-18s are not deployed as aircrew or in submarines and, in line with UN policy, we do not deploy personnel under the age of 18 on UN peacekeeping operations.

The UK believes that, if it is widely ratified and its provisions properly implemented, the Protocol will represent a major step towards preventing the exposure of children, sometimes as young as seven or eight, to appalling danger and brutality, often by forceable recruitment into non-government forces.

Key Point Defence

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment of key point defence he has made since 11 September; what the outcome was *(a)* in Scotland and *(b)* in the rest of the UK; and what assessment he has made of the resources available in the UK to guard key points in the event of an emergency; [20887]

(2) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of volunteer reserves in Scotland to undertake key point defence. [20888]

Mr. Ingram: The security and defence of key points within the UK is a matter for the police. Should the threat warrant additional security, beyond that which a particular constabulary are able to provide, they can call on assistance from other police forces across the country and, ultimately, from the armed forces. Under current arrangements, regular service personnel would be used to augment the police. Arrangements for mutual aid between police forces and for military support to the police are the same throughout the UK.

All counter terrorist contingency plans, including those relating to key points in the UK as a whole, are being reviewed to ensure they remain robust and relevant in the light of the terrorist attacks of 11 September. As part of work on the New Chapter of the Strategic Defence Review, consideration is being given to a possible increased role for the armed forces including the Territorial and Reserve Forces, in homeland security.

Nuclear Liabilities

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the value of liabilities owed by his Department arising from radiological contamination at or arising from *(a)* nuclear submarine bases and berths, *(b)* nuclear weapons manufacture, *(c)* nuclear weapons design and developments, *(d)* military nuclear materials production and processing, *(e)* radioactive waste conditioning and storage, *(f)* nuclear weapons explosive testing within the United Kingdom and abroad and *(g)* nuclear propulsion reactor research, development and manufacture. [19882]

Mr. Ingram: As at 31 March 2001, the Ministry of Defence's nuclear liabilities amounted to £3,574,809,000 (representing the liabilities discounted at 6 per cent. and expressed in 2000–01 money values) or £16,039,639,000 (undiscounted) mainly arising from the areas noted. A more detailed breakdown is not available in the form requested.

Provision for liabilities and charges is included in the MOD's annual Departmental Resource Account. The Account for 2000–01 will shortly be published and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Afghanistan

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what communications British military personnel located in Afghanistan have had with the US Marines based near Kandahar. [20241]

Mr. Hoon: British forces in Afghanistan are in regular contact with the US Marines based near Kandahar.

Saif Sareea

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was of desert-proofing equipment used by the UK military in Oman; and if he will make a statement. [12399]

Mr. Ingram: The vast majority of the UK military equipment deployed to Oman for Exercise Saif Sareea required no modification in order to operate in the climatic conditions encountered during the exercise. Although individual units may, at modest cost, have taken measures to prepare equipment for the exercise, a decision was taken not to fully desertise all major items of equipment. An example of individual unit measures was the fitting of sand filters and protective blade strips to RN helicopters, the costs of which could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

SA80 Mk II Rifle

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the deployment of the SA80 MK II rifle in the Army. [20632]

Mr. Ingram: The main deployment of the SA80 A2 rifle is due to take place between early 2002 and mid 2006. However some weapons have already been issued to elements of two UK based Brigades on standby for Operation Veritas. The Service Shooting Teams have also received rifles as part of an early deployment programme and have successfully used them in international competitions.

Early Warning Radar

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work is to be undertaken under the programme for upgraded early warning radar support in the UK, allocated to the US ballistic missile defence organisation in their 2002 fiscal year budget. [20523]

Mr. Hoon: We have received no request from the United States for the use of facilities in the UK for missile defence purposes. The US ballistic missile defence organisation's 2002 fiscal year budget is a matter for them.

Armed Forces Headquarters

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on the dispersal of *(a)* brigade and *(b)* divisional permanent headquarters. [20886]

Mr. Ingram: The Strategy for the Army (SFTA), a copy of which is in the Library of the House, stated that the Army should be based progressively in the UK over time, becoming more regionally focused, whenever opportunities present themselves. Decisions on the future basing of Army units will be made against this background.

Transport Ships

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the cost of placing the order for four new roll-on, roll-off transport ships for the Royal Navy; and if he will make a statement. [18814]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 5 December 2001]*: Negotiations continue to finalise a 25-year private finance initiative contract for the Department's strategic sealift with AWSR as the preferred bidder. This will cover the operation, support, maintenance, and crewing of up to six roll on/roll off ferries to be available for the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to use at varying periods of notice. It is estimated that routinely the MOD will require only four of the six vessels and when not being used by the Department they will be available to the owners, AWSR, for commercial purposes. The total value of the contract is estimated to be worth around £950 million with some 85 per cent. being spent within the UK. The cost of the ship-build element will be contained within the overall strategic sealift service contract. We hope to be in a position to complete negotiations shortly.

Eurofighter

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on *(a)* the Eurofighter and *(b)* the Joint Strike Fighter and when they will be in service. [21621]

Mr. Hoon: Both Eurofighter and the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) will be essential components of the UK fast jet inventory. They will complement each other. Eurofighter is optimised for the air superiority role, while JSF is primarily a strike aircraft, with a secondary air defence role. The current forecast in service dates for Eurofighter and JSF are 2002 and 2012 respectively.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

British Trade International

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will announce details of the overseas trade fairs, seminars and outward missions programme to be supported by British Trade International from 1 April 2002. [21322]

Ms Hewitt: Details of a £21.7 million British Trade International programme of support for participating in overseas trade fairs, seminars and outward missions, in the form of supported groups, will be placed in the Libraries of the House. Organisations that bid for support are being informed.

These activities continue to be central to trade development work world wide. We are conscious of sponsor organisations' need for a greater degree of flexibility on how these funds are allocated, particularly for overseas trade fairs and seminars to reflect the ways in which conditions in some markets and sectors may change in the course of the year. British Trade International will seek to observe this need for flexibility, within the overall budget provision, in administering the 2002–03 programme.

Fireworks

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what guidance she has given to trading standards officers in local authorities throughout the United Kingdom to ensure that fireworks comply with British Standard 7144. [21474]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We have made it a requirement under the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1977 that fireworks must comply with BS7114. In addition, we have issued guidance to trading standard officers and others through our firework safety toolkit on the requirements of the 1997 regulations including the importance of BS7114.

Government Office for the North-West

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* advice and *(b)* support was provided to Thomas Whitter Ltd. by the Government office for the north-west after the company was taken into administration. [20874]

Alan Johnson: No advice or support has been sought by or given to Thomas Witter Ltd. by the Government office for the north-west.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what decisions were taken by the north-west development agency in relation to support for Thomas Whitter Ltd. following the actions taken by the Government office for the north-west. [20873]

Alan Johnson: No decisions have been taken by the north-west development agency about support to Thomas Witter Ltd. The agency has been in contact with the company, but the company does not feel that the agency can do anything to help. The agency remains willing to discuss support should that position change.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1047W, on the Government office for the north-west, what *(a)* support and *(b)* advice the Government office for the north-west provides to companies in non-assisted areas on management buy-outs. [20877]

Alan Johnson: The Government office for the north-west can provide advice on a range of issues associated with management buy-outs, either directly or indirectly, by referring the company to one of its partner organisations, such as the Small Business Service or the north-west development agency. The Government office cannot provide direct financial support to companies in non-assisted areas.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what files the Government office for the north-west holds on concerns raised by hon. Members on behalf of local companies. [20876]

Alan Johnson: The Government office for the north-west holds files where concerns raised by hon. Members have led to some substantive action being taken.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the criteria for companies to receive *(a)* advice and *(b)* support from the Government office for the north-west when placed in administration. [20875]

Alan Johnson: Any company may seek advice from the Government office for the north-west, regardless of its situation. A company may be eligible for financial support from the Government office if it is located in an assisted area and is investing in capital expenditure. This can apply to a company in administration where the legal entity of the company changes.

Hearing Aids

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on standards of conduct and competence concerning the advertising and selling of hearing aids to elderly and vulnerable customers; and if she will make a statement on the plans for independent scrutiny of the hearing aid industry. [18992]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The private supply of hearing aids is regulated by the Hearing Aid Council. The operation of the Hearing Aid Council was recently reviewed. The Government are considering its recommendations.

Consumer Protection

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to change consumer protection legislation relating to the purchase of motor insurance policies following the provisional liquidation of Sussex Insurance Services. [10830]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The DTI investigated this company and the Secretary of State petitioned successfully for its provisional liquidation. Responsibility for insurance regulation, which protects consumers in this area, rests with the Treasury and the FSA.

Small Businesses

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to encourage the growth and development of small businesses in areas of high unemployment. [19932]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service (SBS) was established in April 2000 as a single Government agency dedicated to help small firms and represent their interests. One of the key aims of the SBS is to stimulate enterprise, particularly in areas of deprivation, including those with high levels of unemployment.

Working through a national network of Business Link operators, the SBS provides information, advice and access to expertise on just about everything needed to start and grow a business. An element of the funding provided to Business Link operators is allocated on the basis of relative levels of deprivation.

Under the Phoenix fund, we are providing support to 96 projects aimed at stimulating enterprise among under-represented and disadvantaged groups. A number of these projects are in areas of high unemployment.

Enterprise grants of up to £75,000 are available in the assisted areas and other specified areas of England to support growing small and medium-sized businesses. In addition, larger grants are available through regional selective assistance in assisted areas to help create and safeguard jobs.

The whole Wansbeck district is covered by the enterprise grant scheme and much of it by assisted areas.

Under the new deal, help is available to all long term unemployed people who want to become self-employed.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Human Rights (Nigeria)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment her Department has made of human rights in Nigeria; and what actions her Department is taking to improve human rights in Nigeria. [20637]

Clare Short: We welcome steps taken by the Nigerian Government and the National Assembly towards ratification of the Convention against Torture, the drafting of a National Action Plan on Human Rights, strengthening of the National Human Rights Commission and the removal of existing laws that contravene international human rights obligations. There remain areas of concern including the handling of tensions between ethnic groups, the use of capital and corporal punishment, prison conditions and the high numbers of Nigerians that live in extreme poverty.

I recently approved a £30 million programme to support Nigerian efforts, at both federal and state level, to enable poor people to obtain rapid and fair justice. This involves the whole justice system—courts, police, prisons, legal aid, and traditional and informal mediation. We will focus this programme in our four partnership states. These are Benue, Ekiti, Enugu and Jigawa. We will ensure that the assistance programme is taken forward in all four states in ways that uphold international human rights standards.

We are also providing £2.4 million to civil society organisations in Nigeria working for better governance and the realisation of the rights of the marginalised people in Nigeria.

In order to address the economic and social rights of poor people in Nigeria, we are currently designing and implementing a range of programmes (in basic health, support to the electoral process, state and local government reform, among others) with a probable value of some £140 million.

We are working closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to establish a high-level bilateral human rights dialogue with the Nigerian Government on issues such as child and women's rights (including trafficking issues), and international and regional human rights obligations.

African Trade and Poverty Programme

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which African countries will benefit from the UK's contribution to the African Trade and Poverty Programme; and what criteria were used to decide these countries. [20970]

Clare Short: Through the Africa Trade and Poverty Programme (TPP) we are making available funding of £7.5 million to work in up to 12 countries across sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in regional organisations, to build capacity for trade reforms which serve poverty reduction objectives.

Trade and Poverty Programme projects are expected to start in 2002 in Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and Botswana (as well as with the East Africa Community). The main criteria for selection of these countries have been strong demand for TPP within the country, and consistency of the TPP approach with DFID's other work on poverty reduction. Exploratory visits have been made to nine other countries. This may lead to further country projects being developed during 2002.

Afghanistan

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the aid agencies that are active within Afghanistan; where they are operating; and what level of food aid they are providing. [20811]

Clare Short: Information on which agencies are working where in Afghanistan, and the kind of relief goods that they are distributing can be obtained from the Humanitarian Information Centre (HIC) in Islamabad, set up by the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) with technical and financial assistance from my Department. Regularly updated activity maps can be found on their website at www.hic.org.pk.

The UN world food programme (WFP) is the lead agency in terms of emergency food assistance. Before 11 September, they were transporting enough food into Afghanistan to feed 5 million people. Since then, despite significant constraints on the operating environment, they have continued to dispatch increasingly large amounts of food into the country. WFP currently has food distribution contracts with 61 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working inside Afghanistan.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what discussions are taking place between the Government and aid agencies on how to gain entry to Taliban-controlled areas; [20810]

(2) if she will make a statement as current aid provision for Afghanistan, with particular reference to the parts of the country which *(a)* are receiving aid and *(b)* are not. [20809]

Clare Short: Humanitarian agencies, particularly the world food programme (WFP), continue to make good progress in transporting humanitarian relief into Afghanistan. Some international staff of humanitarian agencies have now returned to the country and are working with national staff to reach those in need of assistance. However, despite the best efforts of humanitarian agencies, some areas of Afghanistan are proving difficult to access. We are in regular contact with aid agencies about how to gain access to vulnerable people living in insecure areas of Afghanistan, whether Taliban-controlled or otherwise. Areas of particular concern, where vulnerable people are in need of food and other relief supplies, and access is constrained by insecurity, are the western and central highlands; southern Afghanistan, particularly the area around Kandahar city; and Badghis and Faryab Provinces.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

House of Lords Appointments Commission

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council what recent discussions the House of Lords Appointments Commission had concerning the criteria they use for selecting people's peers with the objective of making the House of Lords more representative. [20408]

Mr. Robin Cook: I understand that the Appointments Commission asked for feedback on the criteria which it used for its first round of appointments. It has considered responses to this request, and has concluded that the criteria it originally adopted remain relevant. The commission's criteria are set out on its website www.houseoflordsappointmentscommission.gov.uk.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council how many civil servants and at what grade are working *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time for the House of Lords Appointments Commission. [20406]

Mr. Robin Cook: I understand that one member of the senior civil service works part-time for the House of Lords Appointments Commission. One other member of staff works full-time at Cabinet Office range A level. There is a full-time administrative support post which is currently vacant.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council how many days per month members of the House of Lords Appointments Commission devote to their Commission duties. [20407]

Mr. Robin Cook: I understand that on average the members of the House of Lords Appointments Commission devote two to three days a month to their duties.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council when the printed version of the annual report for 2000 of the House of Lords Appointments Commission will be lodged in the Library. [20404]

Mr. Robin Cook: I understand that the House of Lords Appointments Commission's annual report will be lodged in the Library when it is published in the new year. The report will cover the period May 2000 (when the Commission was set up) to November 2001.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Contract Staff

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers were employed (i) full time, (ii) part time and (iii) on a contract basis by his Department in each year since 1992. [6933]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Parliamentary Secretary at the Cabinet Office to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 340W.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many ministerial decisions were made where authority for the same derived from the royal prerogative for the most recent calendar month for which information is available. [9367]

Mr. MacShane: Records are not kept of the individual occasions on which powers under the royal prerogative are exercised nor could it be practicable to do so.

Unallocated Funds

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will estimate the total unallocated funds within his departmental expenditure limit *(a)* at the start of the financial year and *(b)* to date; and what was the month seven forecast on outturn underspend against his departmental expenditure limit in (i) real and (ii) percentage terms. [19448]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office allocated its full 2001–02 provision, other than on conflict prevention, where we hold a departmental unallocated provision (DUP) of £27,849,000. This figure is set out on page 130 of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's departmental annual report for 2001–02. There has been no draw-down of this DIP to date.

Outturn against our six-month forecast for each request for resources will be published in the Winter Supplementary Estimates Summary request for supply as usual.

Departmental Assets

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs further to his answer of 5 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1W, on departmental assets, if he will make a statement on what *(a)* quantities, *(b)* countries of origin and *(c)* maximum bottle price of fine wines are available for use at home; and what was the cost by Department for the last year. [19799]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 746–47W.

Wines from many different countries of origin are represented in the Government Cellar including, England, Wales, Portugal, United States, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Germany, Spain, Italy and France.

It is not possible to give a detailed break-down of wine costs by Department; such a breakdown would incur disproportionate cost.

Nuclear Reprocessing

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the basis of the criticisms of the competence of the authors of the report prepared for the European Parliament's Scientific and Technological Option Assessment Programme on possible toxic effects from nuclear reprocessing plants at Sellafield, that the Attorney General put before the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea on 19–20 November. [19880]

Mr. Straw: The Government, in their submissions before the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea in the MOX plant case, drew attention to criticisms that had been made of the Wise report regarding its possible lack of objectivity. As these statements were made in the context of legal proceedings, I would not wish to paraphrase them. I refer my hon. Friend to the full verbatim transcripts of the statements made by the Government to the Tribunal during the hearings on 19 and 20 November. These are available on the website of the Tribunal at http://www.itlos.org.

The relevant sections from the transcripts are as follows:

Transcript of public sitting held on Monday, 19 November 2001, at 3.00 p.m.

Page 23, lines 34–41

http://www.itlos.org/case_documents/2001/document_en_194.pdf

Transcript of public sitting held on Tuesday, 20 November 2001, at 9.30 a.m.

Page 5, lines 43–50, page 6, lines 1–17, page 29, lines 4–41

http://www.itlos.org/case_documents/2001/document_en_195.pdf

Transcript of public sitting held on Tuesday, 20 November 2001, at 3.15 p.m.

Page 20, lines 22–27

http://www.itlos.org/case_documents/2001/document_en_196.pdf

Alternatively, these transcripts may be accessed by starting from the home page of the Tribunal's website (http://www.itlos.org) and making the following selections:

English
Proceedings and Judgments
Docket
Case No.10 (The MOX Plant Case)
Oral proceedings
ITLOS/PV.01/07,
ITLOS/PV.01/08, and
ITLOS/PV.01/09.

The above page and line references are to the uncorrected versions of the transcripts which are currently displayed on the Tribunal's website. When the Tribunal replaces these with the corrected versions, there might be some slight changes in the line numberings of the relevant text. If these are material I will write to my hon. Friend to inform him.

Overseas Territories Consultative Council

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Government Ministers attended the Overseas Territories Consultative Council meeting in September; on what basis and for how long on each occasion each Minister attended; what subjects were discussed; and if he will make a statement. [20243]

Mr. Bradshaw: The third meeting of the Overseas Territories Consultative Council took place on 24 to 26 September 2001. Baroness Amos chaired the Council. Ministers from DFID, the Home Office, HM Treasury, DTLR, DFES and DEFRA also participated. In all, seven UK Ministers represented HMG at sessions on subjects for which their Department had lead responsibility. The duration of each session was approximately 90 minutes. The topics discussed included; constitutional and governance issues, immigration and nationality, financial issues, aviation safety and security, education, strategic development planning, realisation of human rights and environmental issues.

Catherine Meyer

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to assist Catherine Meyer to be reunited with her sons. [20255]

Mr. Bradshaw: Catherine Meyer is currently pursuing legal proceedings before the German Constitutional Court to be reunited with her sons. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has provided consular support and assistance to Catherine Meyer with her case in the past and, as with any such case, we continue to provide consular assistance whenever we properly can.

Andorra

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with Andorran *(a)* parliamentarians and *(b)* officials in the last three years. [20878]

Peter Hain: The British Ambassador to Spain, in his capacity as non-resident Ambassador to Andorra, has visited Andorra three times within the last three years. The most recent trip was on 15 October 2001, when he met separately with the Andorran Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. In addition, the Ambassador has also had separate meetings with the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister in both Madrid and Paris during this period.

HM Consul-General in Barcelona, in his capacity as Consul-General to Andorra, has made three trips to Andorra in the last two years, the most recent in June 2001.

The previous (non-resident) Andorran Ambassador to the Court of St. James made occasional visits to the United Kingdom for discussions with Foreign Office officials. The last visit was on 9 April 2001. The new Andorran Ambassador has yet to present his credentials and has not therefore visited officially.

At all meetings, discussions focused on issues relating to the bilateral relationship.

Azerbaijan

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Azerbaijan on journalists' freedom. [20884]

Peter Hain: We continue to raise the issue of media freedom in Azerbaijan through a number of channels; most recently on 4 December in London with senior Azeri Foreign Ministry officials. The Ambassador in Baku has also raised specific issues of concern with Azeri Ministers and Presidential advisers; the UK has participated in joint EU representations in Baku.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Azerbaijan on their compliance with the founding principles of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. [20883]

Peter Hain: We raise compliance with Council of Europe founding principles regularly with the Azeris, including with the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Azeri Parliament (the deputy leader of the PACE delegation). These matters have also been raised with President Aliev's legal adviser bilaterally and through the Council of Europe monitoring group. The Government have pledged £50,000 to help Azerbaijan with compliance issues.

Gibraltar

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the responsibilities of the Governor of Gibraltar concerning the policing of Gibraltar. [21366]

Peter Hain: Under the 1969 Gibraltar Constitution the Governor is responsible for the internal security of Gibraltar, including the Royal Gibraltar Police.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many inquiries his Department has received concerning the future of Gibraltar since 7 June. [21370]

Peter Hain: Since 7 June, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has received some 224 items of correspondence concerning the future of Gibraltar. These include letters from Members of Parliament, and e-mails, faxes and letters from members of the public. In addition the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has received the outcome of a write-in campaign on Gibraltar organised by a national newspaper—an estimated 11,000 coupons.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Governor of Gibraltar about delays in crossing the border with Spain. [21367]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not recently discussed with the Governor of Gibraltar the issue of delays in crossing the border with Spain. However, my most recent discussion of this issue with the Governor took place on 29 November.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had about the dual use of Gibraltar's airport. [21369]

Mr. Bradshaw: Discussions under the Brussels Process are aimed at overcoming all the differences between the UK and Spain over Gibraltar and at promoting co-operation on a mutually beneficial basis, including on aviation matters.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs discussed issues of co-operation when they met under the Brussels Process in Barcelona on 20 November.

Copies of the joint press communique have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The Government remain keen to see progress on the development of Gibraltar airport and believe that this would bring economic and commercial benefit to the people of Gibraltar and the neighbouring region in Spain.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Governor of Gibraltar on Spain's access to the airport in Gibraltar. [21368]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not discussed with the Governor of Gibraltar the issue of Spain's access to the airport in Gibraltar.

Israel

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what monitoring systems are in place to guarantee that UK manufactured and licensed equipment, components and spares are not used against civilians in Israel's Occupied Territories; and if he will make a statement. [R] [19563]

Mr. Bradshaw: We assess all export licensed applications on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria in light of circumstances prevailing at the time. We are keeping the situation under close review. We have no evidence that equipment manufactured in the UK and licensed for export by this Government has been used by Israeli forces against civilians in the Occupied Territories during the recent and continuing violence. We would be concerned if such evidence came to light.

We use information supplied by a number of sources to check that British equipment is not being used against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, including information gathered by our embassy and non-governmental organisations among others.

However, the surest way of preventing UK defence exports from being misused is to refuse an export licence if it is assessed that an unacceptable risk of misuse or diversion exists, among other reasons. To this end, the Government have also taken steps to strengthen the process of risk assessment when considering export licence applications for any destination. For example, we have improved our procedures for gathering information on end-users of potential concern from UK overseas posts. We also take into account reliable information received about end-users of concern from a variety of external sources, including international reporting bodies and non-governmental organisations.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to encourage the setting up of an international monitoring presence in Israel's Occupied Territories; what specific proposals have been put forward by the British Government; and if he will make a statement. [R] [19564]

Mr. Bradshaw: We condemn the suicide bomb attacks in Israel over the weekend, and regret the cycle of violence now taking place in the region. It is clear that Israel and the Palestinians must return to dialogue as the only means of securing a just and lasting peace in the middle east. It remains our view that third-party monitoring, accepted by both parties, would serve their interests in implementing the Mitchell recommendations. In common with the US and our EU partners, we stand ready to contribute to monitoring if both parties agree to their presence.

Afghanistan

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role the Government are playing at the Bonn Conference on the future of Afghanistan. [20808]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Bonn conference concluded successfully on 5 December with an agreement on a power-sharing transitional government. We congratulate the Afghan participants and the United Nations, particularly the Secretary General's Special Representative, Mr. Brahimi, on this significant achievement which will, we believe be the first step towards a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. We have played an important role behind the scenes in encouraging the interested parties to strike a deal. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has had a number of conversations with key figures to this end, the British Office in Kabul has engaged directly with United Front leaders, and a senior diplomat, Robert Cooper, attended the Bonn conference. The Royal Air Force facilitated the travel of some of the delegates from Kabul.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Russian Government on its decision to place troops within Afghanistan. [20807]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are not aware of any decision by the Russian Government to place troops within Afghanistan. The Russian personnel who have been deployed there are from the Emergency Situations Ministry (EMERCOM) and are setting up medical facilities and a humanitarian centre. The United States, through CENTCOM, were aware of their inbound flights.

Visas

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many appeals have been lodged since October 2000 by overseas visitors against refusal of visas; of these, how many have requested *(a)* oral and *(b)* written appeals; and what is the success rate in both categories. [19642]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

The Immigration Appellate Authority has received 4,040 family visit visa appeals in the period from 2 October 2000 to 31 October 2001. Of that total, 1,982 appeals were received for an oral hearing and 2,058 for a determination on the papers alone.

The success rate of appeals determined by an Adjudicator over the same period is as follows:

Oral cases—73 per cent. successful

Paper cases—38 per cent. successful.

The Immigration Appeal Tribunal (IAT), the higher tier of the Authority, has received 110 substantive appeals. Of these, 13 were for oral hearing and 97 for determination on the papers alone.

The success rate of appeals determined by the IAT is as follows:

Oral cases—75 per cent.

Paper cases—81 per cent.

SCOTLAND

Petrol Prices

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations she has received over *(a)* the retail price of petrol distributed through the oil companies' own forecourts and *(b)* the wholesale price for petrol charged to independent retailers of fuel. [6078]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 15 October 2001]:* The price of motor fuel is a subject on which I receive a considerable amount of correspondence from many parts of the community. However I have not received any substantive representations on the issue referred to by the hon. Member.

If the wholesale or retail price for petrol raises competition concerns it should be brought to the attention of the Director General of Fair Trading, who is responsible for investigating allegations of anti-competitive behaviour.

The Director General has investigated differential pricing by oil companies and has found that the competition legislation has not been breached.

As a result of concerns which have been expressed about the operation of the fuel market in those areas, the Office of Fair Trading undertook investigations in the Highlands and Islands and Western Isles, covering a range of matters, including information regarding the wholesale and retail pricing of fuel.

The OFT published reports in July last year and October this year, which concluded that, in the Highlands and Islands area as a whole and also in the Western Isles, there was no evidence of any sustained widening of pump price differentials as compared with the rest of the UK.

Special Advisers and Press Officers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers were employed (i) full time, (ii) part time and (iii) on a contract basis by her Department in each year since 1992. [6921]

Mrs. Liddell: In the former Scottish Office there were two full-time special advisers in post as any one time in the financial years 1992–93 to 1997–98 and three in 1998–99. The number of press officers employed was as follows:

Year	*Number*
1992–93	29
1993–94	28.5
1994–95	29.5
1995–96	28.5
1996–97	29.5
1997–98	30
1998–99	33

The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. In 1999–2000 and 2000–01, there were three special advisers in post at any one time (one unpaid). The Department currently has two special advisers. Since 1 July 1999, the Department has had four press officers.

Departmental Properties

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will estimate the total running costs for buildings used, owned or rented by her Department for each nation and region of the UK, and estimate the average cost per square metre for properties used by her Department as a whole, and by region and nation of the UK. [6807]

Mrs. Liddell: The estimated running costs for the buildings rented by my Department in Scotland for 2001–02 is £742,000. The running costs for the Department's building in London is estimated to be £571,000.

The estimated average cost per square metre for properties occupied by the Department is £294; this comprises £352 per square metre in Scotland and £242 per square metre in London.

Housing Debt

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland under what Treasury heading, and by what mechanism, moneys would be paid by HM Treasury to *(a)* the City of Glasgow council and *(b)* the Scottish Executive for the clearance of overhanging housing debt in the event of a Glasgow residents' vote in favour of the current housing stock transfer proposals; and if she will make a statement. [7796]

Mrs. Liddell: If the current Glasgow housing stock transfer proposals are agreed, my Department will provide appropriate additional funding to the Scottish Executive as part of the block grant for devolved services. It will then be for the Executive to make appropriate arrangements with the city of Glasgow council. The proposals in relation to housing debt in Scotland where a stock transfer takes place are on the same lines as the arrangements in England and Wales.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much of the cost to the economy of foot and mouth disease has been incurred in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Dumfries and Galloway. [19985]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* In March 2001, the Scottish Executive formed an Economic Impact Assessment Group to collect evidence for decisions on relief and recovery measures following the outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

A reliable assessment of the final cost of the foot and mouth disease cannot be made until the Impact Assessment Group, in collaboration with Whitehall and the other devolved Administrations, completes its assessment, in summer next year.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Communications Data

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many requests last year there were by the Metropolitan Police of *(a)* British Telecom and *(b)* other private sector communications organisations for information in respect of communications traffic data. [20446]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that between November 2000 and November 2001 the Metropolitan Police Service made an estimated *(a)* 10,500 requests of British Telecom and *(b)* 13,000 of other private sector communications organisations.

Firearms

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many illegally-held firearms were *(a)* recovered other than by seizure and *(b)* seized by police forces, in each year since 1990. [20540]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* Information about illegal firearms seized by police forces is not collected centrally. During the firearms amnesty in 1996, nearly 23,000 firearms were surrendered to the police, but not all of these would have been illegally held.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will extend the scope of section 1 of the Firearms Act 1968 to include airguns. [20447]

Mr. Denham: High powered air rifles (those with a muzzle energy greater than twelve foot pounds) are already subject to the control of section 1 of the Act. High powered air pistols (those with a muzzle energy greater than six foot pounds) are prohibited under the terms of section 5(1)(aba).

The Government do not believe that a certification regime for low powered air weapons would be justified. It would be costly to introduce, would be cumbersome to operate and would impose a considerable administrative burden on already stretched police firearms licensing departments.

Regulation of Investigatory Powers Tribunal

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* financial, *(b)* personal and *(c)* administrative resources are available to the regulation of investigatory powers tribunal to enable it to undertake its work. [20444]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* For the financial year 2000–02, £167,000 has been budgeted for the investigatory powers tribunal. This includes Secretariat staff salaries, fees and expenses for tribunal members and salary for one Commissioner. The Secretariat to the tribunal consists of few officials and a part-legally qualified Registrar.

Prisoner Data

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in prison in England and Wales on 10 June in each of the past three years were jailed for (i) fine default and (ii) drug offences related to personal use. [20289]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* The information requested is given in the tables.

The proportion of males and females in prisons in England and Wales who were jailed for fine default is as follows:

			Percentage
		As at 30 June	
	1999	*2000*	*2000*
Proportion of Males	0.16	0.14	0.07
Proportion of females	0.16	0.21	0.05

Information on drug offences is given for all types of drug offence. The proportion of males and females in prison in England and Wales who were sentenced for drug offences is as follows:

			Percentage
		As at 30 June	
	1999	*2000*	*2001*
Males			
Unlawful Supply	4.0	4.2	4.4
Possession with intent to supply	3.5	3.5	3.6
Possession	0.9	1.0	0.9
Unlawful import/ export	3.0	3.1	3.3
Other drug offences	0.3	0.2	0.2
All drug offences	11.6	12.0	12.4
Females			
Unlawful supply	5.8	6.9	7.0
Possession with intent to supply	4.9	4.7	5.2
Possession	1.2	1.1	0.9
Unlawful import/ export	15.1	15.1	16.7
Other drug offences	0.2	0.2	0.2
All drug offences	27.1	28.2	30.0

Downview Prison

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many occupants of Downview prison have been transferred *(a)* to more secure category prisons or *(b)* out of the south-east in the last 12 months. [20123]

Beverley Hughes: The exact information requested is not available. In preparation for the change of role of Downview to a women's prison, 340 male prisoners were moved from the establishment between 17 July and 1 September. No prisoners were moved out of the south-east, and none had their security category increased, as part of this process.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what rehabilitation and education programmes were being run at HMP Downview on 17 July; how many prisoners were on each programme; and where those prisoners completed their programmes. [19517]

Beverley Hughes: The available information will take some time to compile. I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Electronic Tagging

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many electronically tagged offenders there are *(a)* in the UK, *(b)* within Teesside and *(c)* within Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. [19970]

Beverley Hughes: As at midnight on 30 November 2001, a total of 3,527 persons were electronically tagged in England and Wales. 28 were within Teesside, and five of these were within Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency.

Stalkers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures have been taken in the past five years to strengthen the protection from stalkers available for women. [18668]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 28 November 2001]*: The Protection from Harassment Act came into force in June 1997. The Act not only protects women from stalking, but all those subjected to repetitive and alarming or distressing behaviour, among others: children from bullies, victims of domestic violence and witnesses from intimidation.

Police Authorities (Civilian Staff)

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civilian staff were employed by each police authority in England in each year since 1979 *(a)* in total and *(b)* per head of population. [15239]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is readily available only since 1989. A table has been placed in the Library which shows the answer in the form of population per officer.

Police Numbers

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* operational police officers per head of population there are in each police authority in England. [15238]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is set out in the table in the form of population per police officer. Operational officers are defined by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary as any member of staff, including covert staff, whose primary role (ie over 50 per cent. of their time) is directly to deliver the overarching aims of the police service. To 'directly deliver', the role must involve routine and immediate interface (either face to face or by telephone) with the public, including covert operations; staff in such roles can be considered as front line service providers.

Police force	*Population per police officer*[1]	*Population per operational police officer*[1]
Avon and Somerset	507	531
Bedfordshire	543	595
Cambridgeshire	559	643
Cheshire	491	555
Cleveland	395	433
Cumbria	469	496
Derbyshire	534	609
Devon and Cornwall	535	566
Dorset	511	540
Durham	380	423
Essex	560	583
Gloucestershire	479	542
Greater Manchester	373	403
Hampshire	518	547
Hertfordshire	543	587
Humberside	460	498
Kent	478	544
Lancashire	438	476
Leicestershire	460	501
Lincolnshire	523	559
London[2]	285	325
Merseyside	344	380
Norfolk	561	626
Northamptonshire	537	576
Northumbria	368	404
North Yorkshire	573	605
Nottinghamshire	467	490
South Yorkshire	407	467
Staffordshire	498	581
Suffolk	595	618
Surrey	522	614
Sussex	531	613
Thames Valley	571	608
Warwickshire	548	627
West Mercia	585	684
West Midlands	354	403
West Yorkshire	439	461
Wiltshire	545	590
England	416	472

[1] Full time equivalents

[2] Figures for the City of London and Metropolitan police have been combined

Notes:

1. Population figures are as at mid 1999 and are provided by the Office for National Statistics
2. Police numbers figures are as at 31 March 2001 (Home Office Statistical Bulletin—Police Service Strength)

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target concerning the model to assess the levels and routes of supply of drugs within prisons. [16930]

Beverley Hughes: The scope of this work has now been agreed and the project is under way, with a provisional completion date of June 2002.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the efficiency of the Probation Service in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [16929]

Beverley Hughes: Analysis of the currently available financial information indicates that the Probation Service achieved an estimated efficiency saving of 0.6 per cent. in 2000–01, against the target of 4 per cent. This followed estimated savings of 17 per cent. during the three year period from 1995–96 to 1998–99, significantly above the target requirement. The reduction in the level of estimated savings between 1995–96 to 1998–99 and 1999–2000 to 2000–01 recognised the substantial additional investment provided to the Probation Service from 1998 to secure and improve effective service delivery.

The public service agreement target for the National Probation Service in 2001–02 is 3 per cent. The National Probation Service has issued efficiency savings targets to each of the 42 local probation boards for 2001–02. Boards are required to include a statement of their proposed efficiency savings in their annual plan. Boards are also being required to report on their achievement of efficiency savings targets for 2001–02.

The National Probation Service recognises that the achievement of efficiency savings is critically important and it is also vital to have proper arrangements for measuring efficiency savings. The National Probation Service is therefore committed to developing a new comprehensive model to measure efficiency savings that takes into account the very considerable changes that are being made to the arrangements for dealing with offenders, such as the introduction of accredited programmes.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for completions of accredited offender behaviour programmes in prison; [17068]

(2) if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target for completions of accredited offender behaviour programmes for sex offenders. [17067]

Beverley Hughes: The Public Service Agreement target for completions of accredited offender behaviour programmes in prison was published in 'Public Services for the Future: Modernisation, Reform, Accountability'. The target was to increase the number of completions of accredited offender behaviour programmes run by the Prison Service from 3,000 to 6,000 a year by 2001–02, including an increase from 680 to 1,100 in those completing sex offender programmes.

Completions of offending behaviour and sex offender treatment programmes are key performance indicators for the Prison Service. Performance for the period 1999–2002 is listed in the table.

	Offending behaviour programmes	*Sex offender treatment programmes*
1999–2000	4,664	585
2000–01	5,986	786
2001–02[1]	2,613	164

[1] Performance for the year 2001–02 is for the period April 2001–October 2001. These data are provisional and subject to change.

Data on accredited offending behaviour programmes and other key performance indicators are published in the Prison Service annual report and accounts and Her Majesty's Prison Service Corporate and Business Plan.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target of reducing violent crime against vulnerable groups; [17312]

(2) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target in respect of domestic violence. [17311]

Mr. Denham: There are no specific public service agreements to reduce domestic violence or to reduce violent crime against vulnerable groups, but as part of the Government's determination to reduce violent crime overall we are committed to taking steps to tackle the problem of violence against all sectors of the community.

Between 1999 and 2000 the British Crime Survey shows that the number of violent crimes has decreased significantly, by 19 per cent. The survey shows a 34 per cent. decrease in the incidents of domestic violence over that period.

We have taken a number of steps to address domestic violence including issuing a new Home Office circular to the police, issuing multi-agency guidance for addressing domestic violence, and providing over £10 million funding under the Crime Reduction Programme to the Violence Against Women initiative. Further consideration is currently being given across government as to what further strategic measures are needed to ensure there is adequate provision for domestic violence survivors, the Criminal Justice System response to domestic violence is robust and effective, and to reduce incidents of domestic violence and repeat victimisation.

We have also taken steps to strengthen the protection of children as part of our major reform of the law on sex offences, and to target hate crime with new racially aggravated offences and legislation to ensure that the courts treat evidence of racial hostility as a factor in sentencing.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the Crime Reduction Programme. [17313]

Mr. Denham: There is no specific public service agreement (PSA) target for the Crime Reduction Programme. However a number of the initiatives being funded under the programme contribute towards the PSA targets for reducing domestic burglary, robbery and vehicle crime, as well as contributing to a reduction in the fear of crime.

Offending Behaviour Programme

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the cost in 2001–02 of the Accredited Offending Behaviour Programme. [17324]

Beverley Hughes: In 2001–02, the cost of developing and implementing accredited offending behaviour programmes in the community is projected to be £44 million. £15.3 million of this came from the 2000 Spending Review settlement, with the remaining £28.7 million coming from efficiency savings as a result of replacing old programmes with the new, accredited ones.

Prison Population

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the prison population for each prison; and what overcrowding there is in each prison. [17208]

Beverley Hughes: The total population and number of overcrowded prisoners in each establishment at the end of October is listed in the table. Data are provisional and subject to validation by prisons.

Prison name	*Population*	*Total overcrowding*
Acklington	761	0
Albany	443	0
Altcourse	817	0
Ashfield	397	0
Ashwell	378	0
Askham Grange	128	0
Aylesbury	343	0
Bedford	435	172
Belmarsh	839	345
Birmingham	840	120
Blakenhurst	839	186
Blantyre House	116	0
Blundeston	420	0
Brinsford	452	76
Bristol	612	90
Brixton	760	242
Brockhill	156	0
Buckley Hall	385	0
Bullingdon	884	303
Bullwood Hall	173	0
Camp Hill	520	230
Canterbury	292	220
Cardiff	666	534
Castington	322	0
Channings Wood	580	8
Chelmsford	456	84
Coldingley	364	0
Cookham Wood	146	46
Dartmoor	574	0
Deerbolt	383	0
Doncaster	1,080	638
Dorchester	255	150
Dovegate	585	0
Dover	190	0
Downview	144	0
Drake Hall	229	0
Durham	709	320
East Sutton Park	95	0
Eastwood Park	320	66
Elmley	936	236
Erlestoke	316	0
Everthorpe	465	64
Exeter	478	348
Featherstone	589	0
Feltham	653	0
Ford	444	0
Forest Bank	840	0
Foston Hall	213	0
Frankland	645	0
Full Sutton	583	0
Garth	593	0
Gartree	285	0
Glen Parva	798	432
Gloucester	296	166
Grendon	453	0
Guys Marsh	504	66
Haslar	155	0
Hatfield	167	0
Haverigg	545	0
Hewell Grange	169	0
High Down	704	174
Highpoint	873	0
Hindley	439	0
Hollesley Bay	335	0
Holloway	498	0
Holme House	929	118
Hull	578	0
Huntercombe	328	0
Kingston	183	0
Kirkham	515	0
Kirklevington	165	0
Lancaster	229	0
Lancaster Farms	536	92
Latchmere House	167	0
Leeds	1,228	898
Leicester	353	320
Lewes	468	28
Leyhill	369	0
Lincoln	537	318
Lindholme	611	0
Littlehey	628	28
Liverpool	1,395	488
Long Lartin	406	0
Low Newton	284	90
Lowdham Grange	482	0
Maidstone	366	0
Manchester	1,188	744
Moorland	757	40
Morton Hall	182	0
Mount	729	80
New Hall	375	72
North Sea Camp	179	0
Norwich	740	364
Nottingham	508	228
Onley	531	0
Parc	860	0
Parkhurst	422	0
Pentonville	1,159	402
Portland	469	0
Preston	550	440
Ranby	719	96
Reading	246	170
Risley	791	34
Rochester	239	0
Rye Hill	597	0
Send	219	0
Shepton Mallet	172	0
Shrewsbury	331	294
Stafford	625	0
Standford Hill	323	0
Stocken	573	52
Stoke Heath	543	0
Styal	420	12
Sudbury	506	0
Swaleside	745	0
Swansea	329	240
Swinfen Hall	313	0
Thorn Cross	229	0
Usk	327	178
Verne	567	40
Wakefield	561	0
Wandsworth	1,361	480
Wayland	640	52
Wealstun	618	0
Weare	386	0
Wellingborough	500	0
Werrington	113	0
Wetherby	328	0
Whatton	265	0
Whitemoor	397	0
Winchester	570	290
Wolds	405	0
Woodhill	675	100
Wormwood Scrubs	964	0
Wymott	793	0

Source:

Figures for Northhallerton are currently not available

Overcrowding includes prisoners held two to a cell designed for one, those held three in a cell designed for two and those overcrowded in larger dormitories and other accommodation units where population exceeds the uncrowded capacity.

Overcrowding is not evenly dispersed across the prison estate; it is particularly concentrated in local prisons. Local prisons are those which serve the courts of a specific area.

The Prison Service key performance indicator on overcrowding measures the number of prisoners held two to a cell designed for one. The target for this financial year is not to exceed 18 per cent. of the average population. The provisional April 2001 to October 2001 performance is better than target and stands at 16.9 per cent.

Merseyside Police

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in Merseyside police in each year since 1992. [19559]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Year as at 31 March 2001	*Police officers*[1]	*Civilian support staff*[1]
1992	4,621	1,578
1993	4,669	1,625
1994	4,693	1,639
1995	4,659	1,595
1996	4,411	1,560
1997	4,230	1,343
1998	4,216	1,502
1999	4,211	1,356
2000	4,085	1,458
2001	4,081	1,418

[1] Full time equivalents

I understand that the Merseyside police has a budgeted work force total of 4,272 officers for 31 March 2002.

Special Hospitals

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the implementation of the recommendations of the Tilt report concerning security at special hospitals and the amount of money so far spent on implementation by his Department. [16620]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 22 November 2001]:* Responsibility for special hospitals lies with the Department of Health. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Health on 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 418W.

Police Shootings

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Police Complaints Authority review of police shootings since 1998 will take into consideration the need for appropriate procedures when the potential aggressor is known by the police to suffer from a mental disorder. [19777]

Mr. Denham: The terms of reference set by the Home Secretary for the review does not prescribe specific areas for consideration; it sets the coverage as all shootings by the police since 1998 that resulted in death or injury. However, the terms of reference do include the planning, control and conduct of these operations.

There is guidance from the Association of Chief Police Officers that firearms officers should take account of when called to deal with a situation involving a person with a mental disorder. If any of the cases under review did involve such a person then the Police Complaints Authority will consider the appropriateness of this guidance to the situation, how well it was followed and its affect on the planning, control and conduct of the operation and will make recommendations.

Police Training

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training is given by police forces in England and Wales to help their officers deal with mental health crises. [19778]

Mr. Denham: The basic training received by all recruits to the police service includes an element designed to raise awareness of mental illness and to highlight the importance of communicating effectively and sensitively with people suffering from a mental disorder. Individual forces also provide further training for their officers on these issues. Details are not held centrally of such local provision.

Best Value

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the cost in the latest available year of the best value regime to *(a)* his Department and *(b)* police authorities. [19597]

Mr. Denham: The best estimate of costs falling to the Home Office in 2000–01 is in the region of £500,000. This covers estimated staff time based on average salary costs. It also includes travelling and subsistence costs for Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary when they are carrying out best value inspections.

The costs of implementing best value, which falls to police authorities, is not collected centrally.

Stolen Vehicles

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many stolen vehicles have been recovered through use of the Schengen Information System. [19591]

Mr. Denham: None. Article 100 of the Schengen Convention relating to data on motor vehicles which have been stolen, misappropriated or lost has not yet been implemented.

Credit Card Fraud

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what guidance he gives to credit card issuers on reporting credit card fraud; [18999]

(2) what estimate he has made of the level of under-reporting of credit card fraud in each of the last five years; [18996]

(3) what estimate he has made of credit card fraud in each of the last five years *(a)* by level and *(b)* by number of incidents. [18998]

Mr. Denham: No Home Office guidance is given to credit card issuers on reporting credit card fraud. However, I understand that the Association of Chief Police Officers' National Working Party on Cheque and Card Fraud has agreed guidelines on reporting cheque and payment card fraud to the police to encourage best practice in combating credit card fraud.

No estimates of the level of under reporting of credit card fraud have been made by the Government. However, a National Economic Research Associates Report commissioned by the Home Office recognised under reporting of all frauds.

Information on the number of offences of cheque and credit card fraud recorded by the police is available for the last two financial years only, as follows:

Year	*Number*
1999–2000	173,857
2000–01	148,252

The Association of Payment Clearing Services has estimated the cost of reported losses due to credit card fraud over the last four years as:

Year	*£ million*
1997	122.0
1998	135.0
1999	188.4
2000	292.6

Source:
APACS Fraud in Focus 2001

Proof of Age Card

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will give approval for a proof of age card in a standardised format. [19461]

Mr. Denham: The Government have no plans to develop a standard format for a proof of age card or to introduce a single national proof of age scheme. The Government welcome the recent initiative by the British Retail Consortium proposing to develop agreed standard design criteria and methods of accreditation for the various proof of age cards which currently exist so that retailers can be assured of the status of the cards presented to them.

Court Appearances

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time was between arrest and court appearance of a person charged with an offence in England or Wales in the last 12 months. [20434]

Mr. Wills: I have been asked to reply.

It is not possible to provide figures for the average time between arrest and court appearance as details of arrest dates are not collected. I am, however, able to provide figures for the average number of days between charge and first listing, the first appearance in court, for all defendants charged with indictable cases for the period September 2000 to September 2001.

The figures are taken from the Magistrates Courts Time Intervals Survey, which is published quarterly by the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Survey date	*Average number of days from charge to first listing*
September 2000	6
December 2000	5
March 2001	6
June 2001	6
September 2001	6

HEALTH

Commission for Health Improvement

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the change in expenditure and manpower that will result from the CHI's proposed new functions. [16614]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 22 November 2001]:* Any significant change in expenditure and manpower resulting from the Commission for Health Improvement's proposed new functions will be assessed in the context of decisions on budgets for next year which will be announced in due course.

Digital Hearing Aids

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to share with the Scottish Executive the interim evaluation results of the 20 First Wave NHS trusts that are providing digital hearing aids. [18008]

Jacqui Smith: Officials from the Department are in regular contact with officials in the Scottish Executive and the results of the evaluation will be made available to them.

Stem Cells

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the operation of commercial services to members of the public to collect and freeze blood from umbilical cords with a view to stem cell use to treat children later in life; and what proposals he has to regulate commercial firms offering these services. [19299]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* Informal representations have been received from commercial cord blood banks and numbers of concerned health professionals. The Department has implemented an accreditation scheme to ensure the safety and quality of traditional human tissues that are supplied to the national health service via tissue banks. Measures needed to regulate emerging technologies such as stem cell technology are being kept under review by the Department.

Patient Consultations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has issued on the recommended average length of patient consultation times with *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* hospital consultants. [19292]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The Department does not issue guidance on how long general practitioners or hospital consultants should spend on consultations. It is up to clinical judgment how long they should spend on a consultation, as patients' needs differ on an individual basis.

Housing

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanism is used to reallocate health funding to effect changes in population levels predicted in the Government's housing targets. [19480]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* The populations used to calculate health authority allocation targets are based on Office for National Statistics population projections. These are updated to take account of trends in births, deaths and migration.

Decisions on the level of housing required are for local planning authorities. Trends in population growth are taken into account when these decisions are taken. Issues concerning the provision of housing are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many and what proportion of letters received by his Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days; [18578]

(2) how many letters his Department received from hon. and right hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. [18558]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The information requested is shown in the tables.

Replies—20 June to 20 July

Replies sent within	*Number of replies*	*Percentage*
Ministerial replies:		
15 days	527	34
20 days	436	28
30 days	202	13
40 days	186	12
Over 40 days	202	13
Total	[1]1,553	100
Official replies:		
15 days	1,581	67
20 days	379	16
30 days	264	11
40 days	67	3
Over 40 days	74	3
Total	[2]2,365	100

[1] In addition 199 letters were transferred to other Government Departments or no reply required.

[2] In addition 250 letters were transferred to other Government Departments or no reply required.

Pathology Services

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where pathology services will be placed in the new NHS structures under the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill. [20010]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* In future primary care trusts will commission pathology services alongside other services. Pathology services are currently provided by national health service trusts. Through the Pathology Modernisation Programme, the Department is currently working with the NHS to develop a planning guide for pathology modernisation. As part of this process, we are considering the appropriate model for pathology services in the light of "Shifting the Balance of Power" and the proposed changes to NHS structures under the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill. We aim to issue these proposals for wide consultation in spring 2002.

NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if draft orders emanating from the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill will be published before 18 December. [20011]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* No. These orders will be drafted in due course.

Health Service Standards

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on which health services he defines as world class, indicating what their characteristics are. [20397]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan and the National Service Frameworks set out our vision for the high quality service we intend to deliver. The 10 core principles reflected in the NHS Plan are set out in the preface to the document.

Nurses Pay

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the average weekly earnings of a qualified nurse in 2001–02. [21101]

Mr. Hutton: The average weekly earnings of a full-time qualified nurse working in the national health service, including all additional payments and allowances, in 2001–02 are estimated to be £450.

Source:

Department of Health's August 2000 NHS earnings survey.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Violence Statistics

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those persons who have *(a)* died and *(b)* been injured in suspicious circumstances since the Belfast Agreement was concluded, indicating which are (i) known to be as a result of terrorist or paramilitary activity and (ii) known not to be as a result of terrorist or paramilitary activity. [11054]

Jane Kennedy: The police do not keep information on people categorised as injured in suspicious circumstances. Listed are the statistics on deaths and injuries as a result of the security situation since 10 April 1998.

There have been 76 deaths and 4,558 injuries as a result of the security situation since 10 April 1998. A breakdown of the injuries is as follows:

	Number
RUC	1,836
Army	140
Civilian	2,582
Total	4,558

The causes of the injuries were:

	Percentage
Explosions	13
Shootings (mainly paramilitary type)	11
Assaults (paramilitary style beatings)	11
Others (mainly public disorder)	65
Total	100

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the implications are for other recruits in the event of Catholic recruits to the Police Service of Northern Ireland failing to complete recruit training. [19772]

Jane Kennedy: There are no implications for other recruits in the event that Catholic recruits fail to complete training. The 50:50 requirement applies only to the appointment of recruits. It does not apply after police trainees have taken their place on the training course.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

BSE

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she first learned of Professor Bostock's concerns about the possible contamination of samples of sheeps' brains on which tests were being conducted for evidence of BSE; [10595]

(2) how many checks were made, and on what date, into whether samples of brain matter collected in the 1990s and investigated by the Institute of Animal Health in relation to BSE in sheep contained bovine material. [10596]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 26 October 2001]:* It has been known since the experiments began that there were some doubts about whether the brains involved could be cross-contaminated with bovine material. The sheep brains used in the study were not collected under the stringent sterile procedures normally used for such material. the possibility of contamination was raised by Professor Bostock and discussed by the Spongeform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee in February 2000. It was recognised in the public statement made by the Food Standards Agency on 2 August 2001, which explained that the possibility of contamination of the samples with BSE infected cow brains needed further investigation.

DEFRA first approached an independent laboratory asking if they would be able to conduct tests to determine whether the scrapie brain pool (collected in the early 1990s and used in the Institute of Animal Health experiment) contained bovine material in June 2001. Results of the work were reported to DEFRA on 17 October.

Foot and Mouth

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list by county the number of applications for livestock movement licences under the foot and mouth disease control restrictions made during the periods *(a)* 1 March to 30 May, *(b)* 1 June to 31 August and *(c)* 1 September to date; and how many licences were issued in the same periods. [11420]

Mr. Morley: The number of applications for livestock movement licences under foot and mouth disease controls and licences issued for the periods involved are available in the Library of the House. Table 1 covers the period 1 March to 17 September 2001 when licences were issued primarily for slaughter and for welfare reasons. Table 2 covers the period 17 September to 28 November 2001 for licences issued under the Autumn Movements Arrangements.

The differences between the numbers of applications received and number of licences issued, is partly due to some applications being withdrawn and partly because the licensing procedures are a combination of manually and computerised processing.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the information given in the letter of 4 August from the Under-Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Vale of York concerning the bases on which premises subject to foot and mouth culling are decided and the advice given to farmers on cleaning of fields (refs 4430, 4431). [12072]

Mr. Morley: My letter of 4 August provided the following information:

> "On 12 July you tabled two parliamentary questions which I was unable to reply to before the House rose for summer recess. You asked on what basis are premises subject to contingency foot and mouth culling decided and what advice is given to farmers on how to clean a field that has held infected livestock.
>
> I am sorry that I was unable to reply, but had I done so, I would have said any decision to cull animals is based on the following criteria:
>
>> All foot and mouth susceptible animals (normally cattle, sheep, pigs and goats) on a farm where foot and mouth disease is confirmed either on clinical grounds or laboratory tests (an Infected Premise) should be slaughtered within 24 hours of the infection being reported.
>>
>> Susceptible livestock on farms adjoining an Infected Premises (Contiguous Premises) should be culled within 48 hours although local vets have some discretion not to slaughter cattle or rare breeds of sheep or pigs if it is considered that the level

> of biosecurity on the contiguous premises means that the risk of the animals having been exposed to foot and mouth infection is very low.
>
> Animals which have been in contact with infected stock in some way, either directly, indirectly or which are on premises which have been exposed to infection are traced and slaughtered as dangerous contacts.
>
> Susceptible livestock are also slaughtered where animals show signs which suggest foot and mouth disease is present but which are not sufficiently consistent with the signs of FMD to confirm the diagnosis on clinical grounds. In such cases, samples are submitted to the laboratory and animals on contiguous premises are not culled unless a positive laboratory test is obtained.
>
> The following procedures should be applied to fields and pastures used by susceptible animals on an infected premises.
>
> Items likely to attract vermin or scavenging animals must be removed from the land and either destroyed or soaked in disinfectant.
>
> The land should be cleared of all equipment and structures (e.g. troughs, arks, temporary fencing etc.) and left for 42 days to enable maximum exposure of any surface contamination to the environment.
>
> Land that had been grazed by susceptible stock, where possible, be harrowed to break down and disperse waste material e.g. dung.
>
> The cleansing and disinfection of the paddock(s) or land can then be considered complete. However, re-contamination of pastures by vehicles, personnel etc. is feasible unless they follow the biosecurity measures when they leave the other parts of the premises that have not been cleansed and disinfected.
>
> Detailed guidance in respect of individual premises is available to farmers through the local animal health office. In addition, general guidance on biosecurity is available on the DEFRA website."

A copy of this letter was placed in the Library of the House.

Our policy for the slaughter of animals suspected of being infected of foot and mouth has changed slightly. We have introduced a further category. This is for cases where the clinical picture on the farm suggests that disease is not present (i.e. there are insufficient grounds for slaughtering on suspicion the entire herd/flock) but where we want to be sure we have not missed something. We have the option of placing the herd/flock under official movement restrictions while laboratory test are carried out.

The advice on fields and pastures has not been updated.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will update and publish the information given in the letter of 8 August from the Under-Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Vale of York in response to questions concerning biosecurity measures in areas where culling takes place, closure of local roads and the impact of Thirsk Auction Mart (refs 4050, 4047, 4044, 4045, 4048, 4046). [12069]

Mr. Morley: My letter of 8 August provided the following information:

> "On 11 July you tabled 6 parliamentary questions which I was unable to reply to before the House rose for summer recess. You asked what representations had been received that those involved in the culls were not observing the strict biosecurity measures; what representations had been received on actions by officials on an infected site covered by biosecurity provisions, what criteria are used to decide on road closures in an infected zone; what measures will be taken to ensure that local roads are closed when culling is taking place; what assessment has been made of the impact on Thirsk Auction Mart of its closure as a collection centre; and what representations have been received on the three kilometre restriction zone from an infected area.
>
> The Government's key priority is to eradicate foot and mouth disease as quickly as possible and vigilance and high standards of biosecurity are crucial. It is therefore imperative that DEFRA staff are seen to be applying good biosecurity measures at all times and at every available opportunity officials are reminded of this. Any breaches will be treated with the utmost seriousness.
>
> A number of allegations have been made that recommended biosecurity measures have been breached by DEFRA officials. All such allegations are investigated. So far most cases have been found either to be groundless or to be lacking in sufficient detail to enable a thorough investigation.
>
> One case was proven where animal parts were left on a holding. The site was subsequently fully cleared and the staff reminded of the vital importance of maintaining full biosecurity and thoroughness in performing culling operations. The Foot and Mouth Disease Order 1983 allows a Ministry or local authority inspector to prohibit the entry of any person onto any land or into any agricultural building that lies within an "infected" area. This power could be used to close roads. However, veterinary judgment has been that, except in very rare cases, to do so would be disproportionate to the risk involved. Such recommendations are normally based, for example on epidemiological assessment where a road passes through the middle of an infected premise that has not yet been disinfected or where it is not possible to screen a cull from the public's view.
>
> Nonetheless, to ensure that inspectors have sufficient powers to control the current outbreak, additional powers have been inserted in the Foot and Mouth Disease Order 1983 by the Foot and Mouth (Amendment) (England) (No 4) Order 2001 which would allow an inspector of the Ministry or a local authority (with prior written authority of the Minister) to close roads within a controlled area. It is a veterinary judgment as to whether a recommendation should be made to the local authority for a particular road to be closed pending a cull. This would happen if a road passed through or, particularly close to, an infected premise where culling was to occur and where there was no means of ensuring that the cull and all related activity could be screened from the public's view.
>
> No assessment has been made on the impact of closing the Thirsk Auction Mart as a collection centre. Responsibility for authorising collection centres rests with the local authority which in this case, is North Yorkshire county council. However to be licensed as a collection centre strict guidelines laid down by the State Veterinary Service must be met. The Thirsk Centre was no longer able to meet the required criteria owing to the outbreak of the disease in that area. The situation will be kept under review but Thirsk is now subject to tight biosecurity emergency procedures announced by my noble Friend Lord Whitty on 23 July.
>
> The three-kilometre zone (the Protection Zone) is required by EU legislation, and is based on scientific and veterinary advice and experience in dealing with this disease."

A copy of my letter was placed in the Library of the House.

Biosecurity remains an extremely important issue and there will need to be a continuing discussion with all interested parties on the lessons that need to be learned on disease prevention measures to be followed by those responsible for livestock. As regards the biosecurity observed by DEFRA staff during the outbreak, no further examples of breaches have been proven by our investigation.

The disease situation is now much improved in Thirsk. North Yorkshire has had no outbreaks since 18 August although it remains an "at risk" county for the purposes of the Animal Movements Licensing Scheme. Thirsk Auction Mart was re-licensed as a collection centre on

4 October and operates as such on Mondays. For the remaining days of the week, except Sunday, it operates as a cleansing and disinfection centre.

SSSIs

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of sites of special scientific interest were in *(a)* good, *(b)* fair and *(c)* poor condition in (i) 1996, (ii) 1997, (iii) 1998, (iv) 1999, (v) 2000 and (vi) 2001. [16537]

Mr. Meacher: Information on the condition of sites has been collected since April 1996. The features are assessed as being favourable; unfavourable but improving; unfavourable with no change; unfavourable and declining; and destroyed.

English Nature reports on SSSI condition in its annual reports, copies of which are available in the House Library. Figures from the reports are set in the table.

Percentage

Year	*Favourable/ improving Good*	*Unfavourable/ no change Fair*	*Declining or destroyed Poor*
April 1996–March 1997	67.2	22.9	9.9
April 1997–March 1998	72.0	15.7	12.3
April 1998–March 1999	71.8	16.9	11.3
April 1999–March 2000	58.8	29.6	11.6
April 2000–March 2001	58.0	27.0	15.0

Nature conservation is a devolved matter, and the National Assembly and Scottish Parliament hold information for Wales and Scotland respectively.

English Nature has a programme of monitoring SSSIs, which started in 1997. It will inspect each site at least once every six years. By March 2001, English Nature had inspected 66 per cent. of sites and assessed them against a common standard, giving the figure of 58 per cent. in good condition. Thus the figures for later years are more accurate than earlier estimates and do not necessarily show that actual deterioration has taken place. The programme of inspections was disrupted this year due to restrictions on access to land; however, English Nature plans to complete the cycle by the end of 2002–03 to give comprehensive data on all sites.

The Department has adopted a public service agreement target of aiming to deliver 95 per cent. of SSSIs in favourable condition by 2010. This is a challenging target. Deterioration through neglect of management was addressed in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, and EN now has new tools available. We will also need to secure policy changes which will remove the causes of poor condition of sites, with the co-operation of other Government Departments.

Waste Management

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what impact impending EU legislation will have on the UK waste management strategy. [19053]

Mr. Meacher: There are a number of EU Directives still in the developmental stage or in the process of being transposed into UK law, including those relating to End of Life Vehicles, Batteries, and Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment, which will extend producer responsibilities. These should encourage producers and distributors to internalise costs of disposal and lead to more efficient use of resources.

The EU Landfill Directive of 1999 requires us to reduce the amount of biodegradable municipal waste sent to landfill to 75 per cent. of 1995 levels by 2010, 50 per cent. by 2013 and 35 per cent. by 2020.

In order to achieve this, the national waste strategy, published in May 2000, prioritises waste minimisation, re-use and recycling. This year we have set challenging statutory recycling targets for each local authority to achieve and are supporting the delivery of these with additional funding, including a £140 million pot on which consultation is currently under way.

Livestock Industry (Wales)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to support the Welsh livestock industry. [19895]

Mr. Morley: This is a matter for the Minister for Rural Affairs at the National Assembly for Wales.

Bathing Water Directive

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of the Bathing Water Directive on *(a)* rural beaches and *(b)* tourism policies. [19542]

Mr. Meacher: Water quality has been improved considerably at both resort and rural beaches to meet the requirements of the Directive. Compliance with the Directive's main mandatory standards in England was 98 per cent. this year, compared with 79 per cent. in 1990. Of the 388 bathing waters in England which passed this year, around three-quarters are rural. The enhanced reputation of our beaches will enable more to obtain Blue Flags and Seaside Awards and make our coasts and seaside resorts even more attractive to the millions who visit every year.

White Goods

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice has been issued by her Department to consumers on buying fridges and freezers before the issue concerning the disposal of their ozone-damaging contents is resolved; and what action she is taking to prevent the dumping of fridges and freezers. [19553]

Mr. Meacher: My Department has issued an information note for householders regarding the safe disposal routes for fridges and freezers. This will shortly be made widely available and can already be found on my Department's website. The information note is intended to reduce the likelihood of fly-tipping. The illegal disposal of waste on a site without a waste management licence or registered exemption is a criminal offence. Local authorities and the Environment Agency have powers to remove fly-tipped waste and to recover their costs from those responsible.

Hunting with Dogs

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of the temporary cessation of hunting with dogs on the level of predation of livestock by foxes. [20656]

Alun Michael: There is no information collected centrally which could provide the basis for an answer to this question.

Portland Cement

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage the British manufacturers of Portland cement has agreed to improve their energy efficiency by 2010 under their climate change levy sector agreement. [20516]

Mr. Meacher: The four major UK-based manufacturers of Portland cement constitute the climate change agreement with the British Cement Association. The cement sector target is to achieve specific primary energy consumption of 1.25kWh/kg of cement by 2010. This represents a 25.6 per cent. reduction from the 1990 performance of 1.68kWh/kg of cement.

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which of the British producers of Portland cement have signed a climate change agreement; and what percentage of that industry sector they represent. [20606]

Mr. Meacher: The following British producers of Portland cement have entered into the climate change agreement between the Secretary of State and the British Cement Association:

Blue Circle Industries;

Buxton Lime Industries Ltd.;

Castle Cement Ltd.;

The Rugby Group Ltd.

These companies represent very nearly 100 per cent. of the UK Portland cement manufacturing sector.

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's fisheries policies, and in particular on the common fisheries policy of the EU. [20752]

Mr. Morley: Our primary objective for the Common Fisheries Policy must be for a policy which is both economically and environmentally sustainable and one which involves stakeholders more closely in management decisions affecting them. Only in that way will the CFP attract support and credibility from fishermen, ensure responsible stock management and give the promise of a viable future. I strongly agree with the Commission's conclusions in their Green Paper on the operation of the CFP that it is not meeting its objectives. It is failing to provide an adequate living for many fishermen and is failing to conserve fish stocks. The forthcoming review of the CFP will give the opportunity not only to put right what has gone wrong but also to consider how the CFP should develop over the coming years.

Livestock Markets

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects that livestock markets will be reopened. [19742]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* Some livestock markets have reopened in Scotland reflecting the lower number of FMD cases there. A decision to reopen livestock markets in England and Wales will be made in the light of scientific and veterinary advice on progress with the eradication of foot and mouth disease. It is not possible to give a precise date but it is expected to be in the early part of 2002, provided there are no further outbreaks.

Flood Defence

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many local authorities have completed their review of flood defence assets and provided that data to the Environment Agency. [21415]

Mr. Morley: I intend to publish this information once it has been validated.

Rural Initiatives

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1090W, on rural affairs, how many people received support through the England Rural Development Programme in 2001–02, broken down by category and amount. [20940]

Alun Michael: Because applications are still being processed, figures on the number of new land-based agreements under the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) in the current financial year are not available.

My answer of 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1090W, gave the number and value of agreements approved under the ERDP project based schemes since they were launched in October 2000. Of these, the equivalent figures for 1 April to 31 October 2001 are:

Scheme	*Number of agreements*	*Total value of grant approved (£ million)*
Rural Enterprise Scheme	122	7.7
Processing and Marketing Grant	17	4.8
Vocational Training Scheme	21	1.0

ERDP agreements typically provide a wider environmental, economic and social benefit than is apparent from the payment of grant to a single individual or business. It is not possible however to quantify precisely the number of people who benefited indirectly from the ERDP.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1091W, on rural affairs, which organisations received support through each scheme of the Vital Village Programme grants in 2001–02; and how much each received. [20941]

Alun Michael: Information on which organisations have received funding, and how much they have received under the Parish Plans Scheme and the Community Services Grant have already been lodged in the Library of the House. Details on which organisations have been offered funding under the Parish Transport Scheme are as follows:

Description	*Grant offered* £
Holy Island Parish Transport Grant	2,692
Ellingham Travel Voucher Scheme	1,771
Arkholme bike racks and bus shelter	7,909
Melling with Wrayton Bus shelter	4,555
Nuthall Community Bus	9,439
Evergreen Club Transport	750
Ryton On Dunsmore Community Bus	10,000
Bicton Bus Shelter	2,372
Rockland St. Mary (Year 1)	2,475
Surlingham Rural Bus Service	7,524
Ventnor Town Council Parish Scheme	5,800
Feock Bus Shelter	4,403
Winford Parish Transport Grant	450
Blockley Hedgehog Bus service	1,864
Total	62,004

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to introduce a rural equivalent of the Excellence in Cities scheme; and if she will make a statement. [20911]

Alun Michael: The Excellence in Cities scheme, which has been promoted by the Department for Education and Skills (DFES), is already being extended outside major cities, through the Excellence Clusters. These will tackle smaller areas of disadvantage, including some rural areas. By September 2002 there will be 24 clusters, including some serving areas in West Cumbria, County Durham and Lancashire. More clusters will be announced in subsequent years. Ministers and officials at DEFRA will strongly support the lead given by colleagues at DFES in spreading this excellent initiative to rural areas rather than establishing a new initiative in competition. We welcome the success of the Excellence in Cities initiative, which is designed to address disadvantage through a programme of support including learning mentors, learning support units and a programme for gifted and talented pupils, and the way the initiative focuses on the needs and aspirations of pupils and their parents. It currently involves 58 authorities and by 2003–04 some £300 million will be spent in EiC schools. The extension of the programme to Excellence Clusters started in September 2001. Excellence Clusters are smaller groups of schools outside major cities which work together to implement the EiC programme.

Veterinary Medicines

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she is taking on the EU's proposals to make veterinary medicines dependent on prescription; and what assessment she has made of their impact in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland. [20949]

Mr. Morley: This proposal forms part of a much wider set of proposals produced by the European Commission to amend the procedures for the authorisation and control of both human and veterinary medicines in the EU. This particular proposal concerns veterinary medicines for use in food-producing animals. In its present form it could result in farmers in England, Wales and Scotland, having to pay more by incurring veterinary surgeons' fees when obtaining those medicines that are currently available without veterinary intervention. Furthermore, it could restrict the number and types of veterinary medicines that may be supplied by registered agricultural merchants and saddlers, to a limited range of products for dogs and cats. This could have significant adverse effects on those businesses.

In considering the proposal the Government have taken account of its likely impact on the supply of veterinary medicines and have agreed that, during negotiations, UK officials should seek to modify the proposal to enable a flexible approach to the distribution of veterinary medicinal products that takes advantage of existing national practices, so long as consumer protection and animal welfare can be demonstrably assured.

Rural Business Campaign

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received from the UK Rural Business Campaign concerning the level of compensation available to rural businesses affected by foot and mouth disease; and if she will make a statement. [20662]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* I am not aware of any recent representations from the UK Rural Business Campaign on this specific issue. The Government do not accept a liability to compensate businesses affected by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease and the measures taken to control it. The Government have put in place a package of measures to help affected businesses, including the £74 million Business Recovery Fund, enhanced central support for hardship rate relief granted by local authorities, and interest-free deferral of income tax, VAT and national insurance contributions.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Websites

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he has taken to ensure that Government and agency websites are easily accessible to disabled users. [20950]

Mr. Leslie: It is our policy that all new or redesigned websites are made accessible. To achieve this we have adopted the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Accessibility Initiative, and web managers are asked to comply with level 1 of their Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Ministerial Decisions (Appeals)

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will list each of the statutory provisions where a person wishing to appeal against a decision of a Minister must, when lodging the appeal, pay the Minister a sum of money. [20815]

The Solicitor-General: The following are examples of where the making of an application or the lodging of an appeal is accompanied by certain formalities, including the payment of a fee.

Section 303 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 empowers the Secretary of State to make regulations to prescribe fees for most types of application under planning legislation. The Secretary of State had made regulations under this section setting fees.

Part V of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 establishes a regime setting up the Immigration Services Commissioner, whose functions include the registration of persons providing immigration services and advice. Paragraph 5 of schedule 6 to the Act empowers the Secretary of State by order to specify fees for the registration or continued registration of persons on the register. The Secretary of State has so ordered.

Part IV of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 provides for immigration appeals, and Section 60(1) empowers the Secretary of State by regulations to make provision requiring a family visitor exercising a right of appeal under section 59 to pay such fee as may be fixed by the regulations. The Secretary of State has made such regulations.

It is not possible to list all statutory provisions falling within the category defined without a complete survey of statute law which would involve a disproportionate cost.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Free Television Licences

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* single pensioners have taken out free television licences, *(b)* pensioner couples have taken out such licences, *(c)* pensioners are entitled to such licences but have not taken them out and *(d)* pensioners have no television. [20951]

Dr. Howells: Free television licences are issued to named individuals but also cover anyone else living at the specified address. The information held by TV Licensing does not therefore distinguish between free television licences issued to over-75s living on their own and those living as couples.

No accurate information is available on television ownership by age group. It is therefore not possible to establish the number of pensioners who do not own a television set, nor the number of people eligible for a free licence but who have not applied for one.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many and what percentage of households in the United Kingdom *(a)* pay for and *(b)* receive a free television licence. [21381]

Dr. Howells: At the end of October 2001, television licences were in force for 23.725 million domestic premises. Fees were payable in respect of 20.059 million of these premises or approximately 85 per cent. of the total, including 200,000 Accommodation for Residential Care (ARC) units, for which the fee is £5. 3.666 million premises or approximately 15 per cent. of the total benefited from free television licences for the over-75s.

Office of Communications

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to ensure all regions of the United Kingdom are represented on the content board of the Office of Communication. [20551]

Dr. Howells: Details of the arrangements for the regulation of content by the Office of Communications and how the interests of the nations and regions of the United Kingdom will be taken into account in those arrangements will be contained in the draft Communications Bill to be published in spring 2002.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what appointment criteria she proposes for the content board of the Office of Communication. [20550]

Dr. Howells: The draft Communications Bill to be published in spring 2002 will contain details of the proposed form the regulation of content by the Office of Communication will take.

Historic Buildings (Disabled Access)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action the Government are taking to facilitate the provision of accessible WCs for people with disabilities visiting historic buildings. [21003]

Dr. Howells: The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was introduced to ensure that people with disabilities are offered the same services and facilities as everyone else. Planning Policy Guidance Note; planning and the historic environment (PPG15) states that it is important that people with disabilities should have dignified easy access to and within historic buildings. This includes the provision of suitable WCs.

English Heritage is the Government's statutory advisor on all matters concerning the historic environment in England, as well as being responsible for 409 historic properties and sites which are visited by over 11 million people each year. It is currently undertaking a programme of access audits, to be followed by works to increase physical access. The programme covers all 409 sites and will make all reasonable physical adjustments, including the provision of accessible WCs where appropriate. It will be implemented according to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. English Heritage also provides guidance to others who own or manage historic buildings and other heritage properties on how to improve accessibility.

English Heritage, as well as the National Trust and other bodies, also produce special publications with information for visitors with disabilities and also include this in their general guides.

Television Sets

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of people living in the United Kingdom who have a television at their primary place of residence. [21384]

Dr. Howells: Statistics on television ownership relate to premises rather than individuals. The estimated number of domestic premises with a television set is

24.585 million or 97.25 per cent. of all such premises. The available statistics do not distinguish between primary and other residences.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of (i) people and (ii) households in the United Kingdom that (A) receive and (B) can receive digital television by (1) digital terrestrial, (2) digital satellite, (3) digital cable and (4) other means; and what the equivalent figures are for reception at people's primary place of residence. [21386]

Dr. Howells: The information available is as follows:

(A) Digital television take up

Nearly 8 million UK households (30 per cent.) have switched on to digital television since 1998, made up of some:

5. 5 million satellite (Sky Digital);

1.22 million terrestrial (ITV Digital);

over 1 million cable (NTL and Telewest);

others using terrestrial free-to-air only broadcasts and other technologies (eg ADSL).

(B) Digital television coverage

The latest figures available from the Independent Television Commission are as follows:

(1) Digital terrestrial television (DTT) as at July 2001

UK coverage	*Percentage of population*	*Number of homes*
Multiplex 1 BBC	81	20,261,000
Multiplex 2 Digital 3 and 4	80	19,851,000
Multiplex A SDN	78	19,455,000
Multiplex B ITV Digital	79	19,546,000
Multiplex C ITV Digital	76	18,963,000
Multiplex D ITV Digital	74	18,441,000
Core coverage[1]	68	16,929,000

[1] Core coverage is the ability to receive all six multiplexes

The BBC and ITC, who are responsible for the DTT transmission network, are considering, in consultation with Government and stakeholders, how to improve coverage of all DTT multiplexes across the UK.

(2) Digital satellite is predicted to reach about 98.2 per cent. of the UK population.

(3) Digital cable passes 6.2 per cent. of UK homes.

(4) Data are not available for other technologies.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what is her estimate of the number of *(a)* analogue and *(b)* digital television sets bought in each of the last five years; and how many sets there are in the United Kingdom; [21382]

(2) if she will estimate the number of *(a)* analogue and *(b)* digital (i) radio and (ii) television sets in the United Kingdom. [21383]

Dr. Howells: The Independent Television has advised that there are estimated to be 40–50 million analogue television sets in the UK and 210,000 integrated digital television sets.

Estimates of television sales in the last five years are as follows:

	Analogue TV sales (million)	*Digital TV sales (thousand)*
1997	4.3	nil
1998	4.7	2
1999	5.5	27
2000	6.2	94
2001[1]	4.6	87

[1] To October.

Equivalent figures for radio are not available, but the Radio Authority has advised that there are estimated to be in excess of 100 million analogue radio sets currently in use in the UK and some 40,000 digital radio sets.

Digitally Originated Graphics

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the use of on-screen digitally originated graphics to identify and promote *(a)* television channels, *(b)* programme strands, *(c)* internet links and *(d)* other programmes. [21372]

Dr. Howells: Electronic Programme Guides (EPG) (both with and without digitally originated graphics), will make it easier for viewers to access an increasing number of television programmes and channels on offer through digital television.

Under the proposals outlined in the Communications White Paper, Ofcom's powers to promote competition and protect consumers will apply to EPGs and similar new systems. Ofcom's powers must be sufficiently flexible to address new competition issues as they emerge. It is also proposed that Ofcom should be able to regulate EPGs so that Public Service Broadcasters are given due prominence.

BBC Charter

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on *(a)* the process and *(b)* the timing of the renewal of the BBC Charter. [21373]

Dr. Howells: The current Charter will expire in 2006 after a term of 10 years. We expect to start the review process in 2004 and will make an announcement on the process and timing in due course.

Digital Radio

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of (i) people and (ii) households in the United Kingdom that can receive (A) publicly and (B) commercially funded digital radio by any means; and what are the figures for reception at people's primary place of residence. [21385]

Dr. Howells: The Radio Authority advise that:

BBC national digital radio services cover around 60 per cent. of households (estimated to be around 14,700,000 households in total). The BBC has just announced that it is resuming its roll-out of digital radio;

BBC local digital radio services (which include the National Regions) cover between 40 and 50 per cent. of households (estimated to be between 9,800,000 and 12,300,000 households in total);

Commercial national digital radio services cover over 80 per cent. of households (estimated to be around 19,600,000 households in total);

Commercial local digital radio services cover between 40 and 50 per cent. of households (estimated to be between 9,800,000 and 12,300,000 households in total), and the Radio Authority continues to advertise new multiplexes, working towards a target of 80 per cent. in this phase.

There are no data for reception at a primary place of residence, or for the number or percentage of individuals (as opposed to households) who can receive digital radio.

Films (Funding)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will *(a)* make a statement on (i) direct and (ii) indirect Government funding of films and *(b)* publish a list of films that have received such funding in each of the last five years. [21371]

Dr. Howells: We have contacted a number of organisations that provide funding for film to request the information required, and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as it is available, placing copies of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

BBC Broadcast

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she expects to announce her decision on plans for BBC Broadcast. [21376]

Dr. Howells: My Department has received an application from the BBC under Article 3(u) of the Charter seeking approval for the proposed incorporation of BBC Broadcast Ltd. The application is currently being assessed against the published guidelines for BBC commercial approvals and we expect to make a decision shortly.

Apsley House

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what provisions exist for the private hire of Apsley House; and which events have been held there in the last 10 years. [20870]

Dr. Howells: Under the Wellington Museum Act 1947 all private hire events are subject to the consent of the Duke of Wellington.

There have been 84 private hire events at the museum since 1 January 1991.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make it her policy to exclude members of the Wellesley family from sitting on the proposed private trust for Apsley House. [20869]

Dr. Howells: The proposed Apsley House Trust will be independent of Government. However the scope of its proposed membership has been discussed with Ministers who have indicated that there should not be more than one member of the Wellesley family out of a current total of five trustees on the Trust. The Duke and his family have a right to occupy the private apartments at Apsley House and the consent of the Duke of Wellington is required for the holding of certain events in the public apartments. In these circumstances, we believe that, if the Trust were to be successful in a bid to carry out various functions of the Secretary of State in relation to Apsley House, a formal link with the family would make good operational sense.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what annual financial contribution is made by the Wellesley family towards the upkeep of Apsley House. [20871]

Dr. Howells: Under the terms of the Wellington Museum Act 1947, the Secretary of State has a duty to maintain the forecourt of Apsley House, the fabric of its exterior and the parts of the building used as a museum. The Duke of Wellington is not required to make any contribution in respect of the duties of the Secretary of State, but he does have a duty to keep the portions of Apsley House which he is entitled to occupy in good repair and to maintain the garden of the House. In addition the Wellesley family are responsible for making their own arrangements for the supply of utilities to their apartments.

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what accommodation is provided for the Wellesley family in Apsley House; and what rent is paid. [20868]

Dr. Howells: The Duke of Wellington and his family have the right of occupation, under the Wellington Museum Act 1947, to live at Apsley House in private apartments which comprise just over half the house and to occupy and maintain the garden. These rights of occupation are rent free (subject to the duties of repair and maintenance) in perpetuity.

Pools Industry

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what percentage of pools industry money went to the *(a)* Foundation for Sport and Arts and *(b)* Football Foundation in (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02; and what the percentage will be for 2002–03; [20988]

(2) what estimate has been made of the income to the *(a)* Foundation for Sport and the Arts and *(b)* Football Foundation from the pools industry in 2002–03. [20989]

Mr. Caborn: Under the terms of the Government's agreement with the Littlewoods and Vernons Pools each company has made donations equivalent to 3 per cent. of stake money to each of the Foundations for Sport and the Arts and the Football Foundation in 2000–01 and 2001–02. The agreement was due to end on 31 March 2002. As announced by my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his pre-Budget Report, following discussions between officials and industry representatives, the two pools companies have agreed to continue their funding for the two Foundations for a further two years at a rate equivalent to 2 per cent. of gross profits.

The Football Foundation retains only an element of the donations made to it as the pools donations are for UK-wide purposes while the Foundation is an England only body. The Foundation currently retains 72.8 per cent. of the funds donated to it by the pools companies for its own purposes less £250,000 directly allocated to Supporters Direct by the Government. The rest is passed to bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland specified by the devolved Administrations.

My Department's provisional estimates are that pools donations to the Foundation for Sport and the Arts and Football Foundation will be in the region of £1.25 million. In the case of the Football Foundation this will mean in the region of £1 million for its own purposes in 2002–03. Of course, the final figures are tied to the success of both companies over the year.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Judges' Lodgings

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the average cost of running judges' lodgings per judge accommodated for financial years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [20653]

Mr. Wills: The average cost of running judges' lodgings per judge accommodated for the four years in question is set out on three bases:

£

Year	*Cost per judge accommodated*
Total cost of lodgings	
1997–98	56,865
1998–99	64,604
1999–2000	53,772
2000–01	61,047
Cost of lodgings[1]	
1997–98	52,581
1998–99	58,253
1999–2000	47,233
2000–01	52,326
Costs solely attributable to judicial occupation	
1997–98	26,587
1998–99	28,322
1999–2000	24,673
2000–01	24,676

[1] Excluding the Treasury capital charge payable on all freehold properties

Note:

The figures for 2000–01 are yet to be audited and may therefore be subject to slight change

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the average cost of running judges' lodgings per night of accommodation provided for the following financial years *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–2001. [20652]

Mr. Wills: The average cost of running judges' lodgings per night of accommodation provided for the four years in question is set out on three bases:

Total cost of lodgings

£

	Cost per night of accommodation
1997–98	777
1998–99	846
1999–2000	782
2000–01	896

Cost of lodgings (excluding the Treasury capital charge payable on all freehold properties)

£

	Cost per night of accommodation
1997–98	719
1998–99	763
1999–2000	687
2000–01	768

Costs solely attributable to judicial occupation

£

	Cost per night of accommodation
1997–98	364
1998–99	371
1999–2000	359
2000–01	362

The figures for 2000–01 are yet to be audited and may therefore be subject to slight change.

Judiciary (Corruption)

John McDonnell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many members of the judiciary (1) were convicted of corruption in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999 and *(e)* 2000; [20494]

(2) were charged with corruption in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999 and *(e)* 2000; [20495]

(3) cautioned in the course of an investigation for corruption in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999 and *(e)* 2000. [20498]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information sought is not recorded and held in a manner which would make it possible to answer these questions with absolute certainty. However, the Lord Chancellor is not aware of any member of the judiciary being charged with, cautioned for or convicted of corruption between 1996 and 2000; he is aware of a Circuit Judge who, during the period, was charged with, but not convicted of, fraud relating to his activities before he became a judge.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of the increase in the departmental expenditure limit from 2001–02 to 2002–03 will be accounted for by wage costs. [20666]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The level of wage costs within departmental budgets this year and in future years will be dependent upon negotiations. Departmental reports published next spring will give full retrospective costs.

House of Lords (Reform)

Mr. Miliband: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will publish the series of background papers on reform of the House of Lords promised in the Government's White Paper, "The House of Lords—Completing the Reform". [21864]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department is today issuing a single report, entitled "The House of Lords—Completing the Reform—Supporting Documents", that contains all of the background papers. Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Copies of the report have also been placed in the Vote Office.

Further copies of the report may be obtained from:

The House of Lords Reform Team
Lord Chancellor's Department
Room 815
Millbank Tower
21–24 Millbank
London SW1P 4QP

The report is also available on the LCD website at www.lcd.gov.uk/

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for what reasons the Government have not established a Joint Committee of both Houses to consider the reform of the House of Lords; and if he will make a statement. [19636]

Mr. Wills: The Government proposed a Joint Committee in their manifesto for the 1997 election, which they stated would focus on the parliamentary aspects of reform. During the course of the last Parliament, they made strenuous efforts to set up such a Committee. However, it was not possible to reach agreement with the other main political parties as to the terms of reference for the Joint Committee.

There was no commitment in the 2001 manifesto to the creation of such a Committee. The 2001 manifesto committed the Government to the introduction of the second stage of reform of the House of Lords, by the most effective implementation possible of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on reform of the House of Lords.

The Government's proposals were published on 7 November in the White Paper "The House of Lords—Completing the Reform" (Cm 5291). They are subject to consultation; the consultation period ends on 31 January 2002.

Victims of Crime

Andrew George: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in which types of cases victims' personal statements may be used in court cases since 1 October. [20325]

Mr. Keith Bradley: I have been asked to reply.

The Victim Personal Statement scheme is intended to give victims of crime a more formal opportunity to say how they have been affected by the crime. The statement will become part of the papers and should help all Criminal Justice Agencies subsequently dealing with the case to take more informed decisions. All personal victims of crime, or serious road traffic incidents, are covered by the Victim Personal Statements (VPS) scheme and will be offered the chance to make VPSs which can be used in court.

The term "victim" includes the bereaved relatives or partners (including same sex partners) in fatal road traffic cases leading to criminal action; the bereaved relatives or partners (including same sex partners) in homicide cases; partners or carers where the primary victim is a child or vulnerable adult; and small businesses (such as small shops, but not large retailers or corporations).

PRIME MINISTER

Performance and Innovation Unit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what legislation has resulted from the establishment of the Performance and Innovation Unit. [21245]

The Prime Minister: The implementation of PIU reports is taken forward by the relevant Government Departments. In many cases, the wide-ranging nature of PIU reports means that it is not possible to identify specific pieces of legislation that have arisen from those reports. However, examples include the PIU "Encryption and Law Enforcement" report which influenced the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, and the PIU "Recovering the Proceeds of Crime report" which contributed to legislation in the Proceeds of Crime Bill.

NHS Spending

Mr. Laws: To ask the Prime Minister if it is his policy to increase the level of spending on the NHS to the European average level by 2005; and if he will make a statement. [20305]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the right hon. Members for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) and for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 325–30.

Special Advisers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish *(a)* the standard form of contract for and *(b)* the disciplinary procedures for special advisers; and if he will state where these differ from those of career civil servants. [21356]

The Prime Minister: All special advisers are appointed under terms and conditions set out in the Model Contract for Special Advisers. Copies of the model contract are in the Library of the House. Clause 15 of the contract sets out the disciplinary procedures that apply.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what information he collates on the amount and frequency of payments into stakeholder pension schemes. [20955]

Mr. McCartney: Information is supplied by the Inland Revenue, derived from returns made by scheme administrators when claiming tax relief, on the amount of contributions to stakeholder pensions. Information for the first quarter of the financial year is published on its website. Information on the frequency of payments is not available.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pension schemes have been closed to new members in each year since 1997; and what the size is of each of the schemes that has been closed. [15149]

Mr. McCartney: Further to the answer given to the hon. Member for Havant on 10 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 623–24W, inaccuracies occurred in the information provided. The information in the text of the answer and column *(a)* were correct at the date of the original answer. The information given in column *(c)* for years prior to 1990 was unreliable, but was accurate for subsequent years. Information has been subsequently supplied which increases the numbers in columns *(a)* and *(c)*. The information in column *(b)* supplied at the time was incorrect. The correct information is contained in table 1.

Table 1

	(a) Number of schemes with commencement dates in that year	*(b)* Number of occupational schemes closed within a particular year	*(c)* Number of schemes that wound up in that year
1979	4,781	n/a	n/a
1980	4,693	n/a	n/a
1981	4,637	n/a	n/a
1982	5,723	n/a	n/a
1983	6,770	n/a	n/a
1984	8,620	n/a	n/a
1985	10,974	n/a	n/a
1986	11,038	n/a	n/a
1987	12,436	n/a	n/a
1988	22,299	n/a	n/a
1989	11,511	n/a	n/a
1990	7,820	n/a	n/a
1991	12,881	n/a	657
1992	8,156	n/a	758
1993	6,614	n/a	968
1994	7,541	n/a	1,248
1995	6,614	n/a	1,675
1996	8,354	[1]—	3,132
1997	6,221	[2]176	25,525
1998	5,053	283	6,825
1999	3,743	310	8,161
2000	3,502	322	5,596

[1] The total number of schemes that closed prior to 2 April 1997 was 2,021. This may include schemes closed before 1979, but still in existence when schemes were required to register in 1991.

[2] Figure covers the period 2 April 1997 to 31 December 1997

Column *(a)* is based on scheme commencement date until 1991 and then registrable date. Schemes with at least two members have been required to register since 1991. Schemes already in existence in 1991 had to provide the date of scheme commencement on registration.

Column *(b)* shows numbers of schemes closed to new members during the year. The Pension Schemes Registry did not require schemes to provide the date of closure prior to 2 April 1997, although some schemes did. Therefore, in most cases, it is not possible to identify the individual years in which schemes closed prior to this date.

Column *(c)* is based on the wound-up date of the occupational pension scheme. Many of these schemes will have begun the winding-up process in an earlier year. Figures for years before 1991 are not available.

The Pension Schemes Registry (PSR) records the number of closed schemes (that is schemes closed to new members but which still have active members accruing benefits) but it would be disproportionately expensive to identify the size of each individual scheme. The information in tables 2 and 3 identify the number of schemes according to the membership bands used by the PSR to assess a schemes levy liability.

Table 2: Occupational pension schemes closed from an effective date within each year

Levy membership band	*1997*[1,2]	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*[3]
2–11	72	127	135	106	85
12–99	56	77	69	94	73
100–999	39	65	89	110	71
1000–4999	4	10	12	12	16
5000–9999	4	3	1	0	1
10000+	1	1	4	0	2

Table 3: Personal Pension schemes closed from an effective date within each year

Levy membership band	*1997*[1,2]	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*[3]
2–11	0	0	1	0	0
12–99	0	0	0	0	0
100–999	0	0	2	0	0
1000–4999	0	0	0	0	0
5000–9999	0	0	0	0	0
10000+	1	1	1	0	4

[1] The PSR computer system is not able to identify the year of closure of schemes prior to 2 April 1997

[2] 2 April to 31 December

[3] To date

Notes:

1. Schemes with one member are not required to register and are therefore not included in the figures
2. The schemes listed as closed are those which still have active members

Deaf Awareness

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what research his Department is undertaking into the take-up of disability living allowance among deaf adults. [20792]

Maria Eagle: The number of disability living allowance (DLA) recipients with deafness as their principal disabling condition has increased by around 200 per cent. (8,700 to 26,500) since 1993, twice the increase in the overall caseload over the same period. More generally the number of people getting DLA is increasing by some 3 to 5 per cent. each year. Estimates of and research into the take up of DLA are not routinely undertaken, but the take-up of the benefit is kept under general review.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to ensure that disability living allowance medical reports based on assessments in which *(a)* a deaf examinee was not provided with communication support or *(b)* the examiner was not experienced in the problems of deaf people are set aside. [20793]

Maria Eagle: Arrangements exist for the rescheduling of a medical assessment if a claimant has not previously indicated the need for an interpreter, but it later transpires that the assessment cannot proceed without one. The same would apply should there be a need for communication support for a deaf claimant.

Current training for examining doctors already includes instructions to assess comprehension of speech and reaction to noise. It also includes instructions to take into account the effects of background noise when assessing hearing. A trainer-led module on sensory problems has been prepared, with help from RNID and other voluntary organisations to deliver to examining doctors.

It is therefore unlikely that there would be a need for medical assessments to be set aside.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will amend the Decision Making and Appeals Regulations so that appeals from deaf claimants which are heard without the requisite communication support can be set aside by a tribunal chair. [20794]

Maria Eagle: Regulation 57 of the Social Security and Child Support (Decisions and Appeals) Regulations 1999 only allows set aside in limited circumstances. These are where a document relating to the proceedings was not sent or received or a party to the proceedings was not present at an oral hearing. A chairman may also set aside where there have been procedural irregularities or mishaps. In addition, under section 13(2) of the Social Security Act 1998, if a person applies for leave to appeal to a Commissioner, the tribunal chairman (or another legally qualified panel member) can set aside the tribunal's decision and remit the matter for redetermination provided he considers that the original decision was wrong in law. That would include where he considered that there had been a breach of natural justice, for example, where the evidence showed that the appellant was not able to hear or understand what was being said at an oral hearing.

We have no plans to expand the set aside provisions.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will ensure that the Appeals Service is prepared to fund appropriate communications support for deaf applicants to hold preliminary meetings with their representatives in such appeals. [20795]

Maria Eagle: Last year the Appeals Service commissioned the Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID) to undertake a disability audit of service provision. To improve customer service a strategic plan has been implemented to tackle the issues identified. We are seeking to ensure diversity issues are taken into account and successfully managed in each area of the agency, as part of normal business.

For those with hearing difficulties, "typetalk" and induction loops are available. Induction loops are now in most permanent venues, and plans are in place to ensure that all permanent venues have this equipment by 31 March 2002. For deaf appellants who require communication support, a British Sign Language interpreter is made available where appropriate.

The Appeals Service does not fund advice or any communications support in advance of the tribunal hearing. This is often provided by welfare organisations, some of whom are already supported by central or local government, prior to an appeal being heard.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will ensure that each disability benefit centre within the Disability and Benefits Covers Directorate works towards accreditation with the Royal National Institute for Deaf People's 'Louder than Words' Charter. [20796]

Maria Eagle: We are working with the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, to review those offices within the Disability and Carer Benefits Directorate that have achieved accreditation in the past and to prepare those offices which are working towards it.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will ensure that all those making decisions on awards of *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* attendance allowance receive appropriate training in (i) deaf awareness and (ii) related problems for those wishing to claim benefits. [20797]

Maria Eagle: Training for new Decision Makers (DM) includes material on hearing impairment with information on how hearing occurs, sound frequency and volume. It also makes reference to British Sign Language and lip reading.

A programme of specialist training on people with hearing difficulties is currently being delivered to all DMs throughout the organisation. The "Understanding our customers" module, includes material on living with a hearing impairment. There are training courses in place covering "Dealing with vulnerable groups" and "Deaf and hard of hearing", the latter run on our behalf by the Royal National Institute for the Deaf.

Hospital Patients (Long Stay Costs)

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to review the rules relating to the pensions and benefits of people who stay in hospital for more than six weeks. [21225]

Mr. McCartney: The Department, in conjunction with the Department of Health, is looking at issues affecting hospital in-patients, including the rules governing the downrating of benefits.

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what estimate he has made of the annual costs to his Department of reducing the pensions and benefits of people who have long stays in hospital caused by delayed transfer in those cases where the Department is late in being notified that the stay exceeded six weeks; [21226]

(2) what estimate he has made of the annual costs to his Department in making retrospective deductions from the incomes of people who have stayed in hospital for *(a)* more than six weeks and *(b)* more than 52 weeks in respect of (i) their pensions income and (ii) their benefits income. [21227]

Mr. McCartney: The Benefits Agency's administration costs are published in the Benefits Agency annual report and accounts 2000–01, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library. The costs are not classified by individual tasks.

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proposals he has to *(a)* alleviate the administrative burden and *(b)* reduce the delays that pensioners leaving hospital following a stay of more than six weeks face when seeking to restore their pensions and benefits to former levels. [21228]

Mr. McCartney: The benefit is restored to the appropriate level when the Benefits Agency receives notification of the pensioner's discharge from hospital. This is part of normal procedures and we have no evidence to suggest there is a widespread administrative burden.

National Insurance Contributions

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many individuals in each of the last 10 years have applied for a formal determination of their national insurance contributions by the Secretary of State. [11995]

Dawn Primarolo: I have been asked to reply.

The figures for the number of individuals who have applied for a formal determination about their national insurance contributions by the Secretary of State for Social Security during the last 10 years are not held.

Pensioners (Statistics)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners he estimates there will be in the United Kingdom by 2010. [20259]

Mr. McCartney: We estimate that by 2010 there will be around 12 million pensioners in Great Britain.

Note:

Figure rounded to the nearest million.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department 2000 Population Projection

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average cost is of processing an application for disability living allowance when it is resolved following *(a)* receipt of the applicant's completed claim pack, *(b)* a medical examination in the home, *(c)* an appeal to a medical appeal tribunal and *(d)* an appeal to the independent tribunal service. [19937]

Maria Eagle: The average cost of processing a new claim for disability living allowance (DLA), based on a claim pack only, is £33.65. Where a medical examination is carried out in the claimant's home, the average cost is £87.39. All appeals against DLA decisions are dealt with by disability appeals tribunals. The total average cost of a DLA appeal is £253.60 of which £168.00 is attributable to the tribunal service.

Outsourcing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will make a statement on the saving from the ACCORD contract for strategic outsourcing of IS and IT services; [18989]

(2) if he will make a statement on the saving arising from his Department's public-private partnership for the support of IT needs. [19260]

Mr. McCartney: The objectives of Strategic Outsourcing are:

To achieve improved value for money for the delivery of current operations and new developments;

To facilitate the award of contracts for future allocations of business in support of the Welfare Reform Agenda;

To deliver current and future IS/IT services and operations;

To develop and manage the migration of existing and new business systems onto a shared systems infrastructure, in line with the Department's IS/IT Strategy.

Strategic Outsourcing therefore has not been undertaken solely on the basis of cash savings. However, estimates over the contract period have shown reduced costs for the outsourcing approach.

SchlumbergerSema

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress has been made on formalising the extension of the medical services contract with SchlumbergerSema. [21863]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department has finalised contractual amendments which set performance and delivery conditions for a contract extension to 31 August 2005. The agreement to extend the contract is subject to confirmation before 31 May 2002.

Equal Pay

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of *(a)* the workforce and *(b)* the finance sector is employed in organisations that have carried out equal pay reviews. [18305]

Mrs. Roche: I have been asked to reply.

Many employers have stated publicly that they have carried out, or are planning to carry out a pay review while others prefer to keep this information confidential. The Government therefore do not hold information on what proportion of the workforce or the finance sector are employed in organisations that have carried out equal pay reviews.

TREASURY

Overseas Development Assistance

17. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with Finance Ministers of other countries on the level of overseas development assistance. [18701]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor talks frequently with his counterparts in other countries on many topics, for example, the most recent meeting of ECOFIN on Tuesday 4 December where this issue was raised.

Public-Private Partnerships

18. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for the expansion of public private partnerships; and if he will make a statement. [18703]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Public-private partnerships remain a key element of the Government's modernisation programme. We will continue to apply the PPP approach to a wide range of public sector activities where appropriate, drawing on business skills and experience of private sector partners to develop and implement policy and deliver better quality public services.

World Poverty

19. **Mr. Pollard:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the role of the United Kingdom in pressing for co-ordinated international action to tackle world poverty. [18704]

29. **Dr. Naysmith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent action he has taken to press for co-ordinated international action to reduce world poverty. [18714]

Mr. Boateng: The UK is working with governments throughout the world, both in donor and developing countries, to ensure that co-ordinated action is taken. To this end we co-ordinate our efforts through the G7/8 process, through institutions such as the IMF, World bank, WTO, and UN system, and directly with developing countries themselves. The Chancellor has recently spoken in New York and at Yale university on the need to ensure that globalisation brings prosperity to all, and contributes to poverty reduction.

34. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with Finance Ministers from other countries to press for co-ordinated international action to tackle world poverty. [18720]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor regularly uses international meetings of Finance Ministers to push for co-ordinated action to tackle world poverty, including efforts to achieve the 2015 goals. Discussions of Finance Ministers in Ottawa covered the need for increased development assistance in order to reach these goals, and efforts to maintain debt sustainability in HIPC countries given the current global downturn.

Manufacturing

20. **Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss the state of United Kingdom manufacturing. [18705]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor and the Governor meet regularly to discuss a wide range of issues.

22. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from business men in the United Kingdom on manufacturing productivity; and if he will make a statement. [18707]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor and other Treasury Ministers often receive representations from manufacturers and all areas of business on a wide range of economic issues, and value their insights.

23. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the change in the tax burden on manufacturing industry since 1997. [18708]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information requested is not available. This is because the difficulties involved in apportioning taxes between different sectors means that the estimates would not be robust.

24. **Richard Burden:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he is taking to create an economic environment that encourages investment in manufacturing industry. [18709]

Mr. Boateng: The Government are committed to creating and maintaining the right climate for business to flourish, invest and grow. Since 1997, the Government's central economic objective has been to achieve high and stable levels of growth and employment. This means pursuing macro-economic and enterprise policies which promote business activity, and which improve the productivity of firms in the UK. Because of the choices we have made we are now enjoying the longest period of sustained low inflation since the 1960s, we have the lowest long term interest rates for nearly 40 years, and the lowest unemployment since the 1970s. The fiscal policy framework which we have put in place has restored the public finances to a healthy and sustainable position.

Of course, no country can insulate itself from global economic events. But the UK is now much better placed than in the past to weather the global downturn. The Government will continue to steer a course of economic stability, with low inflation and sound public finances, coupled with microeconomic reforms to create the right conditions for investment and growth in the future.

Investment

21. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the level of public sector net investment as a proportion of national income over the period of the first comprehensive spending review. [18706]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is as follows:

	Percentage of GDP[1]
1999–2000	0.5
2000–01	0.7
2001–02	1.3

[1] The figures for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 are outturn figures, consistent with table B23 in the pre-Budget report. The figure for 2001–02 is the latest projection, consistent with table B6 in the pre-Budget report.

Development Assistance Target

25. **Paul Goggins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the Government to reach the United Nations development assistance target of 0.7 per cent. of gross national product. [18710]

Mr. Boateng: We remain fully committed to the UN 0.7 per cent. oda/GNP target. We have set out our plans for the next three years to 2003–04 and as these show, development assistance as a proportion of GNP will rise to 0.33 per cent. in 2003–04, up from 0.26 per cent in 1997.

In his speech in New York, the Chancellor emphasised his commitment to ensuring further substantial increases in development assistance.

Monetary Policy

26. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss monetary policy. [18711]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor and the Governor meet regularly to discuss a wide range of issues. The conduct of monetary policy is a matter for the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England.

Aviation Industry

27. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what fiscal measures he is considering to lessen the economic effects of international terrorism on the aviation industry. [18712]

Mr. Boateng: The Government keep all taxes under review and decisions will be made as part of the normal Budget process.

PSBR

28. **Mr. MacDougall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the role of the public sector borrowing requirement in deciding on monetary union. [18713]

Ruth Kelly: The Government have said that they will complete an assessment of the five economic tests within two years of the start of this Parliament. The assessment will be comprehensive and rigorous. All relevant economic issues will be dealt with as part of the assessment.

Minimum Income Guarantee

30. **John Robertson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to improve the minimum income guarantee for the poorest pensioner households. [18715]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The minimum income guarantee benefits around 1.8 million of the poorest households. In April, we reformed the capital rules to reward those who have saved and we abolished the age-related lower rates so that everyone on the MIG is entitled to the highest rate of support. We are committed to raising the MIG in line with earnings throughout this Parliament to ensure that pensioners can share in rising prosperity.

To provide greater support not only for the very poorest but also for those on low and modest incomes, we have decided to proceed with the introduction of the Pension Credit from 2003 at a cost of £2 billion in the first full year. The Pension Credit will tackle the unfairness and complexities of the current system. It will bring pensioners up to a guaranteed minimum income and it will reward those who have saved for retirement to ensure that it pays to have saved even quite modest amounts.

Climate Change Levy

31. **Gillian Merron:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will exempt combined heat and power from the climate change levy; and if he will make a statement. [18716]

Mr. Boateng: As announced in last week's pre-Budget report, subject to legal and other constraints, the Government will consider the environmental case for providing more favourable treatment for CHP within the climate change levy, taking account of the role which CHP might play in meeting the UK's climate change targets.

Euro

32. **Mr. Hopkins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will include the achievement of a competitive and sustainable final exchange rate of the pound against the euro in his assessment of the economic tests for UK membership of the euro. [18717]

Ruth Kelly: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 561W.

Tom Brake: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the recent meetings he has had with the Prime Minister to discuss the introduction of the euro. [18695]

Ruth Kelly: The Prime Minister and the Chancellor meet regularly to discuss a wide range of issues.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor), of 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 381W, what exchange rate between the pound and the euro will be stable and competitive in the medium term. [18698]

Ruth Kelly: The Government believe the best contribution they can make to a stable and competitive exchange rate is low and stable inflation with sound public finances.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the extent to which the pound sterling was overvalued against the euro on 27 November; and if he will make a statement. [20309]

Ruth Kelly: The Government believe the best contribution they can make to a stable and competitive exchange rate over the medium term is low and stable inflation with sound public finances.

Research and Development Tax Breaks

33. **Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the utilisation of research and development tax breaks. [18718]

Dawn Primarolo: Figures for the number of firms that have taken advantage of the research and development tax credit for small and medium enterprises introduced in the last Budget will not be available until 2002, when firms incurring research and development expenditure have sent in their tax returns for the first year of operation of the scheme.

Exports

35. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the impact the economic slowdown in Europe will have on UK exports in the next 12 months. [18721]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's latest forecast for UK export growth in 2002, which takes into account all relevant influences, was published in the pre-Budget report (Cm 5318).

Commissioner Bolkestein

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met European Commissioner Bolkestein; and if he will make a statement on the issues discussed. [19367]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor met Commissioner Bolkestein on 20 November. They discussed a number of current tax dossiers and preparations for the Barcelona European Council.

Smuggling

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the proportion of the market share of UK consumed cigarettes accounted for by smuggled product for the latest year for which information is available; and if he will make a statement. [20339]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to page 11 of the Customs and Excise paper "Measuring Indirect Tax Fraud" published on 27 November 2001, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

The Customs and Excise paper, "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud", also published on 27 November 2001 and a copy of which is also in the Library of the House, sets out the results of the first year of the Government's Tackling Tobacco Smuggling strategy. These results show that the Government's strategy is on target to achieve its aim of putting cigarette smuggling into decline within three years.

Railtrack

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 143–44W, under what exemptions of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information he did not provide the information requested. [20134]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The answer was in accordance with Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which was introduced in April 1994, and the Resolution of the House of March 1997. These specifically provide for the exclusion of internal consultation and discussion, and confidential communications between Government Departments.

Working Age Inactivity Rate

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the change in the working age inactivity rate over the past 12 months; what reasons underlie this change; and if he will make a statement. [20223]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Laws, dated 6 December 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the change in working age inactivity rates. (20223)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of the economic inactivity rates of working age people, ie. men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59. The working age economic inactivity rate is the number of working age people who are economically inactive as a percentage of all working age people.

The latest available seasonally adjusted estimates are based on a three month rolling average for July to September 2001. The seasonally adjusted LFS estimate of the working age economic inactivity rate for July to September 2001 is 21.4 per cent. This is 0.4 percentage point higher than the estimate for July to September 2000. The inactivity rate for women rose by 0.6 percentage points over this period to 27.6 per cent, and the rate for men rose by 0.1 percentage point to 15.8 per cent.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has made of the level of capital gains tax paid in each year from 1997–98 to 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [20307]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of capital gains tax receipts in 2001–02 to 2002–03 are published in the November 2001 pre-Budget report. Estimates for earlier years are available from the Inland Revenue website.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are his latest estimates of the level of non-North Sea corporation tax for each of the years 1997–98 to 2002–03; how these estimates vary from those made at the time of Budget 2001; and if he will make a statement. [20301]

Dawn Primarolo: Current and Budget 2001 estimates of non-North Sea corporation tax receipts in each of the years 1997–98 to 2002–03 are:

£ billion

	Current	*Budget 2001*
1997–98	29.5	29.5
1998–99	29.1	29.1
1999–2000	33.2	33.2
2000–01	30.2	29.8
2001–02	29.8	34.1
2002–03	31.6	35.6

Employment Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of *(a)* single childless people and *(b)* childless couples who will be entitled to the proposed employment credit. [21100]

Dawn Primarolo: The number of people eligible for the working tax credit will depend on the rates and thresholds, which will be set as part of the Budget 2002 process.

Government Receipts

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the total receipts from income tax were in each year since 1989; [20490]

(2) what were the total Government receipts from all sources minus national insurance contributions in each year since 1989; [20491]

(3) what the total Government receipts from national insurance contributions were in each year since 1989. [20492]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates for all the components of public sector receipts are available from the Office for National Statistics databank, which is available in the House of Commons Library.

National Insurance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown in current prices of the total sum raised in *(a)* employers' national insurance and *(b)* employees' national insurance in each year since May 1997. [20470]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates for all the components of public sector receipts are available from the Office for National Statistics databank, which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of levels of *(a)* employers' and *(b)* employees' national insurance contributions on labour productivity. [20465]

Dawn Primarolo: No specific assessment of the impact of levels of employers' and employees' national insurance contributions on labour productivity have been made. However, the Government have implemented a number of recent reforms in this area designed to ensure work pays, which should promote labour supply and employment, and thus also help improve the economy's long-term growth potential.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the amount of money that would be raised by abolishing the upper earnings limit on national insurance contributions. [20772]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 135W.

Uncertificated Securities Regulations

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what use has been made of the powers in the Uncertificated Securities Regulations 2001 to delegate functions to the Financial Services Authority. [21847]

Ruth Kelly: Following Parliament's approval, the Uncertificated Securities Regulations 2001 (SI 2001–3755) have replaced the Uncertificated Securities Regulations 1995. Continuing the approach under the 1995 Regulations, the Treasury has delegated to the Financial Services Authority its powers under part 2 of the Regulations, except—as required—those functions conferred on the Treasury by regulation 11 and regulation 12. This re-confirms the FSA role as supervisor of CREST as operator. The FSA is also supervisor of CREST as a recognised clearing house.

Vocational Training

Mr. Willis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the removal of tax relief on self-funded vocational training. [20824]

Dawn Primarolo: I have no plans to make a statement.

PFI Projects

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to increase value for money in private finance initiative projects. [20464]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Public-private partnership (including private finance initiative) projects are used where they offer better value for money than alternative procurement approaches. By providing better value (through innovation and better management of risks), the Government can deliver more public services, more quickly and to a higher standard than with public sector investment alone.

Significant improvements have been made to PFI since 1997, and the process is kept under review to ensure that lessons learned (including from NAO and PAC reports) are disseminated to Departments and other public authorities. The Office of Government Commerce (OGC), supported by Partnerships UK (PUK), is currently revising the guidance on Standardisation of PFI Contracts first published in 1999. The OGC is working with Departments to improve their delivery of all procurement projects, while PUK support is available for PPP projects in particular.

National Health Service

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what impact the additional costs resulting from measures taken in response to the events of 11 September have had on plans for funding the expansion of the national health service. [18689]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Department of Health in liaison with other Departments have been reviewing their contingency plans in the light of the events of 11 September. There is no impact on planned investment to deliver the NHS Plan. The Chancellor announced in the pre-Budget report an extra £1 billion for health to help ensure delivery of the NHS Plan.

Borrowing

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which assumptions underlying his forecasts for public borrowing have been designed to be deliberately cautious, due to high levels of uncertainty; and if he will make a statement. [20217]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Box B1 on page 169 of the pre-Budget report sets out the cautious assumptions, audited by the National Audit Office, underlying the public finances projections.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of public sector net borrowing for the fiscal year 2001–02 to date; what the position was at the same stage of the fiscal year 2000–01, excluding the proceeds of the sale of mobile (Spectrum) phone licences; and if he will make a statement. [20215]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The latest monthly data for public sector net borrowing in 2000–01 and 2001–02 are available in the joint HM Treasury/Office for National Statistics public sector finances first release, issued on 20 November. As explained in the background notes in the release, the receipts by Government for allowing use of the spectrum by mobile phone companies are treated as rent in the UK national accounts and spread evenly over the whole of the license period.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumptions and calculations he has made in order to derive the lower estimates for financial company profits which are used to calculate the new public borrowing estimates in Table B7, page 173, of the pre-Budget report; and if he will make a statement. [20312]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The pre-Budget report describes the path of financial company profits assumed in the public finances projections in paragraph B44.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates of the growth of total managed expenditure for 2004 to 2007 underlie the forecasts for public borrowing as set out in Table B2, page 165, of the pre-Budget report; and if he will make a statement. [20216]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Forecasts for Total Managed Expenditure for 2004–05 to 2006–07 are determined by the assumptions for current expenditure in DEL and AME and for public sector net investment set out in paragraph B20 on page 168 of the pre-Budget report.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish his latest assessment of each Government Department's performance in relation to its public service agreement targets; and if he will make a statement. [20334]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 373W.

Wanless Review

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his plans to consult with patients and others on the conclusions of the Wanless Review of Long-Term Health Trends. [20336]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Derek Wanless will continue to consult organisations with an interest in health and social care about his interim report, both in the UK and abroad. He will also listen to the views of individuals, patient groups, the NHS and social care practitioners throughout the UK, before submitting his final report to the Chancellor.

Contingency Reserves

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what allocations have been made from the Government's contingency reserves for *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [20331]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government will continue to seek any resources additional to departmental budgets from Parliament in the usual way, which includes the announcement to Parliament of additions to departmental expenditure limits via parliamentary answers. These are given effect in supplementary estimates.

Tax Burden

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his estimate is of net taxes and social security contributions as a share of gross domestic product for each year from 1999–2000 to 2005–06; how these estimates have changed over the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement; [20311]

(2) what is his latest estimate of the change in the tax burden from 2001–02 to 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [20314]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Current projections for net taxes and social security contributions as a per cent. of GDP are available in Tables B10 and B22 of the 2001 pre-Budget report.

The November 2000 projections for net taxes and social security contributions as a per cent. of GDP are available in Table B10 of the 2000 pre-Budget report.

Privatisation Proceeds

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has made for privatisation proceeds over the next 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [20320]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Projections for proceeds from the sales of assets for the next three years are set out in Table B18 of the pre-Budget report (Cm 5318).

Budgetary Forecasts

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the size is of the safety margin built into future borrowing forecasts, referred to in paragraph B3, page 164, of the pre-Budget report, for each of the next three financial years; and if he will make a statement. [20218]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The public finance projections in the pre-Budget report are based on cautious assumptions audited by the National Audit Office (NAO).

In addition, the robustness of projections is tested against an alternative more cautious scenario, in which the level of trend output is assumed to be lower than in the central case, as illustrated in chart 2.5 on page 29 of the pre-Budget report.

Further detail is set out in Box B1 and Chapter 2, paragraphs 2.60 and 2.61 of the pre-Budget report.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumptions for the level of unemployment in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002, *(c)* 2003 and *(d)* 2004 were used in drawing up the economic and budgetary forecasts made in the pre-Budget report; and if he will make a statement. [20319]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The assumption for unemployment used in the public finance forecasts presented in the pre-Budget report is based on the average of outside forecasters' forecasts for unemployment, in line with NAO audited conventions. Assumed annual average unemployment figures are shown in the table. The Government, in line with the practice of previous Administrations, does not publish forecasts for unemployment.

Claimant unemployment assumption for the 2001 pre-Budget report Public Finances Forecast, based on average of outside forecasters' forecasts

million

	UK seasonally adjusted claimant unemployed
2000–01[1]	1.05
2001–02	0.97
2002–03	1.06
2003–04	1.14

[1] Outturn

Inland Revenue

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will announce his decision on the future of the distraint work of the Inland Revenue; and if he will publish his assessment of the financial evaluation of the options. [20396]

Dawn Primarolo: This proposal is still under consideration and I am not at this stage able to say when an announcement will be made.

Output

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the change in the trend growth of output in the UK since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [20221]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's latest assessment of trend output growth in the UK is outlined in Chapter 2 and Annex A of the 2001 "pre-Budget report" (Cm 5318).

Productivity Growth

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of *(a)* whole economy productivity growth and *(b)* manufacturing productivity growth for each year from 1975–76 to 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [20222]

Ruth Kelly: Estimates of output per job across the whole economy, and for the manufacturing sector since 1978–79, are published by the Office for National Statistics, and are accessible through the Library of the House.

Recent trends in UK productivity growth are discussed in Annex A of the 2001 "pre-Budget report" (Cm 5318). Further information is contained in "The Economy: Supplementary Charts and Tables", published alongside this report.

Labour Productivity

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the change in the trend growth of labour productivity since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [20220]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's latest assessment of trend labour productivity growth in the UK is outlined in Chapter 2 and Annex A of the 2001 pre-Budget report (Cm 5318).

Health Spending

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether it is his policy to raise taxes to increase NHS spending; and if he will make a statement. [20310]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have made their commitment to increasing resources over the next three years for the NHS, funded from general taxation and linked to reform. Decisions on taxation and spending will be taken in the Budget and Spending Review, respectively, next year.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his pre-Budget Statement of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 829, whether it is the policy of his Department to increase expenditure on the national health service to the average level of health spending in European Union countries; and if he will make a statement. [20302]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the Prime Minister's statement on 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 963.

Debt Interest

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of debt interest payments by central Government in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; what effect there has been on these forecasts as a consequence of the new forecasts for interest rate levels as set out in the November 2001 pre-Budget report; and if he will make a statement. [20338]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The latest forecast for Central Government Gross Debt Interest payments, and the change since the Budget, for 2001–02 and 2002–03 can be found in the pre-Budget report in tables B13 and B14, pages 182 and 184, respectively. The changes in the forecast for 2001–02 and 2002–03 are due to lower assumed interest rates and the impact the lower rates have on the forecast for RPI affecting the accrued up-lift on index linked gilts.

Interest rate assumptions used in public finance forecasts are audited by the National Audit Office. For the PBR the interest rate assumptions were based on market expectations as of 19 November 2001.

Council Tax Revenues

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the percentage increase in council tax revenues between 2001–02 and 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [20337]

Mr. Andrew Smith: We make projections of council tax receipts as part of our wider projections of the public finances. Table B11 of the pre-Budget report shows projections for council tax receipts in Great Britain for 2001–02 and 2002–03.

Decisions on council tax are for local authorities to take, after consulting with their local electorate and taxpayers.

Tax Credit

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of total expenditure on all forms of tax credit in each year from 1998–99 to 2004–05; and if he will make a statement. [20316]

Dawn Primarolo: Figures and projections from 2000–01 to 2002–03 appear at Table B11 of the pre-Budget report. Equivalent figures for the earlier years appear in the Financial Statement and Budget reports issued at March 2000 and March 2001.

Employees

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimates he has made of financial sector employee bonuses for upper rate taxpayers for each of the years *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000, *(c)* 2000–01 and *(d)* 2001–02; and if he will make a statement; [20306]

(2) what estimates he has made of the change in bonus payments made to financial company employees between 2000–01 and 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [20313]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that estimates are not available. I refer the hon. Member to paragraph B41 of the 2001 pre-Budget report.

Receipts

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to request that the National Audit Office should carry out an audit of all assumptions underlying the changes in the current receipts set out in Table B8, p.174 of the pre-Budget report between the Budget and the pre-Budget report; and if he will make a statement. [21001]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The assumptions underlying the public finance projections which are audited by the National Audit Office under the three-year rolling review, established in Budget 2000, are set out in Box B1 on page 169 of the pre-Budget report.

Equity Prices

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the effects on the public finances of a 10 per cent. increase in UK equity prices; and if he will make a statement. [20315]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The effect of changes in equity prices on the public finances is discussed in paragraph B35 of the pre-Budget report.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the letter of 8 November from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire on the working families tax credit. [21469]

Dawn Primarolo: The letter was not received and a copy has been requested.

Department of Health (Underspend)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the reasons for the underspend in the Department of Health in the last financial year. [20478]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The underspend by the Department of Health last year was approximately 1.5 per cent. of their total budget. Over one third of this was a planned contingency to meet costs falling in the following year.

Renewco

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Office for National Statistics determined that Renewco would be classified as the public sector. [20417]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Chris Grayling, dated December 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to answer your question about the classification of Renewco. I am replying in his absence. (20417)

I have already given details of the advice given and the dates in my reply to Theresa May MP, which appeared in Hansard.

Unitary Authorities (Populations)

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many unitary authorities have a population of less than 100,000; and if he will list them together with their respective populations. [20543]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Andrew Mitchell, dated December 2001:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question concerning the number of unitary authorities which have a population of less than 100,000 persons. (20543)

The table below shows the unitary authorities with fewer than 100,000 residents at mid-2000, together with their estimated populations.

Unitary authorities with fewer than 100,000 residents in mid-2000

Thousand

Unitary authority	*Number of residents*
Rutland	37.8
Merthyr Tydfil	55.8
Isle of Anglesey	64.8
Blaenau Gwent	71.2
Ceredigion	72.2
Monmouthshire	87.4
Torfaen	89.8
Denbighshire	91.8
Hartlepool	92.3

Source:

Office for National Statistics, Crown Copyright 2001

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons his Budget 2001 estimate of total departmental expenditure limit spending was £3.4 billion higher in 2000–01 than the estimate given in his November pre-Budget report; and if he will make a statement. [20318]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Because the pre-Budget report takes account of and revises (in Table B16) the outturn figures published in the Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper (Cm 5243) in July.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out his latest estimates of the underspends by each departmental expenditure limit for 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [20317]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Provisional outturn against final plans and original limits in departmental expenditure limits on both a cash and accruals basis are given in Tables 1 and 1a of the July Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper (Cm 5243). The outturn has been revised and republished Department by Department in Table B16 of the 2001 pre-Budget report (Cm 5318).

Stamp Duty

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the forecast cost over the *(a)* current and *(b)* next three financial years of the stamp duty exemption for SIPs. [20484]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of the cost of the exemption for the share incentive plan to 2003-04 were given in the Budget 2001 report.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 10 December 2001

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Parliamentary Questions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Solicitor-General what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by the Law Officers' Departments were the subject of a holding answer in the last three sessions of Parliament. [22023]

The Solicitor-General: The figures are as follows:

	Percentage
1998–99	0.8
1999–2000	0.85
2000–01	1.7

Dangerous Driving (Sentencing)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Solicitor-General how many of the cases of causing death by dangerous driving whose sentences were considered to be unduly lenient have been referred to her by the court of appeal in each of the last five years. [20937]

The Solicitor-General: Records for cases referred by the Law Officers as unduly lenient sentences to the Court of Appeal have only been maintained by category of offence since 2000. Four cases of death by dangerous driving were referred in 2000 and so far this year six cases have been referred to the Court of Appeal.

DEFENCE

Joint Strike Fighter

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how may jobs will be supported by the decision to proceed with the joint strike fighter in *(a)* the regions of England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Northern Ireland and *(e)* the UK; and what information he has collated on how many jobs will be supported on a company basis. [17358]

Mr. Hoon: As I announced to the House on 29 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 514W, it is estimated that up to 3,500 jobs could be supported or created during the next phase of the Joint Strike Fighter project, rising to 8,500 in later phases. The detailed information requested is not held in the format requested. Officials are working to collate the information and I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Active Service

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the percentage of the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Navy and *(c)* Air Force which were committed to operations in each reporting period for each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [18754]

Mr. Ingram: Since April 2000, the percentage of the trained strength committed to operations for each service has been collated on a quarterly basis. These percentages, which do not include personnel preparing for operations, recovering from operations, or engaged in training, are shown in the table.

Percentage of trained strength committed to operations

Percentage

	Army	*Navy*[1]	*Air Force*
2000–01			
April-June	21.6	11.1	9.2
July-September	22.7	13.8	9.0
October-December	23.1	19.3	8.7
January-March	24.4	10.8	8.5
2001–02			
April-June	21.8	9.5	8.9
July-September	25.6	8.4	9.8

[1] Including Marines

For financial years 1998–99 and 1999–2000, summary information on commitment levels can be found in the relevant Ministry of Defence Performance Report, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. Information for years predating the 1998 Strategic Defence Review is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. We remain determined to balance operational commitments and we will commit personnel to operations for no longer than is necessary to achieve the military aim. Recent operations in Macedonia demonstrated this well. To mitigate the demands placed upon those service personnel who are deployed on operations overseas, we have introduced a new and comprehensive package of welfare support.

Home Defence

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what review he has made of the need for home defence since the events of 11 September. [20889]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary for Defence informed the House on 4 October that the Ministry of Defence would be conducting work designed to ensure that we have the right concepts, forces and capabilities to deal with the kind of asymmetric threat that we saw on 11 September.

This work is on-going and is addressing, among a wide range of issues, the balance between the contributions that the armed forces make to home defence and countering threats abroad. A key part of this work is exploring the role that the armed forces, including the reserves, have in defending and protecting the homeland.

The lead for domestic security lies with the civil authorities, and with the police in particular. The armed forces already provide assistance to the civil authorities in a range of ways. In terms of classical territorial defence roles, the RAF is responsible for the defence of our airspace and the Royal Navy has a role in ensuring the integrity of our territorial waters.

We are looking at whether we need to enhance the assistance we provide or build on our territorial defence roles. We are also reviewing the arrangements and level of co-ordination between the civil authorities and the armed forces in order to maximise the utility, and suitability, of responses to any future requests for assistance.

Armed Forces (Deployability)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of each of the armed forces were deployable at the latest date for which figures are available. [18460]

Mr. Ingram: As at 1 November 2001, the Navy had a trained strength of 37,176, of which 33,352 personnel were fully deployable and 1,638 were deployable with some limitations. The Regular Army, excluding Gurkhas and the Royal Irish, amounted to 96,255 personnel of whom 86,296 were fully deployable and an additional 7,042 deployable with some limitations. The RAF had a trained strength of 49,116 of which 45,245 were deployable.

Osama bin Laden

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on what discussions his Department had prior to 11 September with Pakistan Government officials regarding Osama bin Laden. [19414]

Mr. Hoon: The Defence Adviser in Islamabad discussed the al-Qaeda organisation in his routine contacts with Pakistan Government officials prior to 11 September.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the increase in the departmental expenditure limit from 2001–02 to 2002–03 will be accounted for by wage costs. [20667]

Mr. Ingram: The level of wage costs in the Defence budget this year and in future years will be dependent upon the outcome of Pay Review Body reports and negotiations. The Department's performance report published in the autumn of next year will give full retrospective costs.

Vehicle Purchase

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what policy the Defence Procurement Agency adopts on supporting British manufacturing when purchasing vehicles. [20881]

Dr. Moonie: Competition is the cornerstone of the Ministry of Defence's procurement policy and this applies equally to the purchase of vehicles. Contracts are awarded on best overall value for money. Article 12 of the EC treaty requires that member states do not discriminate in favour of national suppliers. However, where there are exemptions under the regulations we make use of them.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the financial benefits of bulk purchasing vehicles of one particular model for the MOD police. [20882]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence police require a range of vehicle types to meet operational needs. When assessing which vehicle represents best value for money against a particular requirement, the bulk purchase discounts offered by manufacturers are taken into account.

Spanish Airspace

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost *(a)* per flight on average and *(b)* on an annual basis since 1977 of the fuel consumption caused by military aircraft having to avoid Spanish airspace. [20775]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not held and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Armed Forces Headquarters

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when an announcement will be made concerning the relocation of 51 Brigade headquarters. [20885]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence is examining the roles and responsibilities of the regional brigade structure of which 51 Brigade is part. No decisions have yet been made but I hope to be in a position to make an announcement shortly.

Contracts

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts in excess of £5 million have been signed, awarded or novated to *(a)* Matra BAE Dynamics and *(b)* consortia in which Matra BAE Dynamics is a member since January 1997; what the approximate value is of each contract; what the in-service dates were when contracts were announced; and what they are now anticipated to be. [21217]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

War Pensions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many armed forces personnel have been granted a war pension from the War Pensions Agency in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [21215]

Dr. Moonie: A claim for war disablement pension may only be made after discharge from the armed forces. During the year April 2000 to March 2001 6,384 awards of war pension were made to former members of the armed forces. For the period April 2001 to September 2001 3,221 awards were made.

Specialised Reservists

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the specialised reservists called out on 11 October were mobilised; and if he will make a statement. [20926]

Dr. Moonie: A Call-out Order was signed on 11 October under section 54 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 (RFA 96) to permit reservists to be called out for permanent service on operations arising from the terrorist attacks in the United States of America. Since then 51 reservists from all three services have been called out on various dates, of whom 46 have come into service. Of that 46, three have completed their tasking and been transferred to another operation. In addition, five Sponsored Reserves from the Royal Air Force's Mobile Meteorological Unit have been called out under separate powers contained in section 43 (1) of RFA 96. We expect to call out more reservists as the operation progresses.

Recruitment

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on recruitment and retention in the *(a)* (i) Coldstream Guards and (ii) Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters' Regiment and *(b)* (1) Royal Scots and (2) Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment. [20927]

Mr. Ingram: Recruitment to Infantry regiments is at about the same level this year as last. To the end of October 2001, the Army has recruited to just about 50 per cent. of target for all Infantry Divisions. Although retention data are not centrally collected at regimental level, indications are that recruitment to the specific regiments mentioned is satisfactory and on a par with last year.

Retention in the Army overall is currently holding steady. We expect (and need) an acceptable level of outflow in order to achieve the required manning profile. The premature voluntary exit of other ranks has fallen to 6.1 per cent. over the last 12 months. The rate for officer outflow has remained steady at 4.4 per cent. This maintains the historically very good performance and is well below the peak experienced at the beginning of the 1990s.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what warnings about depleted uranium hazards have been given to *(a)* UK and other allied forces troops, *(b)* UK and international aid and media organisations and *(c)* civilian communities and military organisations likely to be exposed to depleted uranium contamination in Afghanistan. [20341]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* We are not aware that DU has been used in the current conflict by the Coalition, nor are we aware of any plans for it to be used. We have no information about the use of DU in previous conflicts in Afghanistan.

In the event that it is used in future, suitable guidance will be available to UK deployed forces. It will be for other nations to take similar actions with their own forces as they see necessary. The Coalition will also liaise with the Afghan authorities and human relief agencies in the event that there is a need to issue guidance to the Afghan population.

Whale Island, Portsmouth

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future occupancy of Whale Island, Portsmouth, with special reference to the *(a)* Royal Marines and *(b)* Royal Marine Band. [21413]

Mr. Ingram: The functions of the Headquarters Royal Marines, currently based on Whale Island, will be subsumed by the new, fully integrated Fleet Headquarters which will be formed in the Portsmouth area in April 2002. The headquarters is planned to occupy purpose-built accommodation on Whale Island from the end of 2003.

The band of Her Majesty's Royal Marines will remain located in Her Majesty's Naval Base Portsmouth.

In addition, Whale Island will continue to be used as a site for Naval training.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken to ensure sufficient soldiers, sailors and airmen are available to celebrate the Golden Jubilee in London. [21516]

Mr. Ingram: I can confirm that sufficient personnel will be available to meet the requirement.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Commonwealth troops are expected to participate in the London celebrations of Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and how many participated in 1977. [21522]

Mr. Ingram: None. Similarly, no Commonwealth troops took part in the London celebrations for the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* military bands and *(b)* armed service personnel will participate in the London celebrations of Her Majesty's the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2001. [21524]

Mr. Ingram: Detailed planning for the London celebrations of the Queen's Golden Jubilee that will take place between 1 June and 4 June 2001, with particular reference to the armed forces, is still on-going, though the armed forces will play a significant role in the proceedings.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Commonwealth countries have been invited to send troops to participate in the London celebrations of Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee. [21523]

Mr. Ingram: None.

Parliamentary Questions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by his Department were the subject of a holding answer in the last three sessions of Parliament. [22012]

Dr. Moonie: The percentage of parliamentary questions replied to that received a holding answer in the last three sessions is as follows:

Session dates	*Percentage of holding replies*
24 November 1998—11 November 1999	21
17 November 1999—30 November 2000	21
6 December 2000—14 May 2001	21

The percentages include replies that gave an undertaking to answer shortly or to write. It should be noted that some questions might have been answered in part and also gave an undertaking to write.

Nuclear Transport

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given to the suspension of nuclear transport since the terrorist attacks on the USA on 11 September. [22150]

Mr. Ingram: The security arrangements for the transportation of Ministry of Defence nuclear materials, which take particular account of the threat of an attack by armed terrorists, have been kept under constant review since their inception. These security arrangements include a review of the threat prior to the movement of these materials and a mechanism to provide for a speedy decision to suspend the operation if it is deemed necessary to do so. Suspension has not been considered necessary since 11 September, although due account has been taken of the changed threat environment.

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Her Majesty's Government have evidence that Iraq is in breach of United Nations resolutions on the *(a)* procurement, *(b)* possession and *(c)* manufacture of weapons of mass destruction. [19885]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

In their final report following withdrawal from Iraq in December 1998, UNSCOM noted that Iraq still retained a significant WMD capability. There have been no independent inspections since then. We assess that Iraq still has that capability. There is considerable circumstantial evidence that Iraq is engaged in a programme of rebuilding manufacturing facilities disabled by UNSCOM and those destroyed during Operation Desert Fox in December 1998.

In line with exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, I cannot provide any fuller details of our knowledge of Iraq's current activities.

Base Security

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he perceives a heightened risk of terrorist attack on private houses located adjacent to high security military bases; and what consideration he has made of whether proximity to high security military bases should be a consideration during the planning process. [19575]

Mr. Blunkett: I have been asked to reply.

Threat and risk assessments are conducted on a regular basis and incorporate intelligence assessments together with a range of other factors. Police contingency planning, which gives priority to prevention, takes account of all types of threat.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Staff Passes

Mr. Dismore: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what plans he has to review the number of passes available to hon. Members for their staff following the recent changes in staffing levels consequent on the SSRB report; and if he will make a statement. [21400]

Mr. Kirkwood: I understand that the principles underlying the issue of photo-identity passes to Members' staff were considered by the Administration Committee on 14 November 2001 in the context of the recommendation of the SSRB report that hon. Members should be enabled to employ up to the equivalent of three full-time staff. I also understand that the Committee agreed that the current regulation approved by the House in 1989 whereby no hon. Member is entitled to apply for a photo-identity pass for more than three individual members of their personal staff may be interpreted to take account of job-share and part-time staff. The Commission has no plans to carry out a further review of the number of passes available to hon. Members for their staff at present.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

David Winnick: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if further discussions are to take place with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards regarding her continuation in office; and if he will make a statement. [21444]

Mr. Kirkwood: The Commission's intentions are as set out in my reply to the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) on 18 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1285W. Since then, the present Commissioner has indicated that she does not wish to enter the selection process.

David Winnick: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what communication he has received from the Chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life regarding the post of Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. [21446]

Mr. Kirkwood: Sir Nigel Wicks wrote on 29 November to Mr. Speaker as Chairman of the House of Commons Commission. Sir Nigel has placed the letter on the Committee on Standards in Public Life website.

David Winnick: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, when it is proposed for the Commission to next discuss the post of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards; and if he will make a statement. [21445]

Mr. Kirkwood: The Commission will discuss this matter at its next meeting.

Advisory Committee on Works of Art

Mr. McNamara: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, who sits on the House of Commons Advisory Committee on Works of Art; when this Committee was established and who its Chairman is; if he will *(a)* publish the minutes of meetings of this body and *(b)* place them in the Library; how many times the Committee has met in the past two years; what plans he has to make the work of the Committee more public; what the criteria are for commissioning and purchasing artworks for the House; what the mechanisms are for consultation about purchasing policy; what steps (i) hon. Members and (ii) members of the public may take to nominate a particular work of art to be (A) purchased and (B) borrowed for display in the House; what is the value of works of art (1) on display and (2) in storage in the Parliamentary estate; and what is the value of purchases of artworks in each of the buildings that comprise the Parliamentary estate in each of the last three years. [20893]

Mr. Kirkwood: I am informed that the Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art was established in 1956, in response to a report on works of art in the House of Commons by a committee chaired by Viscount Hinchingbrooke. Mr. Speaker appointed the following hon. Members to the current Advisory Committee on 11 July 2001:

Mr. Tony Banks
Mr. John Burnett
Frank Cook
Mr. Mark Fisher
Mr. Robert Jackson
Mr. Hugo Swire
Mr. Michael Trend
Derek Wyatt.

The Committee elected Mr. Banks as Chairman at its meeting on 18 July 2001.

Under the Committee's terms of reference, which have been endorsed by the Commission, the Committee shall:

(a) advise Mr. Speaker on any matters relating to works of art in general which he might consider appropriate;

(b) each year, approve the conservation and curatorial programme for the historic collection of works of art, furniture and frescoes etc;

(c) consider the policy on the future of the collections and on the historic decorative interior and report from time to time to the Accommodation and Works Committee; and

(d) at the request of the Domestic Committees, advise on proposed changes to the historic decorative interior of the Palace and other matters connected with the parliamentary estate.

In addition, the expenditure of that part of the House of Commons: Administration Estimate for the acquisition of new works of art is delegated to the Committee.

I am informed that the Committee has met on 11 occasions since 1 December 1999. It is not the Committee's practice to publish minutes of its meetings or place them in the Library. The Chairman is a member of the Accommodation and Works Committee and reports regularly to that Committee on the work of the Advisory Committee. I will invite the House of Commons Commission to consider what information could usefully be published in its annual report. The Committee is keen to make the content of the Permanent Collection of Works of Art more widely known both inside and outside Parliament. Press releases are issued to publicise important new acquisitions or the acceptance into the Collection of significant commissions.

The Committee seeks to acquire for the Collection works of art which illustrate the history of Parliament, which are of outstanding artistic quality and which represent good value for money. The Committee seeks in particular to acquire representations of Prime Ministers and party leaders. Expert advice on the artistic and material quality of potential purchases is sought from the Honorary Advisers to the Committee, the Curator and his staff and, where appropriate, directors of relevant national institutions. The Chairman welcomes suggestions from hon. Members and from members of the public for purchases or loans. He wrote to all hon. Members in April this year inviting them to put forward suggestions for inclusion on a new acquisition list.

No assessment has been made of the total market value of works of art on display in the parliamentary estate, but works in store are worth approximately £50,000. For the estate over the last three years the value of purchases was:

Year	*£*
1998–99	62,653
1999–2000	69,904
2000–01	60,046

In addition, a special purchasing budget was approved for the House of Commons in respect of Portcullis House. Expenditure in the last three years was:

Year	*£*
1998–99	18,500
1999–2000	90,711
2000–01	99,823

WALES

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many, and what proportion of letters received by the Department from hon. and right hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July were replied to in *(a)* under 15, *(b)* under 20, *(c)* under 30, *(d)* under 40 and *(e)* over 40 working days. [22004]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information requested is set out in the table:

Days	*Correspondence answered*
Under 15	2
16–19	0
20–29	1
30–39	0
40 or more	0

Parliamentary Questions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by the Wales Office were the subject of a holding answer in the last three parliamentary sessions. [22017]

Mr. Paul Murphy: 1,345 questions were tabled for answer by my Department during the last three parliamentary sessions, of which 2.9 per cent. received a holding answer.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many and what proportion of letters received by his Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days; [18587]

(2) how many, and what proportion of letters received by the Department from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July were replied to in *(a)* under 15, *(b)* under 20, *(c)* under 30, *(d)* under 40 and *(e)* over 40 working days. [22003]

Dr. John Reid: The information is as follows:

(a) in under 15 working days—21 letters—55 per cent.

(b) in under 20 working days—six letters—16 per cent.

(c) in under 30 working days—five letters—13 per cent.

(d) in under 40 working days—three letters—8 per cent.

(e) in over 40 working days—three letters—8 per cent.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many letters his Department received from hon. and right hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July. [18567]

Dr. John Reid: I received 38 letters from Members of Parliament in this period.

Parliamentary Questions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by his Department were the subject of a holding answer in the last three sessions of Parliament. [22021]

Dr. John Reid: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Police

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members of the Police Reserve are stationed at each police station; and what percentage this represents of the total number of officers posted at these respective stations. [20373]

Jane Kennedy: Under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information it would be inappropriate to comment.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans there are to introduce the Airwave system of communication to the Police Service of Northern Ireland. [20368]

Jane Kennedy: There are no plans to introduce the Airwave system of communications to the Police Service of Northern Ireland. However, the Police Service of Northern Ireland is planning to procure its own digital trunked radio system in partnership with other emergency services in Northern Ireland.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many emblems were *(a)* produced and *(b)* published for consultation as the new badge for the Police Service of Northern Ireland. [20269]

Jane Kennedy: The Secretary of State commissioned a number of designers to come forward with a range of proposals. The process involved the development of a number of design concepts and themes. In all about seven different themes were explored.

Seven illustrative designs were published to assist consultation on the draft Emblems and Flags Regulations.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will place the minutes of the Northern Ireland Police Authority in the public domain; what measures he has taken to ensure meetings of the PSNI Policing Board are open to the public; and how reports of Policing Board meetings will be published. [17759]

Jane Kennedy: Minutes of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland's meetings with the Chief Constable have been published since 1997 under the Authority's Code of Openness.

Paragraph 19 of Schedule 1 to the Police (Northern Ireland) Act requires the Policing Board to hold at least 10 public meetings each year. The first public board meeting was held on 7 November at the board's headquarters in Belfast.

The board is currently establishing its committee structures and will formulate a policy on how reports of its meetings will be published.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the average cost is per applicant to the new police service of Northern Ireland recruitment competition. [14048]

Jane Kennedy: The recruitment agent is contracted to run two recruitment competitions, with the costs spread across both competitions. It is not therefore possible to quantify the cost per applicant in the first competition alone.

Stamp Duty

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what criteria were used to identify the wards in Northern Ireland in which stamp duty will no longer be paid on properties up to the value of £150,000. [20372]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

The qualifying areas were identified by reference to "Measures of Deprivation in Northern Ireland 2001".

Paramilitary Violence

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on present levels of *(a)* terrorist violence and *(b)* community unrest. [18881]

Jane Kennedy: We continue to monitor the activities of all paramilitary groups who are on ceasefire. The loyalist UDA/UFF, and the LVF, were specified on 23 October, and a threat remains from disaffected elements within loyalism who continue with their campaign to disrupt the peace process. The ceasefires of the main republican paramilitary groups are believed to be holding though there is a significant threat from dissident republicans. Community tensions remain high throughout Northern Ireland, but more particularly, within interface areas in north Belfast where there have been ongoing sectarian attacks carried out by rival factions on both sides of the community.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

UK Caribbean Overseas Territories (HIV/AIDS)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 776W, if she will outline the conclusions reached at the CARICOM meeting held in St. Lucia in November regarding future HIV/AIDS prevention and mitigation programmes in *(a)* the Turks and Caicos, *(b)* the UK Virgin Islands, *(c)* Montserrat, *(d)* Anguilla and *(e)* US Virgin Islands of the Caribbean. [21390]

Clare Short: The CARICOM meeting held in St. Lucia last month focused on the revision of the Caribbean Regional Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS to take account of the outcome of the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS and the Nassau Declaration of the CARICOM Heads of Government meeting in July this year. It also discussed the need to develop an appropriate structure to co-ordinate the implementation of the Regional Strategic Plan. DFID has offered support to the CARICOM Secretariat in both of these areas. The St. Lucia meeting did not specifically discuss country level programmes.

We are currently funding a £516,000 project with the Caribbean Regional Epidemiological Centre (CAREC) to strengthen HIV/AIDS/STD case management, support the development of behavioural, communications and information interventions for vulnerable groups, strengthen the management of national AIDS programmes and improve epidemiological surveillance in the UK Caribbean Overseas Territories. Montserrat, Anguilla, the British Virgin Island and the Turks and Caicos Islands are the primary beneficiaries of this project. The CAREC programme forms a key component of the Caribbean Regional Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS and a £1.7 million extension of our support, taking it to 2005, is currently being developed in collaboration with CAREC.

Zimbabwe (Malnutrition)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate she has made of the number of deaths from malnutrition in Zimbabwe in 2001; and if she will make a statement. [21519]

Clare Short: According to a national survey carried out by the Ministry of Health in 2000, 29 per cent. of children aged six months to six years were chronically malnourished. However, the situation is deteriorating. A recent World Food Programme assessment concluded that due to the combined effects of the highest incidence rate of HIV/AIDS in the world (35 per cent. of the population are infected), the deteriorating economic situation and reduction in food production, approximately 35 per cent. of the population, or about 700,000 people, now have inadequate income to procure sufficient food to meet basic needs. The UK Government have committed £4 million to supplementary feeding programmes working through non-governmental channels.

Parliamentary Questions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by her Department were the subject of a holding answer in the last three Sessions of Parliament. [22024]

Clare Short: Over the last three Sessions of Parliament 20 per cent. of parliamentary questions put down to my Department have been the subject of a holding reply.

New Partnership for African Development

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the New Partnership for African Development with regard to Togo. [20640]

Clare Short: The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) is an Africa-wide initiative that does not focus on specific countries. NEPAD has set up teams to work on five areas, which are capacity building on peace and security, economic and corporate governance, infrastructure, central bank and financial standards, and agriculture and market access. Togo is not a member of the NEPAD Steering Committee or Implementation Committee. If Togo implements the principles set out by NEPAD, it should also benefit from the faster progress in development and poverty reduction that will ensue.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the progress of the New Partnership for African Development in Nigeria. [20638]

Clare Short: The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), is an Africa-wide initiative, that does not focus on specific countries. Nigeria is one of the five members of the NEPAD Steering Committee, and therefore takes a leading role in NEPAD activities. NEPAD has set up teams to work on five areas, which are capacity building on peace and security, economic and corporate governance, infrastructure, central bank and financial standards, and agriculture and market access. Work on these areas should bring benefits to Nigeria, as it will to other countries in Africa.

Departmental Sickness

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many days were lost due to sickness absence in the Department in each of the last four years. [21332]

Clare Short: Days lost owing to sickness absence in the Department in each of the last four years were as follows:

Year	*Number*
1997	9,276
1998	8,691
1999	9,276
2000	8,399

China

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what terms and conditions her Department attaches to agreements with non-governmental organisations working in China in relation to *(a)* human rights and *(b)* family planning policy. [20972]

Clare Short: My Department is committed to a rights-based approach to development, based on three principles of participation, inclusion and obligation. We actively seek to promote this approach in all the work which we do anywhere in the world, including in China, and with all partners, including non-governmental organisations.

UK assistance for reproductive health programmes anywhere in the world is provided in line with the principles of free and informed choice set out at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994. We provide a core contribution to the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) in order to support its work in some 140 countries, including China. It is a prerequisite for membership of the IPPF that affiliate family planning associations agree to provide information and services in line with ICPD principles.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many people are employed by the Department under the New Deal for Young People; and at what cost to public funds. [21317]

Clare Short: One member of staff is employed by DFID under the New Deal for Young People. The costs to public funds in the current financial year is estimated to be £10,626.

Africa Private Infrastructure Finance Facility

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the work done by the Africa Private Infrastructure Finance Facility. [20657]

Clare Short: The Africa Private Infrastructure Finance Facility (APIFF) is due to be established by the end of December 2001. It is, therefore, not yet operational. The overall aim of APIFF will be to improve private sector delivery of infrastructure services in Sub-Saharan Africa, leading to economic growth and increased access for the poor.

World Trade Organisation

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions her Department has had with the World Trade Organisation on increasing the representation of developing countries in the WTO. [20971]

Clare Short: We are in regular touch with the WTO on this issue, most recently on 7 December.

The UK is in favour of the expansion of AITIC, the Swiss NGO which has been supporting resource-constrained WTO members since 1998, into a broader-based organisation with a wider mandate than at present. We worked closely on this with other donors in the run-up to the WTO Ministerial meeting at Doha. At the Ministerial, an important commitment was made by a range of beneficiaries and donors to establish a task force on AITIC's future development. The first meeting took place on 7 December in Geneva. The WTO was represented. Some of the £1 million available from my Department to support countries which are under-represented in Geneva (which I announced on 7 November) might assist this work.

We also hope that AITIC might take forward some of the constructive recommendations made by John Weekes' "Study on the Assistance and Representation needs of the Developing Countries without WTO Permanent Representation in Geneva" (published in August 2001), which my Department part-funded through the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of the increase in the departmental expenditure limit from 2001–02 to 2002–03 will be accounted for by wage costs. [21241]

Clare Short: The level of wage costs within departmental budgets this year and in future years will be dependent upon negotiations. Departmental reports published next spring will give full retrospective costs.

Togo

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on reports of civil and political rights abuses in Togo. [20639]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

We deplore the present situation in Togo, where there have been grave human rights abuses.

The European Community suspended aid to Togo in 1993. We are working closely with EU partners to maintain pressure on the Togolese Government to observe the principles of democracy and human rights. In October the EU issued a public statement raising its concerns about the deteriorating political atmosphere, stressing the need for the parliamentary elections scheduled for early 2002 to be held in a free and transparent manner, and calling for the unconditional release of an opposition party leader still held in detention.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

September 11

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many families she has met of the victims of the 11 September events. [17201]

Tessa Jowell: I have been co-ordinating work to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place in the UK and US to support the families of UK victims and of those victims with close links to the UK. The present estimate is that 78 such families lost a relative. I have met many of them—here and in New York.

Departmental Sickness

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many days were lost owing to sickness absence in her Department in each of the last four years. [21347]

Dr. Howells: The information is set out in the following table. The figures for the current year cover the period up to 30 November.

Year	*Number of days absence*
1998	3,127
1999	3,191
2000	3,599
2001	2,991

Commonwealth Games Rugby Sevens

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has made to seek to ensure that the 2002 Commonwealth Games Rugby Sevens are open to teams from both codes of rugby; and if she will make a statement. [20977]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* Decisions on the sports at the Games are taken by the Commonwealth Games Federation who agreed with the Commonwealth Games Council for England and the host organisers to include Rugby Sevens in Manchester next year.

Rugby Sevens is governed in England by the Rugby Football Union. They set eligibility criteria in association with the international rugby union governing body. These restrict them to selecting the England team from members of affiliated clubs.

Civil Servants

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many civil servants have left her Department as a result of *(a)* voluntary, *(b)* statutory retirement, *(c)* dismissal and *(d)* employment outside the Civil Service in each of the last five years. [21388]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The information is set out in the table. The figures for the current year cover the period up to 30 November.

Year	*Voluntary*	*Statutory retirement*	*Dismissal*	*Employment outside civil service*
1997	32	2	—	15
1998	36	5	—	18
1999	34	4	1	16
2000	46	3	1	19
2001	41	2	—	16

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many civil servants have *(a)* transferred at their own request and *(b)* otherwise been transferred (i) from another Department to her Department, and (ii) from her Department to another Department, in each of the last five years. [21387]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The information is set out in the following table. The figures for the current year cover the period up to 30 November.

	Own request		*Been transferred*	
Year	*to DCMS*	*from DCMS*	*to DCMS*	*from DCMS*
1997	6	3	—	22
1998	3	8	—	—
1999	4	6	—	—
2000	4	8	—	—
2001	9	17	46	—

Ministerial Duties

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which film showings *(a)* she and *(b)* other Ministers in her Department have attended in an official capacity since 8 June; and what was the (i) purpose and (ii) date of each attendance. [21378]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* My hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting and I attended a showing of "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone" on 13 November 2001. In addition, my hon. Friend also attended a showing of Gas Attack on 3 October 2001 and the opening night gala screening of Gosford Park at the London Film Festival on 7 November 2001 and we have both attended the cinema in a private capacity.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which countries *(a)* she and *(b)* other Ministers in her Department have visited in an official capacity since 8 June; and what was the (i) purpose and (ii) date of the visits. [21380]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The information the hon. Gentleman requested is shown in the following table.

Date	*Minister*	*Country*	*Purpose*
21 June 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Luxembourg	EU Council of Ministers meeting on Culture and Audiovisual matters
1–2 July 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Belgium	EU Presidency Tourism Summit
2–8 August 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Canada	World Athletics Championships
1–2 September 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Germany	Germany *v.* England World Cup qualifier
9–10 September 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Germany	Opening of Berlin's Jewish Museum and meeting with Julian Nida-Rumelin
26–27 September 2001	Secretary of State	USA	Supporting British families of victims of September 11
14–17 October 2001	Secretary of State	USA	UKwithNY and supporting British families of victims of September 11
27–28 October 2001	Secretary of State	USA	Remembrance Service for victims of September 11
30–31 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	France	UNESCO World Heritage Committee elections

Date	*Minister*	*Country*	*Purpose*
5 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Belgium	EU Council of Ministers meeting on Culture and Audiovisual matters
12 November 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Belgium	EU Ministerial Conference on Sport
23 November–1 December 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Canada/USA	Promotion of UK Tourism and Creative Industries
3 December 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Ireland	Meeting with the Irish Prime Minister, to discuss the 2002 Irish Special Olympics

Staff Training

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on opportunities for staff training in her Department. [21389]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* My Department has Investors in People accreditation and is committed to providing opportunities for staff development. Through the annual appraisal system staff identify their own training and development needs. Both formal and informal opportunities are provided for staff. Formal opportunities include bought-in training from bodies like the Government's Centre for Management and Policy Studies, and courses delivered by DCMS's in-house trainers. Informal opportunities include shadowing, secondments and coaching.

Press Notices

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what determines *(a)* whether a press notice issued by her Department is placed on the Department's website and *(b)* how long a press notice issued by her Department remains on the Department's website. [21374]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* Press notices publicising policy announcements and statements appear on the department's website www.culture.gov.uk. Operational notices, inviting the media to launches or events, are sent directly to the media and are not posted on the website. Press notices dating back to 1999 are archived on the website. Earlier releases are available from my department's Press Office.

Yorkshire Cultural Consortium

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what has been the cost of establishing the Yorkshire Cultural Consortium. [21438]

Dr. Howells: At 6 December 2001, the Yorkshire Cultural Consortium had spent £39,000 from the budget allocated to it by my Department. It has also been helped by a grant of £30,000 from Yorkshire Forward. Much of the money spent so far has gone towards the research and publication of the Consortium's strategy 'Deep Roots, Real Achievements, Lofty Ambitions' which was published on 13 November.

Note:

Figures have been rounded to the nearest £1,000.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people are employed by the Department under the New Deal for Young People; and at what cost to public funds. [21310]

Dr. Howells: There are currently no staff employed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport under the New Deal for Young People.

Announcements

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what announcements her Department is planning to make between 19 December and 8 January. [21375]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* Final decisions on any announcements for this period will be taken nearer the time.

Commonwealth Games

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the process which resulted in Manchester City Football Club being chosen as the final occupier of the Commonwealth Games Stadium in Manchester. [21355]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* In order to secure the long term viability of the City of Manchester Stadium, a tenant was required to assume the operational risk and maintenance obligations, so that these would not fall on the public sector. Manchester City Football Club was identified as the only realistic long term tenant able to undertake that role. Manchester City Council and Sport England negotiated terms with Manchester City Football Club for the Club to operate the stadium after the Games. Those arrangements have been evaluated independently, on behalf of Sport England, who are satisfied that they comply with lottery funding rules.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost of converting the Commonwealth Games Stadium in Manchester into a football stadium will be. [21351]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The cost of removing the athletics track, creating a football pitch and replacing the temporary north stand with a permanent facility is estimated to cost around £12 million.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the design of the Commonwealth Games Stadium in Manchester. [21350]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The City of Manchester stadium is being built in two phases.

The first build phase, in preparation for the Commonwealth Games, is designed for athletics. Following the Commonwealth Games in 2002, in the second phase of building, the stadium is to be further developed into a football stadium. In both phases the stadium will provide high quality facilities for athletes and spectators.

With the construction of the stadium in two phases the venue is made suitable first for the Commonwealth Games and then as a lasting legacy to Manchester as a football stadium. The stadium and other venues within the overall Sport City complex will provide facilities to support both elite athletes and facilities for community use, a key element in the regeneration of east Manchester.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the cost of *(a)* the Commonwealth Games Stadium, *(b)* the Manchester Commonwealth 50 Pool, *(c)* each other sporting facility and *(d)* each non-sporting facility to be used in the 2002 Commonwealth Games; and which bodies own each facility. [21353]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The information requested is as follows:

Construction costs of sporting venues[1]

£ million

Venues	*Construction costs*	*Owned by*
Stadium[2]	110	Manchester City Council
Manchester Aquatics Centre[3]	32.7	Manchester 50 Pool Ltd.
Heaton Park Bowls	1.06	Manchester City Council
Belle Vue Hockey Pitches[2]	3.2	Manchester City Council
English Institute of Sport[2]	16.2	Manchester City Council
International Convention Centre[4]	23.6	G.Mex
National Cycling Centre (complete 1993)[4]	10	Velodrome Trust

[1] Projections for those not yet complete

[2] Projected costs

[3] Developed as a partnership between Council and three Manchester universities who made capital and revenue contributions to cost of project.

[4] Will be used, but not specifically built, for the Games.

All the other venues to be used are listed and will be the subject of hire agreements between Manchester 2002 Ltd., the Commonwealth Games organisers, and the venue owner. Costs associated with the temporary works for the venues necessary for the Games are contained in the Games organisers' budget.

Venues	*Owned by*
Other sporting venues to be used	G-Mex Ltd.
G-Mex	SMG Ltd.
MEN Arena	Manchester University
Athletes Village	National Rifle Association, Bisley
National Shooting Centre, Bisley	UPP (Manchester Student Village) Ltd.
Technical Officials Village	Manchester City Council
Wythenshawe Forum	UMIST
Manchester School of Management	Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council
Bolton Arena	Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council
Rivington and Blackrod High School	Manchester City Council
Manchester Town Hall	Lowry Trust
Lowry Centre	Peel Holdings
Dock 9 Salford Quays	
Training Venues	
Sugden Centre	UMIST
Grand Central Pool	Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
Ducie Sports Academy	Manchester City Council
Manchester Grammar School	Manchester Grammar School
Salford Wrestling Academy	The British Wrestling Association Ltd.
Boggart Hole Clough	Manchester City Council
GMP Hough End	Greater Manchester Police
Northern Lawn Tennis Club	Northern Lawn Tennis Club
Wythenshawe Park	Manchester City Council
Manchester Leisure Sports Development Centre	Manchester City Council
Aquinas College	Diocese of Shrewsbury
Manchester Rugby Club	Manchester Rugby Club
Sale Sharks Rugby Club	Sale Sharks Rugby Club
Aldwinians Rugby Club	Aldwinians Rugby Club
Old Bedians Rugby Club	Old Bedians Rugby Club
Burnage Rugby Club	Burnage Rugby Club
Bowdon Hockey Club	Bowdon Hockey Club
Non-Competition Venues	
Openshaw Business Centre	Manchester City Council
Midland Hotel	Holiday Inn
Commonwealth House	Bruntwood Properties
Heron House	Manchester City Council
Commonwealth Games Village	Manchester University
Technical Officials Village	Jarvis
Bisley Village	University of Surrey
Mancat College	Mancat
Manchester High School for Girls	Manchester High School for Girls
Hollings College	Manchester Metropolitan University

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the 2002 Commonwealth Games and on the cost of its organisation. [21352]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The Commonwealth Games will be held in Manchester from 25 July to 4 August 2002. The Games are organised by Manchester 2002 Limited, an operating subsidiary of Manchester Commonwealth Games Limited, a company limited by guarantee, which is wholly owned by Manchester City Council. Manchester City Council are underwriting the cost of the Commonwealth Games.

The current budget of the Games organisers is £125 million. This is being funded by a combination of commercial revenue from TV rights, sponsorship, ticketing and licensing income and by public sector support from Manchester City Council, the Sports Lottery Fund and the Government.

Manchester City Council is also meeting approximately £10 million of additional human resource costs and expenses of preparing the City.

The Government, Sport England and Manchester City Council have agreed to provide contingency funding of up to £25 million which would be available if necessary to meet unforeseen Games' costs.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the timing of the process of transferring the Commonwealth Games Stadium in Manchester from its current owners to Manchester City Football Club. [21354]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* It is anticipated that the transfer to Manchester City Football Club will be undertaken in time for the 2003–04 football season.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Railway Inspectorate

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received regarding changes in the *(a)* role, *(b)* organisation and *(c)* structure of the Railway Inspectorate. [21057]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State has not directly received any representations for specific changes in the role, organisation or structure of HM Railway Inspectorate (HMRI). These would be matters for the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) and Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to consider in the context of the wider deployment of HSE resources. Lord Cullen's Inquiry report made recommendations to the HSC which affect HMRI.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes in the *(a)* role and *(b)* terms of reference of the Railway Inspectorate within his Department have taken place since 1997; what changes are planned; and what consultations on such changes have (i) taken place since June and (ii) are planned. [21024]

Mr. Jamieson: The role and remit of the Railway Inspectorate (HMRI) within the Health and Safety Executive has not changed. HMRI continues to fulfil its role in ensuring the proper control by duty holders of risks to the health and safety of employees, passengers and others who might be affected by the operation of Britain's railways. Lord Cullen's Inquiry report made recommendations to the Health and Safety Commission which affect HMRI.

Regulatory Impact Assessment Costs

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the gross cost was of the regulatory impact assessment for *(a)* the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2001, *(b)* the Transportable Pressure Vessels Regulation 2001 and *(c)* the Motor Vehicles (Third Party Risks) (Amendment) Regulations 2001. [17691]

Mr. Jamieson: These costs are shown in the published regulatory impact assessments which are in the House Libraries.

Rail Investment

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his Department's budget was for *(a)* payments to Railtrack and *(b)* investment in the rail infrastructure in 2001–02; and what the projected outturn is. [18935]

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money *(a)* public and *(b)* private investment has provided for the railways in each year since privatisation of the railways. [21712]

Mr. Jamieson: Information on investment in railways is contained in the latest (September 2001) edition of the Strategic Rail Authority bulletin "National Rail Trends". All investment in the four years 1997–98 to 2000–01 was undertaken by the private sector.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how much was Railtrack's most recent estimate of the network's infrastructure investment needs in Control Period 2 of 2001 to 2006; [18956]

(2) what is the Government's most recent estimate of the network's infrastructure investment needs in Control Period 2 of 2001 to 2006; [18958]

(3) how much money had been allocated to Railtrack for renewals, maintenance and operating expenses for Control Period 2 of 2001 to 2006 prior to administration. [18946]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department's 2001–02 budget for payments to Railtrack by the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is £497 million, comprising £335 million for network grant payable under the 2 April agreement between the Government and Railtrack and £162 million for network grant in respect of the (October 2000) final conclusions of the Rail Regulator's periodic review of access charges. Projected outturn is £498.6 million, the £1.6 million variation from budget reflecting an allowance for inflation under the 2 April agreement.

While my Department has no 2001–02 budget for direct investment in rail infrastructure, its budget for SRA payments of network grant to Railtrack and of Support for Passenger Services (SPRS) to train operating companies (TOCs) takes account of the Regulator's review. That review set the level of passenger access charges to be paid to Railtrack by TOCs, most of which receive SPRS. Much of Railtrack's infrastructure investment is remunerated through access charges, which provided some 85 per cent. of Railtrack's income last year.

It is difficult in practice to distinguish between investment in renewals and maintenance and investment in enhancement. The Regulator's review set passenger access charges at a level designed to enable Railtrack to increase both types of investment expenditure. The Ten Year Plan for Transport, published in July 2000, provided for extra expenditure on both types of investment. The SRA's Strategic Plan, to be published shortly, will set out the SRA's plans for delivering the Ten Year Plan targets within the levels of funding provided for in the Ten Year Plan.

Information about the network grant allocated to Railtrack for the management and provision of assets in Control Period 2 (CP2, 2001–06) is contained in the answer I have given today (PQ 18947).

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on how the *(a)* Government and *(b)* Railtrack administrator will replace the £445 million due to be raised by Railtrack as part of the Renewco arrangement. [18951]

Mr. Jamieson: The cash requirements of Railtrack in administration are being financed by a loan from Government.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what payments were made from *(a)* the Treasury, *(b)* his Department, *(c)* the SRA and *(d)* the Rail Regulator to Railtrack between 1996 and 5 October 2001; and if he will list the dates on which these payments were made and what they were for. [18948]

Mr. Jamieson: Between 1996 and 5 October 2001, no payments were made to Railtrack by the Treasury or the Rail Regulator. For payments made by my Department, and for payments of network grant made by the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA), I refer to my reply to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 26 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 424–25W. Between 1 April and 5 October 2001, the SRA paid some £24 million to Railtrack for feasibility work.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date Railtrack formally requested additional investment funding from the Government above the amounts in the Regulator's most recent review. [18955]

Mr. Jamieson: In the course of discussions over the summer, Railtrack's advisers first identified three options for the company—restructuring, renationalisation and, as they described it, receivership. It was agreed that Railtrack would develop proposals for the additional finance the company required and possible restructuring. Under these proposals, Railtrack requested additional uncapped subsidy from the Government, and a suspension of the regulatory regime administered by the Rail Regulator.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what payments were scheduled to be made to Railtrack from 5 October until 5 April 2006, from *(a)* the Treasury, *(b)* his Department, *(c)* the SRA and *(d)* the Rail Regulator; and if he will list the dates on which these payments were due to be made and what they were for. [18947]

Mr. Jamieson: Between 5 October 2001 and 5 April 2006, no payments are scheduled to be made to Railtrack by the Treasury or the Rail Regulator. Apart from repayable cash advances made since 7 October 2001 to Railtrack in administration under the Loan Agreement, no payments are scheduled to be made by my Department. For payments of network grant to be made by the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) in respect of the (October 2000) final conclusions of the Rail Regulator's periodic review of access charges, I refer to Appendix D of those conclusions.

Under the 2 April 2001 agreement between the Government and Railtrack, the SRA is scheduled to make the following payments of network grant to the company on the following dates:

£ million[1,2]

Due payment date	*Amount*
1 April 2002	217.5
1 October 2002	217.5
1 April 2003	142.5
1 October 2003	142.5
1 April 2004	117.5
1 October 2004	117.5
1 April 2005	77.5
1 October 2005	77.5

[1] In 2000–01 prices.

[2] Payments from 1 April 2003 onwards are to be increased by an adjustment for freight access income. The size of the adjustment to each payment will be one-sixth of the difference between the total amount of freight income allowed for in the second regulatory control period in the Regulator's final conclusion on passenger charges and that to emerge from the Regulator's freight charging review.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date his Department last discussed Railtrack administration with (a) the Treasury and (b) the No. 10 Policy Unit. [18936]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department has regular contacts with the Treasury and the No. 10 Policy Directorate on a range of issues.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what cash (a) guarantees and (b) sums have been made available to the administrator of Railtrack plc. [19424]

Mr. Spellar: On the question of cash made available to the administrator, I refer the right hon. Member to my reply to him of 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 388W. The administrator is obliged to use reasonable endeavours to procure commercial bank facilities to refinance all outstanding advances under the Loan Agreement. The commercial bank facilities will be guaranteed by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which senior executive positions in Railtrack are (a) vacant and (b) undergoing change of personnel. [19960]

Mr. Spellar: Railtrack plc is a private company in railway administration. This is a matter for the Administrator.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what liabilities Railtrack plc has incurred for poor performance since 5 October. [19958]

Mr. Spellar: This is a commercial matter between Railtrack and train operating companies.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average earnings were of Railtrack directors in (a) salary, (b) bonuses and (c) additional payments in each year between 1996–97 and 2000–01. [19495]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 3 December 2001]*: The table provide information on the average remuneration of Railtrack directors based on information available in Railtrack's annual reports and accounts, 1996–97 to 2000–01. The averages are calculated and presented separately for executive and non-executive directors.

(i) Average payments to the chairman and executive directors (termed executive directors for ease of reference) are provided in table 1.

Table 1: Payments to executive directors

£000

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Average[1]					
Salaries	1,375	158	180	204	224
Other emoluments including benefits in kind	16	11	10	11	26
Other performance related bonus payments	48	49	28	23	15
Pension scheme contributions	19	34	12	11	9

[1] This average divides payments to executive directors by the number of executive directors serving that year. The number of executive directors used to calculate the average has been pro-rated to take account of directors who did not serve a full year

(ii) In addition to the payments detailed, the compensation paid in each financial year to executive directors who resigned prior to or during the financial year is provided in table 2. Because it is only directors who lose office who receive payments, the table presents total payments and the number of individuals receiving compensation rather than providing an average based on the total number of directors in service in the year.

Table 2: Compensation in respect of loss of office

	Compensation in respect of loss of office (£000)	*Number of directors compensated*
1996–97	292	1
1997–98	335	3
1998–99	309	2
1999–2000	153	1
2000–01	594	2

(iii) Average fees paid to non-executive directors are provided in table 3:

Table 3: Fees paid to non-executive directors

	Average (£000)[1]
	Fee[2]
1996–97	15
1997–98	19
1998–99	21
1999–2000	31
2000–01	32

[1] This average divides payments to non-executive directors by the number of non-executive directors serving that year. The number of non-executive directors used to calculate the average has been pro-rated to take account of directors who did not serve a full year.

[2] More detailed figures are not provided in Railtrack's annual reports and accounts.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether Mr. John Robinson asked him for a letter of comfort for Railtrack at the meeting on 25 July. [20420]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the supplementary note of the meeting of 25 July, which was provided to the Transport Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on Transport. Local Government and Regional Affairs and which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it is his policy that the company limited by guarantee he is proposing for Railtrack will seek to include property management as part of its core business. [21046]

Mr. Jamieson: A team is being assembled to take forward to develop the CLG bid. It will put forward proposals to the Administrator in due course.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the expenditure (a) planned and (b) allocated by Railtrack plc on (i) office costs, (ii) expense accounts, (iii) entertainment budgets, (iv) workforce training, (v) staff promotion costs, (vi) information technology costs and (vii) other administration costs, for each month from January 2000 to November 2001. [21035]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department does not hold this information. These are matters for Railtrack.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what amounts have been repaid to date under section 7.2 of the commercial loan agreement with the Railtrack administrator. [21490]

Mr. Jamieson: A total of £20,107,776 has been repaid.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guarantees he has made to the Railtrack administrator under section 9.1 of the commercial loan agreement. [21482]

Mr. Jamieson: No guarantees have been given to date.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made by the Railtrack administrator in refinancing the facilities set out in the commercial loan agreement, as outlined in section 7.1.3. [21489]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for the administrator.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Railtrack administrator has sought consents under section 8.1.2 of the commercial loan agreement. [21488]

Mr. Jamieson: Yes.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much of the trust facility outlined in section 2.1 of the commercial loan facility with the Railtrack administrator has been drawn down. [21494]

Mr. Jamieson: A total of £1,208,287,305.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much of the working capital facility referred to in section 2.2 of the commercial loan ageement with the Railtrack administrator has been drawn down. [21493]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Government have fulfilled its obligations under section 5.6 of the commercial loan agreement with the Railtrack administrator. [21492]

Mr. Jamieson: Yes.

Railways

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions his Department has had with (a) the Strategic Rail Authority and (b) Railtrack regarding the Virgin cross country upgrade, as outlined in the 2001 Network Management Statement Part 1, Chapter 9, page 13. [20091]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the importance of the railways to an integrated transport strategy, with particular reference to integration at a regional level. [21745]

Mr. Jamieson: Improving the quality of our rail system and increasing its use, by both passengers and freight, is an integral part of our 10 Year Plan for Transport. The Plan aims to deliver improvements across all modes of transport, at national, regional and local levels.

Achieving our target of increasing rail passenger patronage by 50 per cent. by 2010, and rail freight by up to 80 per cent., would help to relieve the growing pressure on our roads, and contribute to the reductions in congestion and pollution that the Plan envisages.

At the regional level, the Government's guidance on Regional Transport Strategies emphasises the importance of integration in supporting more sustainable travel choices. The programme of multi-modal studies currently under way, covering most of our main transport corridors and bottlenecks, is also taking an integrated approach and examining a full range of possible solutions in each case. The programme for replacement and extension of existing rail franchises invites bidders to offer proposals for local and regional integration, and the draft Directions and Guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority reinforce this aim. The Rail Passenger Partnership scheme also exists to provide financial support for local and regional initiatives to improve integration of rail with other modes.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the importance of diversionary routes for the rail network. [21736]

Mr. Jamieson: Diversionary routes are clearly important in providing alternatives where disruption occurs. Franchise agreements require train operating companies to use all reasonable endeavours to provide alternative transport where services cannot run as advertised, for which diversionary routes are one possible solution.

Back Lanes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason unnamed back lanes are excluded from highways data for the purposes of calculating standard spending assessments; and when this exclusion was introduced. [20103]

Dr. Whitehead: Back lanes, unnamed or otherwise, should have always been excluded from the data used in SSAs. The same is true of other public ways such as Byways Open to All Traffic, bridleways, footpaths, green lanes and unsurfaced roads. This is on the basis that this group of rights of way take very little or no traffic relative to major and minor roads.

Some authorities have, in the past, erroneously, included some of these rights of way in their highway returns to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

London Underground

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what performance indicators on the London Underground are routinely monitored by his Department. [20114]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department routinely monitors progress towards achievement of the Government's performance and investment targets for 2001–02 that I announced to the House on 19 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 367W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many signal failures there have been on the District line since 1 January between Earls Court and Wimbledon. [20117]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for London Underground who inform me that there were 117 signal failures causing delays to services on the District line between Earl's C[illegible] and Wimbledon between the 1 January and the 10 November this year.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether London Underground holds an up-to-date register of its assets. [20122]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that London Underground holds a register of its assets, in which assets are categorised according to their condition. Under the tube modernisation plans the infrastructure companies will be required to bring all assets up to a satisfactory condition.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many mechanical failures there have been on District line trains since 1 January. [20125]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for London Underground who inform me that between 1 January and 10 November there were 31 train delays of over 15 minutes and 103 peak time cancellations of District line trains because of train defects.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much investment has been made in the London Underground, excluding Jubilee Line construction, in each year since 1995. [20116]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the then Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Keith Hill) to the hon.

Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on 8 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 23W. The actual level of investment in 2000–01 was set out in London Transport's annual report 2000–01, published in July of this year.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when a detailed survey was last carried out (1) of London Underground's tunnels; and if he will make a statement; [20770]

(2) into the condition of London Underground's signalling; and if he will make a statement. [20769]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for London Underground. In many areas London Underground infrastructure is old and of varied condition. Frequently, assets are in need of replacement or renewal. London Underground inform me that they carry out a regular and ongoing programme of inspections and surveys of tunnels, signals, and track. All tunnels are thoroughly inspected several times each week to identify any track defects.

Should any assets be found to be in a condition which has a possible safety implication, then remedial action is taken immediately or if that is not possible, mitigating measures are taken to ensure safe operation, for example, the imposition of a speed restriction. Where necessary, more extensive and/or frequent surveys are undertaken to ensure that no further deterioration takes place before a long-term solution can be implemented. Under London Underground's tube modernisation plans, bidders will have the resources to implement these long-term solutions more quickly than London Underground itself can at present.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what measures he proposes to tackle graffiti on the London Underground; and what account is taken of graffiti in the formulae relevant to the calculation of environmental ambience; [20963]

(2) what minimum measurements apply to (a) litter and (b) graffiti for qualification for inclusion in the periodic surveys of the ambience of London Underground stations and trains conducted by mystery shoppers. [20964]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 442–43W.

Railway Stations (Electronic Ticket Barriers)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent crowd safety assessments have taken place at the London railway stations that have had electronic ticket barriers installed (a) before and (b) since the barriers were installed; and if he will make a statement. [20624]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that prior to barriers being installed, a full risk assessment must be submitted to the HSE and the station operator who is installing the gates must carry out an operational safety assessment. Operation of the gates is assessed as part of the operational safety cases during field inspection. The gates must operate in such a way that they will be powered down, ie set to open, if unattended. There are now many gates in operation and I understand that there have been no significant safety concerns as a consequence of their use.

M58

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what has been the total public investment in the M58 motorway since 1985; and how much of that investment was subject to European Union subsidy. [20651]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Peter Duncan, dated 10 December 2001:

The Transport Minister, David Jamieson, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the total public investment in the M58 motorway since 1985.

I am afraid that our records are not kept in a form which allows us to provide this information.

The total spend includes monies for routine and winter maintenance which we pay to our agents in bulk: the sums are not disaggregated to individual roads. I can say however that between 1992 and 1995 we spend £10.5M on major maintenance schemes on this section of motorway.

This investment was funded by the Agency and its predecessor through the national roads vote. We can find no record of an EU grant having been received towards the cost of these works.

I am sorry that I cannot be more helpful but if you would like any further information about this matter, the Agency's Route Manager for the M58, Roy Wood, would be pleased to help you. His telephone number is 0161 930 5686.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many pensioner households (a) in the United Kingdom, (b) in London and (c) in Barnet are (i) in receipt of housing benefit and (ii) not now eligible for housing benefit, but will become eligible as a consequence of formula rents (x) in 2002–03 and (y) in 2011; and if he will make a statement. [20843]

Ms Keeble: The number of pensioners in May 2000 in Great Britain who were in receipt of housing benefit was 1,693,000 and in London was 215,000. Reliable information on the numbers of pensioners receiving housing benefit is not available at local authority level. The other information is not available.

Rents

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many tenants in (a) registered social landlords and (b) local authority property in (i) London and (ii) Barnet will see their rents lower in real terms after completion of restructuring in 2011; and if he will make a statement. [20848]

Ms Keeble: The information is not available in the form requested. In particular, the rate of increase of actual registered social landlord and local authority rents over the next 10 years will depend, among other things, on the outcome of future Spending Reviews (for local authority rents) and periodic reviews by the Housing Corporation (for registered social landlord rents). Moreover, individual landlords retain responsibility for rent-setting.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to adjust housing benefit thresholds and caps in the light of formula rent increases in (a) London and (b) Barnet; and if he will make a statement. [20841]

Ms Keeble: Rent restructuring will have no impact on more than 60 per cent. of council and registered social landlord tenants who received housing benefit as their housing benefit will be adjusted to reflect the changes in their rents. Furthermore, rent restructuring will have no direct impact on housing benefit rules for private sector tenants.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the effect of formula rents on housing benefit expenditure in (a) the UK, (b) London and (c) Barnet for (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2011; and if he will make a statement. [20840]

Ms Keeble: Our initial estimates suggest that the overall impact of the social rent reforms on public expenditure is broadly neutral, taking account of housing benefit expenditure, local authority rental income and the grant requirements for new developments.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to what extent formula rents after restructuring will be (a) inclusive and (b) exclusive of management and maintenance charges; and if he will make a statement. [20844]

Ms Keeble: The "Guide to Social Rent Reforms" published by my Department at the same time as the December 2000 housing policy statement "Quality and Choice: A decent home for all—the way forward for housing" stated that formula rents under restructuring do not include service charges for items such as management and maintenance.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many (a) registered social landlords and (b) local authority tenants (i) in the United Kingdom, (ii) in London and (iii) in Barnet (1) (x) are and (y) are not in receipt of housing benefit, (2) will become eligible for housing benefit as a consequence of the introduction of formula rents in 2002–03 and (3) will become eligible for housing benefit as a consequence of the introduction of formula rent by 2011; and if he will make a statement. [20842]

Ms Keeble: The number of tenants in receipt of housing benefit in May 2001 in the registered social landlord (RSL) sector in Great Britain was 988,000 and the number in local authority housing was 2,131,000. In the London Government Office Region 167,000 RSL tenants were in receipt of housing benefit, as were 313,000 local authority tenants. In the London borough of Barnet 7,889 local authority tenants were in receipt of housing benefit, but the number of RSL tenants in Barnet in receipt of housing benefit is unavailable. The other information is not available.

Aston Clinton Bypass

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the expected reduction in vehicle movements through Aston Clinton that will result from the construction of the bypass there. [21239]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. John Bercow, dated 10 December 2001:

The Transport Minister, David Jamieson, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the expected reduction in vehicle movements through Aston Clinton that will result from the construction of the bypass.

The bypass will remove approximately 70% of the current through traffic on the A41 through the village. The north-south movement on the local route between Leighton Buzzard and Wendover would continue to use part of the existing A41 in the village.

The contract for the construction of the bypass was let in March 2001 although the start of works on site was delayed until August 2001 due to Foot and Mouth precautions. Construction is due to be completed in the Summer of 2003.

If you would like further details of this scheme the Project Manager in our Dorking office, Andy Finch would be pleased to help you. He can be contacted on 01306–878342.

Bus Safety

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 27W, if he will simplify the criteria for determining the number of persons permitted to stand on scheduled buses. [21017]

Mr. Jamieson: I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to his question on 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 137W. The recent agreement in the EU for a common standard for the construction of buses will lead to a change in the way the numbers of permitted standing passengers is calculated. I do not intend to introduce changes in advance of the introduction of this directive in the UK as it will cause unnecessary disruption to bus manufacturers and operators.

Traffic Links (West Sussex)

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from the South East Economic Development Agency regarding traffic links in West Sussex; and if he will make a statement. [21115]

Mr. Jamieson: None. The South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) is however represented on the Steering Group of the South Coast Corridor Multi Modal Study. This study is looking at strategic transport issues along the whole of the south coast including West Sussex, and SEEDA feed in their views via this forum.

Road Schemes

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps are taken to ensure that the views of local economic development agencies and other stakeholders are given due weight in the provision of new roads and bypasses; and if he will make a statement. [21116]

Mr. Jamieson: All stakeholders including local and regional economic agencies are able to comment at the various statutory stages in the development of a road scheme. These include preferred route, order publication and, if necessary, public inquiry. All parties are also free to comment at the consultation stages of the series of multi-modal and road based studies being undertaken to consider transport problems associated with the trunk road network. Regional development agencies will normally be represented on study steering groups or in the wider reference groups from whom comments are specifically sought. They may also comment at the public consultation stages of regional planning guidance when the regional transport strategies are being considered.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what his criteria are for areas affected by traffic congestion to be addressed by using fast track procedures for building roads and bypasses; and if he will make a statement; [21113]

(2) if he will make a statement on the process to be followed in order to designate a road scheme under the fast track procedure. [21114]

Mr. Jamieson: The new Highways Agency procurement strategy, which I announced on 22 November 2001, will speed up delivery of improvement schemes on motorways and other strategic roads in England. This will be achieved through streamlining the pre-construction phase and better procurement techniques and help to deliver the targets from the 10 Year Plan for Transport. This should significantly cut the 12 years it typically takes at present to deliver these schemes.

The package of measures, announced by the Secretary of State in this House on 20 July 2001, to speed up decisions on major infrastructure projects of major national significance, are expected to apply, in respect of highway projects, to the construction of a new route in excess of 30 kilometres in continuous length. This criterion and the process to be followed to designate schemes are subject to consultation before coming into force.

Rail Franchises

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will state, for each train operating company, (a) when the franchise was first renewed, (b) the length of the original franchise awarded, (c) the dates on which the franchise has since been awarded, (d) when the franchise is next due to be awarded and (e) details of changes in the ownership which have taken place since the franchise was first awarded. [21051]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is as listed.

Current train operating company	*Original franchise commencement date*	*Length of original franchise*	*Original franchise expiry date*	*Original franchisee*	*Changes since original franchise commencement date*
Anglia Railways	5 January 1997	7 years 3 months	4 April 2004	GB Railways Group plc	—
Arriva Trains Merseyside	19 January 1997	7 years 2 months	18 March 2004	MTL Trust Holdings Ltd.	Previously Merseyrail Electrics. Arriva acquired the franchise from MTL in February 2000 for a period of 12 months on existing terms. An extension agreement was signed in February 2001 for a further two years
Arriva Trains Northern	2 March 1997	7 years 1 month	1 April 2004	MTL Trust Holdings Ltd.	Previously Regional Railways North East and then Northern Spirit. Arriva acquired the franchise from MTL in February 2000 for a period of 12 months on existing terms. An extension agreement was signed in February 2001 for a further two years.
Cardiff Railway	13 October 1996	7 years 6 months	12 April 2004	Prism Rail	The takeover of Prism by National Express Group was agreed on 17 January 2001.
Central Trains	2 March 1997	7 years 1 month	1 April 2004	National Express Group	—
Chiltern Railways	21 July 1996	7 years	20 July 2003	M40 Trains Ltd.	Heads of Terms signed in August 2000 for a new 20-year franchise with M40 Trains. New franchise agreement currently being negotiated.
Connex South Central	26 May 1996	7 years	25 May 2003	Connex Rail Ltd. (renamed Connex Transport UK Ltd.)	Transferred to GoVia on 26 August 2001. New 20-year franchise agreement being negotiated with GoVia.
Connex South Eastern	13 October 1996	15 years	12 October 2011	Connex Rail Ltd. (renamed Connex Transport UK Ltd.)	—
C2C	26 May 1996	15 years	25 May 2011	Prism Rail	Formerly known as LTS Rail. The takeover of Prism by National Express Group was agreed on 17 January 2001.
Gatwick Express	28 April 1996	15 years	27 April 2011	National Express Group	—
Great Eastern	5 January 1997	7 years 3 months	4 April 2004	FirstGroup PLC	—
Great North Eastern Railway	28 April 1996	7 years	27 April 2003	GNER Holdings Ltd.	Two-year extension being negotiated.

Current train operating company	*Original franchise commencement date*	*Length of original franchise*	*Original franchise expiry date*	*Original franchisee*	*Changes since original franchise commencement date*
Great Western	4 February 1996	10 years	3 February 2006	Great Western Holdings Ltd.	FirstGroup plc acquired Great Western Holdings Ltd. in March 1998.
Island Line	13 October 1996	5 years	12 October 2001	Stagecoach Holdings	Two-year extension until 27 September 2003 agreed in March 2001.
Midland Main Line	28 April 1996	10 years	27 April 2006	National Express Group	Two-year extension agreed on 10 August 2000
North Western	2 March 1997	7 years 1 month	1 April 2004	Great Western Holdings Ltd.	FirstGroup plc. acquired Great Western Holdings Ltd. in March 1998
ScotRail	31 March 1997	7 years	30 March 2004	National Express Group	—
Silverlink	2 March 1997	7 years 6 months	1 September 2004	National Express Group	Formerly known as North London Railways
South West Trains	4 February 1996	7 years	3 February 2003	Stagecoach Holdings plc	Heads of Terms signed in April 2001 for a new franchise for up to 20 years with Stagecoach Holdings. New franchise agreement currently being negotiated.
Thames Trains	13 October 1996	7 years 6 months	12 April 2004	Victory Railway Holdings	In June 1998 it was agreed that Go-Ahead Group plc would take over from Victory Railway Holdings
Thameslink	2 March 1997	7 years 1 month	1 April 2004	GoVia plc	—
Virgin Cross Country	5 January 1997	15 years	4 January 2012	Virgin Rail Group Ltd.	—
Virgin West Coast Trains	9 March 1997	15 years	8 March 2012	Virgin Rail Group Ltd.	—
Wales and West	13 October 1996	7 years 6 months	12 April 2004	Prism Rail	Previously South Wales and West. The takeover of Prism by National Express Group was agreed on 17 January 2001.
West Anglia Great Northern	5 January 1997	7 years 3 months	4 April 2004	Prism Rail	The takeover of Prism by National Express Group was agreed on 17 January 2001.

Notes:

1. The Shadow SRA announced in June 2000 its intention to develop new franchises for Wales and Borders and Wessex. The SRA announced on 15 February 2001 that it had shortlisted four parties for negotiations to select a preferred operator for a new Wales and Borders franchise. On 2 March 2001 it announced that it had prequalified seven parties to prepare proposals for a new Wessex franchise.
2. The SRA will announce in due course how it will respond to the Secretary of State's recent draft statement on passenger rail franchising. Although the statement emphasises the importance of delivering short term benefits—essentially through existing franchises—as well as longer term improvements for passengers, this does not mean that there will be no early franchise replacements; it does not rule out the proposed Wessex and Wales and Borders franchises. The SRA will, however, consider all the options for delivering benefits to passengers, and take a realistic view about affordability and what represents value for money.
3. The 'Wales and Borders' managerial unit will consist of Valley Lines' services and Wales and West services within Wales and to some English destinations. Discussions are continuing with National Express Group on an early transfer of services within Mid-Wales (from Central Trains) to the new Wales and Borders management unit. Services in North Wales will currently continue to be operated by First North Western.
4. The 'Wessex Trains' managerial unit will consist of Wales and West services not transferring to Wales and Borders. London Waterloo-Exeter services and Reading-Brighton services will currently continue to be operated by South West Trains.

Railway Rolling Stock

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many different types of rolling stock were operated by each train operating company in each year since 1994; and in what year each rolling stock type was due to be replaced. [21052]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is not available in the form requested. However, I have placed in the Library of the House information on the different types of rolling stock currently in use by each train operator. This excludes Mark 1 slam door vehicles which are required to be removed from the network by 1 January 2005.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will state the (a) number and (b) type of new rolling stock ordered in each year since 1994 for each train operating company. [21050]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is provided in the table.

Vehicles ordered, by train operating company, since 1 January 1994

	Total number of vehicles ordered									
	1994		*1995*		*1996*		*1997*		*1998*	
Train operating company	*DMU*	*EMU*	*DMU*	*EMU*	*DMU*	*EMU*	*DMU*	*EMU*	*DMU*	*EMU*
Anglia Railways	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	24	—
Arriva Trains Northern[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	48
c2c[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	184	—	—
Central Trains	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	76	—
Chiltern Railways	—	—	—	—	12	—	—	—	8	—
Connex South Eastern	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	120	—	—

Vehicles ordered, by train operating company, since 1 January 1994

	Total number of vehicles ordered									
	1994		*1995*		*1996*		*1997*		*1998*	
Train operating company	*DMU*	*EMU*	*DMU*	*EMU*	*DMU*	*EMU*	*DMU*	*EMU*	*DMU*	*EMU*
First Great Eastern	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
First Great Western[3]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	40	—
First North Western[4]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	70
Gatwick Express	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	64
Midland Main Line	—	—	—	—	—	—	34	—	—	—
Scotrail	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	45	120
South Central[5]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South West Trains	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	120	—	—
Virgin Cross Country	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	352	—
Virgin West Coast	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Totals	0	0	0	0	12	0	34	424	545	392
	0		0		12		458		937	

Vehicles ordered, by train operating company, since 1 January 1994

	Total number of vehicles ordered								
	1999		*2000*		*2001*		*Totals*		
Train operating company	*DMU*	*EMU*	*DMU*	*EMU*	*DMU*	*EMU*	*DMU*	*EMU*	*Total*
Anglia Railways	—	—	—	—	—	—	24	0	24
Arriva Trains Northern[1]	—	—	—	8	—	—	0	56	56
c2c[2]	—	—	—	112	—	—	0	296	296
Central Trains	—	—	—	—	—	—	76	0	76
Chiltern Railways	10	—	9	—	—	—	39	0	39
Connex South Eastern	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	210	210
First Great Eastern	—	—	—	—	—	84	0	84	84
First Great Western[3]	30	—	—	—	—	—	70	0	70
First North Western[4]	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	70	70
Gatwick Express	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	64	64
Midland Main Line	—	—	—	—	10	—	44	0	44
Scotrail	27	—	6	—	—	—	78	120	198
South Central[5]	—	—	—	—	—	240	0	240	240
South West Trains	—	—	16	—	—	785	16	905	921
Virgin Cross Country	—	—	—	—	—	—	352	0	352
Virgin West Coast	—	477	—	—	—	—	0	477	477
Totals	67	477	31	120	10	1,109	699	2,522	3,221
	544		151		1,119		3,221		

[1] Formerly Northern Spirit

[2] Formerly LTS Rail

[3] Formerly Great Western Trains

[4] Formerly North Western Trains

[5] Formerly Connex South Central

Notes:

DMU—Diesel Multiple unit

EMU—Electric Multiple unit

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on arrangements for the (a) renewal and (b) replacement of rolling stock by train operating companies. [21048]

Mr. Jamieson: Opportunities exist for the refurbishment of existing rolling stock or the introduction of new rolling stock to be taken forward as part of any franchise extension or replacement proposal submitted to the Strategic Rail Authority. Train operating companies and rolling stock companies are free to place orders for new rolling stock in addition to any required under any such franchise extension or replacement proposals.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with the ROSCOs on how the supply of new rolling stock can be speeded up. [21738]

Mr. Jamieson: There have been regular ministerial discussions with rolling stock manufacturers concerning the timely delivery of new rolling stock. These discussions will continue. The Strategic Rail Authority is also setting up a pan-industry group specifically to address rolling stock issues. There will be ROSCO representation on that group.

Rail Industry Confidential Reporting System

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans there are to develop the CIRAS confidential reporting system within the railway industry. [21074]

Mr. Jamieson: All train operators confirmed that they had enrolled their safety critical staff in CIRAS by the end of 2000. Train operators are developing procedures for reviewing reports and responding to reports made.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Strategic Rail Authority is due to publish its strategic plan. [21056]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority has announced that it will publish its Strategic Plan on Monday 14 January.

Rail Fatigue Damage

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the length of track on the railway network suffering from gauge corner cracking was for each month between January 2000 and November 2001 (a) in total, (b) subdivided by zonal area and (c) subdivided by train operating company area. [21038]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack advise that information is not held in this format.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of research conducted into gauge corner cracking; and what action he has taken in response to the conclusions reached. [21040]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive recently received copies of a report into a major piece of research into 'Head Checking' (the general term for the type of rail fatigue damage of which Gauge Corner Cracking is a particular type) carried out for Railtrack jointly by specialist consultants Ove Arup and TTCI. HSE is currently undertaking a detailed evaluation of the report's findings. The initial evaluation indicates that the report makes a very useful contribution to improving the understanding of the factors that influence the occurrence of 'Head Checking'. It would be inappropriate for any formal actions to be taken until HSE's evaluation is completed.

Supporting People Strategy

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the breakdown of funding to local authorities under the Supporting People Strategy is. [20916]

Ms Keeble: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

A40, Ross-on-Wye

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the (a) original budget and (b) final cost of the traffic light installation on the A40 at Lea, Ross-on-Wye; and if he will make a statement on who audits the accounts. [21220]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Paul Keetch, dated 10 December 2001:

The Transport Minister, David Jamieson, has asked me to reply to your recent question about the budget and final cost of the traffic light installation on the A40 Trunk Road at Lea, Ross-on-Wye.

The traffic signals at Lea are part of a package of traffic calming measures for the village that were completed earlier this year. The original budget for the signals was £133,000 but the final costs have yet to be finalised and should be available next month. Auditing of the Highways Agency's accounts is undertaken by the National Audit Office, as with all government departments.

In view of your interest, I have asked the Agency's Project Sponsor, Tom Barry, to write to you with details as soon as the final costs of the signal installation are known. He can be contacted on 0121 678 8072.

Regional Airports

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of United Kingdom air passengers used (a) Manchester Airport Group, (b) Peel airports and (c) Leeds Bradford airport, for the last year for which figures are available. [21455]

Mr. Jamieson: Based upon CAA statistics for 2000, 11.9 per cent. of total UK airport terminal and transit passengers used Manchester Airport Group airports (Bournemouth, East Midlands, Humberside and Manchester. 1.1 per cent. used Peel Group airports (Liverpool and Sheffield) and 0.9 per cent. used Leeds Bradford airport.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the use of public funds by Manchester airport to oppose the proposed airport at Finningley, Doncaster. [21433]

Mr. Jamieson: It is open to anybody to object to a planning application, and it is reasonable to expect objections from anybody who considers that their interests would be damaged by an application. This ensures that the public inquiry can gain a fully rounded picture of the issues relevant to the application.

Travellers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the estimated cost to public funds in 2000–01 of enforcement action by local authorities against travellers. [21461]

Ms Keeble: This information is not collected centrally.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if (a) Ministers and (b) officials in his Department have recently met officers from Brighton and Hove council to discuss issues relating to travellers. [21727]

Mr. Byers: No, but the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) has agreed to meet my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) to discuss the issue.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from local authorities on issues relating to travellers and traveller encampments; and if he will make a statement. [21726]

Mr. Byers: My Department receives representations from time to time from local authorities on issues relating to travellers and traveller encampments, particularly about unauthorised encampments. The Government recognise the problems that unauthorised encampments can cause.

We are revising the joint DTLR/Home Office guidance to local authorities and the police on managing unauthorised camping. This follows a review into the effectiveness of the current guidance. We published a summary of the findings on 2 November. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. We will publish the revised guidance early next year and will evaluate its effectiveness in bringing about improvements on the ground. We continue to keep the scope and application of existing enforcement powers under review.

Housing (Birmingham)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what provision he has made for early redemption penalties and setting-up costs of successor organisations to be paid if transfer of Birmingham City's housing stock takes place; and if he will estimate the cost of central Government subsidy towards them; [21717]

(2) what the outstanding debt is on Birmingham city council's housing revenue account that he will write off if stock transfer goes ahead; and what was the annual cost of debt financing charges in the last three years. [21597]

Ms Keeble: The Department's assumptions for housing revenue subsidy purposes of Birmingham city council's debt financing charges in the last three financial years have been as follows:

	£
1998–99	248,033
1999–2000	253,651
2000–01	264,672

If stock transfer were to go ahead the Department would make a payment equal to Birmingham's housing-related debt less any of its receipt from the transferred stock that remained once set-up costs and early debt redemption premiums had been deducted. That figure cannot yet be calculated.

The Department makes no provision for set-up costs or early debt redemption premiums; these are met by the local authority from the transfer receipt.

Drink Driving

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what provision he has made in the current financial year for his campaign against drinking and driving. [21498]

Mr. Jamieson: As part of the THINK! road safety campaign, my Department allocated £1.7 million for this year's publicity campaign against drinking and driving. Approximately £1 million of this was planned for the Christmas period with the balance for the remainder of the year-round campaign. Anti drink-driving messages are also supported throughout the country by local authority road safety officers, the police, and widely in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Traffic Calming

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he gives to local authorities on (a) installing road bumps on established roads, (b) painting speed limits in block form on roads and (c) other traffic calming measures. [21458]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department provides local authorities with guidance and advice on traffic calming, including road humps, through our Traffic Advisory Leaflets. We are also preparing a Local Transport Note on the design and effectiveness of traffic calming measures. Unlike many other traffic calming measures, painted speed limits on the road (carriageway roundels) require authorisation from the Secretary of State. This is due to their limited effect on vehicle speeds. As such no specific guidance exists, although we offer advice where this is required.

Rough Sleepers

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what directions have been given to local authorities since May 1997 concerning the estimation of rough sleepers in their area. [22045]

Ms Keeble: Local authorities have been asked annually since 1996 to provide estimates of rough sleeping in their areas in statistical returns to my Department as part of the Housing Investment Programme (HIP).

Additionally, my Department encourages local authorities to work with voluntary sector homelessness agencies to conduct head counts of people sleeping rough in their areas. The Government's policy, set out in an answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) on 19 May 1999, *Official Report*, column 357W, is to encourage:

> at least two counts a year in areas with a substantial number of rough sleepers (20 or more on a single night);
>
> at least one count a year in areas with between 10 and 19 rough sleepers on a single night; and
>
> counts in a selection of areas estimating fewer than 10 rough sleepers on a single night to spot check the validity of those estimates.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his Department and the Rough Sleepers Unit are taking to improve the quality of information on the numbers of people sleeping rough. [22044]

Ms Keeble: My Department, through the Rough Sleepers Unit and the Housing Directorate's Housing Data and Statistics Division, monitors and seeks to improve information on the extent of rough sleeping in England by encouraging all local authorities to estimate the numbers of rough sleepers in their areas; by investigating claims by local agencies that they have evidence of a local problem that does not show up in local authorities' Housing Investment Programme (HIP) statistical returns to the Department; and by encouraging areas where there is a known rough sleeping problem to undertake street counts at appropriate intervals, depending on the size of the local rough sleeping problem.

Agencies and local authorities working with the Rough Sleepers Unit collect a range of other information about rough sleepers.

The hon. Member will know that the Homelessness Bill, currently in the other place, will place a new duty on local authorities to conduct regular reviews of the levels, and likely future levels, of all forms of homelessness in their districts.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes his Department and the Rough Sleepers Unit have made to the methodology for counting rough sleepers since the guidance published in 1996. [22043]

Ms Keeble: None.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what requirements the Government have placed on local authorities to engage in street counts of rough sleepers. [22046]

Ms Keeble: My Department monitors the extent of rough sleeping in England by encouraging all local authorities to estimate the numbers of rough sleepers in their areas; by investigating claims by local agencies that they have evidence of a local problem that does not show up in local authorities' Housing Investment Programme (HIP) statistical returns to the Department; and by encouraging areas where there is a known rough sleeping problem to undertake street counts at appropriate intervals, depending on the size of the local rough sleeping problem.

In areas with a substantial number of rough sleepers (20 or more on a single night) at least two counts a year are encouraged.

In areas with between 10 and 19 rough sleepers on a single night, at least one count a year is encouraged.

In other areas with fewer than 10 rough sleepers on a single night, local authorities are asked to report estimates through their annual HIP returns. My Department ensures that street counts are undertaken in a selection of these areas to spot check the validity of estimates, especially in areas which have previously recorded a significant problem.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received over the last four years concerning the manner in which rough sleepers head counts are conducted. [22048]

Ms Keeble: The Government's Rough Sleepers Unit has received a number of oral and written inquiries and representations about the methodology for counting and estimating the number of people sleeping rough in England.

Head counts of people sleeping rough provide a useful 'snapshot' of the numbers of people sleeping rough. The methodology originated among voluntary sector agencies working with rough sleepers in London and was developed by my Department in partnership with the voluntary sector. Despite occasional criticism, independent evaluation has shown consistently that such counts are the most effective method for evaluating changes in the levels of rough sleeping.

They are just one of the tools by which the effectiveness of the Government's strategy on rough sleeping may be gauged. Additional monitoring information provided by agencies providing services as part of local rough sleeping strategies is also useful in making sure rough sleepers are getting the help they need.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what communications his Department and the Rough Sleepers Unit have had with (a) the Metropolitan and (b) the City of London police concerning the rough sleeping head counts in London over the last four years. [22047]

Ms Keeble: My Department's "Guidance on evaluating the extent of rough sleeping" states that the police should be consulted in advance of any rough sleepers count as one of the key local agencies in contact with rough sleepers. The police may also be involved in the count in some areas to ensure the safety of counters.

The Rough Sleepers Unit and the agencies which it funds have regular contact with police forces around the country—including the Metropolitan police and the City of London police—as part of the planning and carrying out of a head count. We also encourage Contact and Assessment Teams and other funded agencies to liaise with police throughout the year.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department and the Rough Sleepers Unit have conducted into the movements of rough sleepers who are placed into (a) hostels and (b) other temporary accommodation; and if he will place a copy of the documents in the Library. [22049]

Ms Keeble: Research commissioned by the former Department of the Environment and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to evaluate the Rough Sleepers Initiative has looked at the use of hostel and other temporary accommodation by rough sleepers. I refer the hon. Member to the following reports, copies of which are available from the Libraries of the House:

"The Rough Sleepers Initiative: An Evaluation", Department of the Environment, HMSO, 1993;

"From Street to Home—An evaluation of Phase 2 of the Rough Sleepers Initiative", Department of the Environment, The Stationery Office, 1996; and

"Homes for Street Homeless People—An evaluation of the Rough Sleepers Initiative", Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 1999.

The Rough Sleepers Unit has commissioned further research to evaluate the impact of its current strategy, including the role played by hostels. The results of this work will not be available until later in 2002.

Planning Applications

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what are the new targets for 2002–03 in respect of local authorities handling planning applications; and what are the targets they replace. [22053]

Ms Keeble: The new targets are: for major industrial, commercial and residential applications, 60 per cent. should be decided in 13 weeks; for minor industrial, commercial and residential applications, 65 per cent. should be decided in eight weeks; and 80 per cent. of all other applications should be decided in eight weeks. These will replace the current single target to decide 80 per cent. of all applications in eight weeks.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when his Department set a new Best Value indicator for local authorities in 2002–03 that 90 per cent. of all planning applications should be delegated; if this will be measured by (a) number, (b) size, (c) controversy and (d) value; and what other changes to Best Value he plans to propose. [22101]

Ms Keeble: The Government published their full proposals for changes to Best Value in a consultation paper "Best Value Performance Indicators 2002–03", published on 2 November 2001.

The proposals included a new indicator for the percentage of planning applications delegated to officers, underpinned by a new target, also announced on 2 November 2001, to delegate 90 per cent. of all applications received.

Best Value

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which local authorities are not obliged to sell assets at best value. [21526]

Ms Keeble: The Government's general policy on local authority land disposals is that authorities should seek to obtain the open market value when making disposals. However, local authorities' land disposal powers under the Local Government Act 1972 are discretionary and they may exercise them in any manner they wish.

The consent of the Secretary of State is required before an authority may dispose of land for less than the best consideration that can reasonably be obtained. Consent is not required to any disposal for a lease of seven years or less.

For certain classes of disposal any necessary disposal consent has been given by the Local Government Act 1972 General Disposal Consents 1998 and in these circumstances it is not necessary for a local authority to apply for a specific disposal consent. For example, the General Consents include the disposal in certain circumstances of the freehold or leasehold interests in property to be used for charitable, recreational and certain retail and commercial uses.

Civil Defence

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what strategy exists to help collaboration between fire brigades related to their role in civil contingencies and dealing with terrorist attacks. [21229]

Dr. Whitehead: Arrangements exist for mutual assistance between fire authorities under the provisions of sections 2 and 12 of the Fire Services Act 1947 which enable brigades to collaborate in carrying out their statutory duties.

In the light of the events of 11 September, we have established with the fire service stakeholders a group, chaired by HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services, which is evaluating, among other matters, existing response capabilities, including the need for regional collaboration.

Young Firefighters Association

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many children are involved in the Young Firefighters Association in the west midlands; and what funding he has given to this organisation to assist it in expanding. [21230]

Dr. Whitehead: Around 400 children are involved in the Young Firefighters Association in the west midlands.

The DTLR provides an annual grant of £54,000 to the Young Firefighters Association: this funds the association's national and training officer posts. In addition, brigades are encouraged to explore funding opportunities for the Young Firefighters Associations (or similar schemes) with the regional Youth Inclusion Programmes, established by the Youth Justice Board.

Train Drivers

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with (a) the Health and Safety Executive and Rail Inspectorate and (b) the Train Operating Companies on driver safety. [21708]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers have regular meetings and contact with the Health and Safety Commission and Executive, the Association of Train Operating Companies and individual train operators during which a range of railway safety issues are discussed.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what limit he sets as the maximum hours a driver can safely drive a train. [21709]

Mr. Jamieson: The Railways (Safety Critical Work) Regulations 1994 require employers to ensure that employees do not undertake any safety critical work, including driving a train, for a length of time that would be liable to cause them fatigue which could endanger safety.

Parish and Town Councils (Uniform Business Rate)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the cost of restoring the policy of giving a share of the uniform business rate to (a) parish and (b) town councils. [21448]

Dr. Whitehead: I have made no assessment. Parish and town councils have never had a share of the revenue from the national non-domestic rate—or uniform business rate—since its introduction in 1990. Their main source of funding is—and will remain—the council tax.

Strategic Rail Plan

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the strategic rail plan will be published. [21710]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority has announced that it will publish its Strategic Plan on Monday 14 January.

Rail Freight

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the Strategic Rail Authority's strategy for freight. [21737]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority published its Freight Strategy on 3 May 2001.

Irish Sea Cable

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which body is responsible for the completion of Irish Sea cable reference 360 Atlantic/C. [21540]

Mr. Jamieson: Consent was originally granted to Atlantic/C, who have now gone into liquidation. Responsibility for the cable is now in the hands of the administrator—Wallace, Philip Wedgewood.

Parliamentary Questions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by his Department were the subject of a holding answer in the last three sessions of Parliament. [22019]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions was formed on 8 June 2001. In the period 8 June to 6 December, my Department answered 894 named day parliamentary questions, of which 223 (25 per cent.) received holding answers.

Fluorspar

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of Britain's national annual need for fluorspar; what proportion he expects to come from the British fluorspar industry; and what assessment he has made of future fluorspar need. [21977]

Ms Keeble: My Department has made no assessment of Britain's national need for fluorspar. Statistics published in the UK Minerals Yearbook indicate that, in 1999, some 40,000 tonnes were produced in the UK and estimated that about 43,000 tonnes were imported. It also indicated that about 5,000 tonnes were exported. This suggests that some 78,000 tonnes were used nationally in that year.

Local Public Service Agreements

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessments he has made concerning the use of local public service agreements; and if he will make a statement. [21729]

Mr. Byers: Local public service agreements help our drive to improve services in partnership with local authorities. Twenty local authorities negotiated agreements with the Government earlier this year, in the pilot stage of this scheme. Each authority proposes demanding targets for key local services over the next three years, covering a mix of central government priorities and priorities of the authority's area. The Government offer possible relaxations in statutory and administrative requirements, some initial financial help, and the prospect of a reward grant for achieving the demanding targets agreed. The scheme is on offer to a further 130 authorities, 119 of which have already sought an opportunity to participate. The first of these further agreements are now being concluded.

Housing (Departmental Definitions)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish his department's definition of (a) affordable housing, (b) social housing, (c) key worker, (d) low income earner and (e) intermediate income earner. [21730]

Mr. Byers: Affordable housing, when used in planning guidance, refers to low cost market and subsidised housing.

Social housing is normally used to refer to subsidised housing provided by local authorities or registered social landlords for rent.

There is no national definition of (c), (d) and (e). However, local authorities may use some of these terms in assessing local housing needs and defining what they regard as affordable housing within their area. Such definitions are usually based on the level of local incomes and their relationship to house prices or rents. In defining key workers authorities will need to decide upon those groups in need of affordable housing who contribute to essential service provision.

Local Government White Paper

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish the White Paper on local government. [22108]

Mr. Byers: The Local Government White Paper will be published shortly.

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will reconsider the guidance given in PPG8 in respect of the siting of mobile phone masts; and what further research he has commissioned into the effects on health following the Stewart report. [21749]

Ms Keeble: On 22 August 2001 we significantly strengthened the planning arrangements for telecommunications development. We have introduced two sets of regulations and a revised Planning Policy Guidance Note 8, "Telecommunications" (PPG8). The revised PPG8 takes account of the conclusions of the Stewart report. We have no plans to reconsider the guidance.

The Stewart report recommended that a substantial research programme should be set up to investigate the potential health effects of mobile phone technology as a whole. This programme has been set up by Government under the direction of an independent scientific management committee who have recently assessed a range of research proposals. The first group of projects is expected to start shortly. Information about the research is being made available at www.mthr.org.uk

Social Service Departments

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many local authority social service departments have applied to his Department for financial support in the current financial year. [21791]

Dr. Whitehead: Local authorities will have applied for the various types of financial support run by this Department. Records of these applications are not kept centrally. The Department has received a number of representations about the pressures on local authorities' social service budgets. The Government announced an additional £300 million to cover 2001–02 and 2002–03 to assist councils in building care capacity. We have also recently announced our proposals for the funding of local government revenue expenditure in 2002–03. Provision for spending on Personal Social Services is set to increase by £684 million next year or 6.5 per cent.

Area Cost Adjustments

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much (a) Tewkesbury's, (b) Cheltenham's and (c) Gloucestershire's revenue support grant has been changed as a result of the area cost adjustment in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [21404]

Dr. Whitehead: The Area Cost Adjustment (ACA) is used in calculating Standard Spending Assessments (SSA) for each authority. The table compares total SSA for the 2001–02 local government finance settlement, with what total SSA would have been if the ACA was not included in the grant distribution formulae:

Local authority	*2001–02 Settlement SSA (£ million)*	*Without ACA (£ million)*	*Absolute difference (£ million)*	*Percentage difference*
Gloucestershire	395.746	400.394	4.648	1.20
Cheltenham	10.644	11.191	0.546	5.10
Tewkesbury	6.919	7.072	0.152	2.20

There is an interaction between the ACA and deprivation indicators in the formulae which means that if the ACA is excluded, the weighting given to deprivation changes. This is why the impact of leaving out the ACA varies between authorities. The figures should be treated as approximate. This is because, if the ACA is excluded, it is possible that the analyses on which the formulae are based would find that some of the deprivation and other indicators that appear in the formulae would change. We have assumed that, apart from the ACA, all the other indicators that appear in the formula are the same.

The ACA methodology has not been changed since 1994–95. The consequence of leaving out the ACA will therefore be broadly the same as the above figures for other years since then.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the local authorities which were net recipients under the area cost adjustment scheme in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [21405]

Dr. Whitehead: For the 2002–03 Local Government Finance Settlement, announced for consultation on 4 December, the authorities listed receive an area cost adjustment (ACA).

Camden
Greenwich
Hackney
Hammersmith and Fulham
Islington
Kensington and Chelsea
Lambeth
Lewisham
Southwark
Tower Hamlets
Wandsworth
Westminster
Barking and Dagenham
Barnet
Bexley
Brent
Bromley
Croydon
Ealing
Enfield
Haringey
Harrow
Havering
Hillingdon
Hounslow
Kingston upon Thames
Merton
Newham
Redbridge
Richmond upon Thames
Sutton
Waltham Forest
Bedfordshire
Buckinghamshire
East Sussex
Essex
Hampshire
Hertfordshire
Isle of Wight Council
Kent
Oxfordshire
Surrey
West Sussex
Council for the Isles of Scilly
Broxbourne
Dartford
Elmbridge
Epping Forest
Epsom and Ewell
Hertsmere
Reigate and Banstead
South Bucks
Spelthorne
Three Rivers

Watford
Slough
Basildon
Brentwood
Chiltern
Crawley
Dacorum
East Hertfordshire
Guildford
Harlow
Mole Valley
Sevenoaks
St. Albans
Surrey Heath
Tandridge
Waverley
Welwyn Hatfield
Woking
Bracknell Forest
Thurrock
Windsor and Maidenhead
Adur
Arun
Ashford
Aylesbury Vale
Basingstoke and Deane
Bedford
Braintree
Canterbury
Castle Point
Chelmsford
Cherwell
Chichester
Colchester
Dover
East Hampshire
Eastbourne
Eastleigh
Fareham
Gosport
Gravesham
Hart
Hastings
Havant
Horsham
Lewes
Maidstone
Maldon
Mid Bedfordshire
Mid Sussex
New Forest
North Hertfordshire
Oxford
Rochford
Rother
Rushmoor
Shepway
South Bedfordshire
South Oxfordshire
Stevenage
Swale
Tendring
Test Valley
Thanet
Tonbridge and Malling
Tunbridge Wells
Uttlesford
Vale of White Horse
Wealden
West Oxfordshire
Winchester
Worthing
Wycombe
Brighton and Hove
Luton
Medway
Milton Keynes
Portsmouth
Reading
Southampton
Southend-on-Sea
West Berkshire
Wokingham
Bedfordshire Police Authority
Essex Police Authority
Hampshire Police Authority
Hertfordshire Police Authority
Kent Police Authority
Surrey Police Authority
Sussex Police Authority
Thames Valley Police Authority
Greater London Authority.

The geographical coverage of the ACA has remained the same since 1993–94, although local government reorganisation has taken place over the period. Some of the authorities listed above have changed from district to unitary status, though they received an area cost adjustment in both cases. In some cases, former districts were combined at the time of reorganisation. The predecessor authorities as listed, also received an area cost adjustment:

Predecessor billing authority	*Reorganised authority*
1 April 1995 *The Council of:*	
The Borough of Medina The Borough of South Wight	The Isle of Wight
The Borough of Brighton The Borough of Hove	The Borough of Brighton and Hove
1 April 1998	
The Borough of Gillingham The City of Rochester upon Medway	The District of the Medway Towns (now Medway)

The Greater London Authority took responsibility of the functions of the Receiver for the Metropolitan Police District and the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority from July 2000.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to review the area cost adjustment; and if he will make a statement. [21403]

Dr. Whitehead: We are reviewing the area cost adjustment as part of our current review of all the grant distribution formulae. We intend to implement changes in the 2003–04 local government finance settlement. We are actively involving local government in the review process, and all relevant papers are available on the Local Government Association website.

High Hedges

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the project by the Building Research Establishment and Tree

Advice Trust to develop an objective way of assessing the obstruction of light by hedges will be completed; and when the report will be published. [22164]

Ms Keeble: The Building Research Establishment (BRE) and Tree Advice Trust have now completed their project to develop an objective method for assessing whether high hedges block too much daylight and sunlight to adjoining properties, and to provide guidance on hedge heights to alleviate these problems.

Copies of the final report of their work, together with guidelines for calculating hedge height, have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. These documents are also being published on my Department's website.

The guidelines explain how to calculate whether a hedge is likely to block out too much light from a garden and from the main rooms of a house. In relation to gardens, the procedure looks at what portion of the garden is shaded by the hedge and what direction it faces. For the rooms of a house, the main factor is the distance from its windows to the hedge. Some of the details of this formula have been refined in the light of the results of consultation and field-testing on a sample of problem hedges.

We want to encourage people to apply the BRE guidelines to their problem hedge and to use the results to try to settle matters with their neighbours amicably. We will, therefore, be preparing a leaflet specifically designed for this purpose. It will include a simplified version of the BRE guidelines as well as advice on how people might approach their neighbours with this information to try and agree a solution. We will be involving local authority, professional, consumer and advice groups in its development and expect to launch the leaflet in spring next year.

We recognise, of course, that in some cases guidance and voluntary action is no substitute for a legal remedy. We remain committed, therefore, to bringing forward legislation to set up a statutory complaints system for dealing with high hedge problems as soon as there is space in the Parliamentary timetable.

Rail Safety

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the signals passed at danger at least three times by trains stating the number of times this has occurred; what action has been taken at each signal to prevent these signals being passed at danger; and what has been the annual cost of this action in the last six years. [12265]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is as follows:

(a) A full list showing signals passed three times or more has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

(b) Actions

The fitment programme for the Train Protection and Warning System (TPWS) will be completed by the end of 2003. The rail industry has initiated a "SPADRAM" (Signals Passed at Danger Reduction and Mitigation) programme which covers a wide range of issues, eg signal sighting, human factors, driver training. Within this programme some of the specific actions include:

highlighting these signals to drivers;
vegetation control;
provision of different backboards;
countdown markers;
repositioning of Signal Post Telephones;
realignment and repositioning of signals;
provision of repeater signals;
changing signalling sequences.

(c) Cost

It is not possible to separate out SPAD mitigation costs from other expenditure.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Health and Safety Commission's working group looking at risks associated with road rail interface will publish its findings. [21196]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Commission hope that its report and recommendations will be available in the first quarter of 2002.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent steps Railtrack has taken to ensure that a supervisor is employed on a continual basis in all signal (a) boxes and (b) centres to manage the operation of workstations. [21124]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for Railtrack.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the Health and Safety Executive on the (a) benefits and (b) outcomes that have resulted from the monthly publications of reports on SPADS. [21030]

Mr. Jamieson: Publication of the Health and Safety Executive's monthly reports on signals passed at danger (SPADs) on the Railtrack network, copies of which are placed in the Library of the House, has put the information into the public domain, provided detailed comparisons by train operating company and outlined the action being taken by the industry to reduce the incidence of SPADs.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what steps have been taken by Railtrack to introduce a system for the central tracking of those recommendations within Part 1 of the Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry report directly made to Railtrack; and whether this has been extended in those cases where recommendations are directed to (a) train operating companies and (b) others; [21064]

(2) what progress has been made by Railtrack to improve the speed at which signallers are able to take action to move points in an emergency; [21120]

(3) what progress has been made towards ensuring that railway (a) signallers and (b) drivers jointly attend away days and other training; and if he will make a statement; [21068]

(4) what research on the understanding of human factors as they relate to train driving his Department conducted between June and November; and what steps are being taken to ensure further research is conducted in this area; [21076]

(5) what consideration has been made by train operating companies of the possibility of providing snap wands as a supplementary means of providing lighting in an emergency; [21184]

(6) what progress has been made to extend the computerisation of information to be used by the police service, in co-operation with the emergency services, in the event of a major incident involving passenger rail services; and if he will make a statement; [21018]

(7) what progress has been made to ensure that the police service, in conjunction with emergency services, ensure that common telephone numbers are issued for the use of members of the public who are seeking to obtain or give information about persons who have or may have been involved in a major incident involving a passenger rail service; [21020]

(8) what steps have been taken by Railtrack management to (a) set out and (b) apply the criteria for allowing signallers to exceed the maximum of 72 hours per week; [21122]

(9) what progress Railtrack has made towards the introduction of simulators for the training of signallers in dealing with emergencies; [21167]

(10) if instructions for railway signallers on their response to a SPAD provide a set of options, including the use of CSR, either to send an emergency stop message to a particular train or a general stop message; and whether such instructions are supported by full and regularly repeated briefing as to the type of circumstances in which each option is appropriate; [21169]

(11) what progress has been made to ensure that the computerisation of information in the event of a major incident involving passenger rail services is extended to all police forces; [21019]

(12) when Railtrack conducted a safety examination of the layout within two miles of Paddington Station; whether this included a risk assessment; and if he will make a statement; [21066]

(13) what steps (a) have been taken and (b) are planned, by train operating companies to ensure that all members of the on-board train staff, including those under contract, have been trained in train (i) evacuation and (ii) protection; [21202]

(14) at which locations ambiguity in the meaning of very short duration, under the Railway Safety Group standard on signal sighting, has caused problems; whether a retrospective review of all such locations has taken place; and what action has been taken in those locations where problems have been identified; [21082]

(15) whether the expression overhead line equipment, under the Railway Safety Group standard on signal sighting, has been clarified to refer only to wires and droppers; [21083]

(16) what progress has been made with the application of NVQs to the driver licensing scheme under the ATOC study on the central licensing of drivers; [21073]

(17) what steps have been taken by Railtrack to ensure that (a) signallers, (b) managers and (c) maintenance staff working at integrated electronic control centres are instructed as to the need to preserve CSR data disks in the event of a SPAD taking place; [21179]

(18) what steps have been taken to ensure that the reports made by Railtrack about a SPAD include a report by the signaller as to (a) their actions and (b) the reasons for such actions; [21168]

(19) if he will publish the guidance provided by the Health and Safety Executive under the provisions in Schedule 1 of the Railway (Safety Case) Regulations 2000 regarding (a) evacuation and (b) escape; [21192]

(20) what consideration has been made for turbo trains of (a) the enhancement of end pillar weld connections, (b) the possible enhancement of crashworthiness by weakening the ends and strengthening the saloon of the cars and (c) the fitting of (i) shear-out couplers and (ii) anti-overriding devices; [21175]

(21) what steps have been taken by (a) train operating companies and (b) ROSCOs to ensure that emergency signs on-board trains are (i) luminous and (ii) capable of being understood by passengers without the necessity to read text; [21177]

(22) who has the responsibility to decide whether the recommendations of a signal sighting committee under the group standard on SPADs are to be implemented under Railtrack's safety management system; [21088]

(23) what steps have been taken since the crash at Ladbroke Grove to review the standard for crashworthiness of (a) vehicles used on the rail network in order to ensure that there are adequate measures for safeguarding survival space and (b) new vehicles; [21174]

(24) whether the definition of very short duration, under the Railway Safety Group standard on signal sighting, was revised between June and November; [21095]

(25) what progress has been made towards ensuring that Railtrack introduce a risk assessment when a material change to (a) track and (b) signalling is proposed; and whether this is being conducted on a holistic basis at the design concept stage and repeated at defined stages up to and including implementation; [21028]

(26) what steps (a) have been taken and (b) are planned, by (i) train operating companies and (ii) ROSCOs to test the practicability of building emergency hammers into the passenger alarm system so that they can be released only after an alarm has been activated; [21204]

(27) what research (a) has been conducted and (b) is planned by (i) train operating companies and (ii) ROSCOs into (A) the feasibility of, and risks associated with, removable windows, (B) the adequacy of windows as a means of emergency egress, (C) the number of dedicated windows that are necessary and (D) the provision as to the maximum distance between each passenger and bodyside door or emergency exit; [21205]

(28) what the steps included by train operating companies are in their daily routine check of every train; [21207]

(29) which train operating companies have conducted a review of the effectiveness of the systems which are in place to deliver the required level of driver competence over the six month period June to November; what these reviews have concluded; and what progress has been made to retest drivers against revised systems; [21071]

(30) what steps have been taken by the Association of Train Operating Companies to obtain expert assistance on the advice which should be given to passengers as to what to do in the event of there being a known threat of serious danger to them remaining on board after an accident; [21187]

(31) whether the use of the term "disregard" in the Railway Group standard on SPADs and its associated documentation was revised between June and November; [21090]

(32) if he will provide details for each train operating company of (a) the criteria against which drivers are tested under their driver training and testing programmes, (b) the minimum standard that must be reached for each of these criteria for drivers to reach a definite pass standard, (c) what steps have been taken between June and November to develop these standards, (d) what further steps are planned to develop these standards and (e) what consideration has been made of how often drivers should repeat key steps in their training before submitting themselves for testing; [21075]

(33) what steps to strengthen the (a) safety audit process and (b) quality of communication under the process under the Railway (Safety Case) Regulations 1994 (i) have been taken between June and November and (ii) are planned; [21077]

(34) what steps have been taken by (a) train operating companies and (b) ATOC to ensure that the availability on trains carrying passengers of the items of emergency equipment mentioned in the standard on emergency and safety equipment is unrestricted; [21198]

(35) what steps have been taken to enhance the security of (a) seating in turbo trains and (b) tables in high speed trains; [21171]

(36) what market research (a) has been conducted and (b) is planned with regard to railway safety related measures; [21195]

(37) what (a) assessment and (b) research his Department has made of the problem of shortages of trained and skilled staff within the railway industry with special reference to (i) drivers, (ii) signallers and (iii) engineers; [21054]

(38) what steps (a) have been taken and (b) are planned, by (i) Railtrack, (ii) train operating companies and (iii) ROSCOs to study the possibility of installing on driver-only trains a telephone by which passengers can communicate with the signaller in the event of the driver being killed or incapacitated; [21201]

(39) what steps (a) have been taken and (b) are planned, by (i) train operating companies and (ii) ROSCOs to review the (A) adequacy of the number of and (B) signage relating to emergency hammers on board trains; [21206]

(40) what progress has been made by the railway group to review (a) emergency planning, (b) liaison with the emergency services and (c) arrangements for the aftercare of survivors and provision of (i) support and (ii) facilities for the bereaved and injured of passenger rail accidents; [21021]

(41) when he expects the Health and Safety Commission to publish the outcome of the first six monthly review of Lord Cullen's recommendations within Part 1 of the Ladbroke Grove Inquiry report; [21197]

(42) what steps (a) have been taken and (b) are planned by (i) Railtrack, (ii) train operating companies and (iii) ROSCOs to study the feasibility of introducing remote broadcasting from outside the train where this is not already available; [21199]

(43) what measures (a) have been introduced and (b) are planned within the railway industry to enhance protection against fire; [21194]

(44) what recent steps have been taken to provide passengers with general safety advice (a) before and (b) after they have boarded their train; and what proportion of train operating companies provided this information (i) as of June and (ii) at the last date for which information is available; [21188]

(45) what assessment he has made of the (a) enhancement of the cabs on high speed trains to improve driver protection and (b) the enhancement of measures for the retention of bogies on the coaches of high speed trains; [21178]

(46) what steps have been taken to establish a system for the collection of human factors information pertinent to issues of passenger safety following rail accidents; [21189]

(47) what steps have been taken to update the code of practice on public information on train (a) safety and (b) emergencies; and what plans there are to update the code of practice; [21191]

(48) when Railtrack carried out the (a) risk assessments and (b) consequent actions required under Group Standard GK/RT 0078 in respect of the signals in the Paddington area; and if he will make a statement; [21065]

(49) what reviews Railtrack has conducted of the work of signallers in order to identify non-essential tasks; [21165]

(50) if he will provide details of the recommendations of WS Atkins' Initial Study of Signal Sighting, Issue 1, published on 6 March 2000, which his Department plans to act upon; [21086]

(51) what changes in the frequency in the briefing by driver standards managers of drivers from Thames Trains have taken place since the beginning of June; [21069]

(52) what steps have been taken by (a) training operating companies and (b) ROSCOs to ensure that staff-only doors on all trains have an override device to enable them to be used by passengers in an emergency; [21182]

(53) what steps have been taken by (a) Railtrack and (b) train operating companies (i) to examine the availability of signal sighters and (ii) to ensure an adequate supply of trained signal sighters; [21087]

(54) what progress has been made to consider, in the case of new vehicles constructed of aluminium used on the rail network, (a) the use of alternatives to fusion welding, (b) the use of improved grades of aluminium which are less susceptible to fusion weld weakening and (c) the further development of analytical techniques; [21173]

(55) if he will provide details of changes made in (a) the direction of running of line three from Paddington station and (b) speed limits on any of the lines between two and six miles out of Paddington Station; and in each case (i) whether a risk assessment has been carried out to the satisfaction of HMRI and (ii) if additional measures have been (A) implemented and (B) shown to have been effective; [21067]

(56) what research (a) has taken place and (b) is planned, by (i) train operating companies, (ii) ROSCOs and (iii) train manufacturers into developing a means of safeguarding emergency lighting systems from disablement by the forces involved in sudden deceleration; [21185]

(57) what steps have been taken to standardise between (a) train operating companies and (b) rolling stock (i) the safety information issued to passengers and (ii) the means by which they can (A) be evacuated and (B) escape from a train; [21190]

(58) what revisions of the Railway Safety group standard on signal sighting took place between June and November; and if he will list details of those (a) groups and (b) individuals involved in this process of revision; and what plans there are for further revision of these standards; [21094]

(59) what steps have been taken by (a) train operating companies and (b) ROSCOs to develop signage in the form of pictograms similar to those used on aircraft and conforming to current human factors standards on signage depicting the correct operation of emergency door mechanisms; [21181]

(60) what steps have been taken by (a) train operating companies, (b) ROSCOs and (c) the HMRI to assess the number of train coaches which have internal doors that slide in the same direction and will need to be replaced by 31 December 2003 under the terms of Lord Cullen's recommendations in Part 1 of the Ladbroke Grove Inquiry report; [21183]

(61) what progress has been made by (a) Railtrack and (b) train operating companies towards the introduction of a national system of direct radio communication between trains and signallers; [21180]

(62) what steps have been taken to make progress with the ATOC study on the central licensing of drivers over the six month period June to November; and what additional steps are planned; [21072]

(63) what steps have been taken by (a) Railtrack and (b) train operating companies to train (i) signallers and (ii) drivers so as to appreciate the (x) nature and (y) demands of each other's work; [21166]

(64) what steps have been taken by (a) Railtrack, (b) train operating companies and (c) other groups to train persons who (i) investigate and (ii) make recommendations as a consequence of SPADs in the (A) identification of human factors and (B) root cause analysis; [21091]

(65) whether instructions for railway signallers on their response to a SPAD dictate that the signaller should make an assessment and take action immediately; [21093]

(66) if he will list changes in Railtrack procedures, and the actions of management to enforce them, in response to Lord Cullen's recommendations within Part 1 of the Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry report; [21063]

(67) what progress has been made towards the (a) teaching and (b) practice of defensive driving by train operating companies; [21070]

(68) what progress has been made by Railtrack to provide signallers with the opportunity to practise the controlling of train movements; [21123]

(69) what steps have been taken by (a) train operating companies, (b) ROSCOs and (c) train manufacturers to carry out a (i) feasibility and (ii) risk assessment into the incorporation of escape hatches in (A) existing and (B) new carriages; [21203]

(70) what steps have been taken by Railtrack to institute a system whereby all signallers in a signal (a) box and (b) centre are briefed by their line manager following a SPAD in their area; and what steps have been taken to ensure that there is appropriate dissemination of information which may be of assistance to signallers elsewhere; [21170]

(71) what progress has been made towards the introduction by Railtrack of a system in which there is an automatic replacement of a signal to danger where a SPAD takes place; [21119]

(72) what steps have been taken by Railtrack to improve the alarm system for SPADs in integrated electronic control centres; [21121]

(73) if he will provide details of how acceptable limits to the temporary obscuration of a signal are defined under the Railway Safety Group standard on signal sighting; [21084]

(74) what progress has been made by Railtrack towards the introduction of an arrangement whereby a train fitted with CSR sounds an audible warning automatically in the cab when a signal at danger is passed; [21118]

(75) what changes in scope in Schedule 1 to the Railway (Safety Case) Regulations 2000 took place between June and November; and what further changes are planned; [21193]

(76) what steps his Department has taken to review the Railway Group standard on SPADs and its associated documentation; [21089]

(77) what recent steps have been taken by Railtrack to (a) clarify and (b) improve the instructions for signallers as to their response to a SPAD; [21092]

(78) how the Railway Safety Group standard on signal sighting defines the cab sight lines within which signals must be positioned; [21085]

(79) in respect of which signals the Railway Safety Group standard on signal sighting deals explicitly with the additional time required for reading; [21096]

(80) what steps his Department has taken to ensure that all material and information on the activities of the organisation being audited in regard to the area of activity being audited is disclosed to the auditor under the Railway (Safety Case) Regulations 1994; [21098]

(81) what proportion of passenger rolling stock of each train operating company provides on-board explanatory information about the emergency facilities on the train; [21186]

(82) what steps (a) have been taken and (b) are planned, by (i) train operating companies and (ii) ROSCOs to study the feasibility of introducing a roaming communication system for train staff; [21200]

(83) if he will list for each train operating company the proportion of services which make use of on-board announcements to draw attention to safety information. [21176]

Mr. Jamieson: Lord Cullen made recommendations on this issue in Part 1 of his Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry report. The Health and Safety Commission is reviewing the industry's compliance with all the recommendations and will publish a report in the spring. I will ensure that a copy is placed in the House Library.

Housing Allocation (Paedophiles)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information the Government makes available to (a) local authorities, (b) registered social landlords and (c) private landlords to enable them to make appropriate decisions about housing allocations to those convicted of paedophile offences. [17688]

Beverley Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

The Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 introduced a statutory duty on the police and the probation service to make joint arrangements for the assessment and management of risks posed by sexual and violent offenders, including paedophiles, and by other offenders who may cause serious harm to the public. Each police/probation area is required to prepare a report on its discharge of those responsibilities. The first reports will cover the period to 31 March 2002 and will be published next summer. Local authorities and housing associations may be involved in risk management panels and will have access to shared information under protocols established in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Women and Public Services

Joan Ryan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he intends to report on the Government's work on women and public services. [21865]

Mrs. Roche: I have today published the report "Better Services—Better Working Lives". Copies have been placed in the Vote Office, and the Libraries of the House.

This document reports back on the work undertaken to look at how health and education public services are delivered for women. We know that the proportion of women with dependent children working full-time has risen from 59 per cent. in 1991 to 65 per cent. in 2001. But women are still the people responsible for accessing services—91 per cent. of women with school age children say they normally take them to the GP and 61 per cent. take them to school.

In this publication we report back on what women have told us during a series of regional evidence gathering visits supported by a wide range of good practice examples, new research findings and recommendations for national and local action.

Copies of "Better Services—Better Working Lives" will be distributed to all the women who took part in the regional evidence gathering visits and through the Department of Health and Department for Education and Skills.

Parliamentary Questions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by the Cabinet Office were the subject of a holding answer in the last three Sessions of Parliament. [22014]

Mr. Leslie: The percentage of Cabinet Office parliamentary questions that required a holding reply during the last three Sessions of Parliament is as follows:

1998–99: 50 had holding replies, which equates to 7 per cent.

1999–2000: 68 had holding replies, which equates to 8 per cent.

2000–01: 32 had holding replies, which equates to 11 per cent.

Opinion Polling

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list his Department's *(a)* budgeted and *(b)* actual expenditure on opinion and market research during each financial year since 1996; what recent assessment he has made of the need to continue to monitor public opinion; by what means he intends to do it; and if will make a statement. [15375]

Mr. Leslie: The total expenditure on opinion and market research from the 1997–98 to the 2001–02 financial years is shown in the table.

Year	*£ million*
1996–97	[1]—
1997–98	0.7
1998–99	0.9
1999–2000	0.3
2000–01	0.4
2001–02	[2]0.4

[1] Not available

[2] Planned

Notes:

1. The figures do not include the salary costs of Cabinet Office staff.
2. Expenditure undertaken by Central Office of Information on behalf of clients is not included.

We are reviewing the current and future requirements of the monitoring of public opinion but have not reached any firm conclusions on the tools or vehicles required. We will inform the House in the normal course of business of any conclusions or decisions made in this area.

Public Interest Disclosure

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the operation of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1994 as it applies to central Government; and if he will make a statement. [21647]

Mr. Leslie: Guidance for civil servants on the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 is set out in the Directory of Civil Service Guidance, volume 2. Copies of the directory are in the Library of the House and on the Cabinet Office website www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/guidance.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of the increase in the departmental expenditure limit from 2001–02 to 2002–03 will be accounted for by wage costs. [21234]

Mr. Leslie: The level of wage costs within departmental budgets this year and in future years will be dependent upon negotiations. The Departmental Report to be published next spring will give full retrospective costs.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on progress with the public service agreement target for openness and diversity in the civil service. [21249]

Mr. Leslie: The latest figures for April 2001 show that the civil service continues to make steady progress towards the targets for openness and diversity, increasing on all indicators from 1998 baselines:

> 24.2 per cent. of the Senior Civil Service are women, up from 17.8 per cent. in 1998. The target for 2004–05 is 35 per cent.
>
> 20.2 per cent. of those in the top 600 posts are women, up from 12.7 per cent. in 1998. The target for 2004–05 is 25 per cent.
>
> 2.4 per cent. of staff at Senior Civil Service level are from a minority ethnic background, up from 1.6 per cent. in 1998. The target for 2004–05 is 3.2 per cent.
>
> 2.0 per cent. of staff at Senior Civil Service level are disabled, up from 1.5 per cent. in 1998. The target for 2004–05 is 3.0 per cent.

The Cabinet Office has launched 'Pathways', a central development programme targeted at minority ethnic staff with the potential to rise to senior levels.

The number of successful candidates from minority ethnic backgrounds in the Fast Stream Scheme has doubled from 3.4 per cent. in 1998 to 6.8 per cent. in 2000.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what opinion research he has undertaken for ascertaining progress in meeting the public service agreement target on responsiveness of public services to the views of users. [21341]

Mr. Leslie: A third wave of research ("Wave 6") monitoring and tracking changes in public satisfaction levels against key public services is currently under way. The results will be published in newsletter format and on the internet. Copies will be placed in the House.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the initial targets to be met by April 2001 in pursuit of the public service agreement target for the delivery of new programmes. [21343]

Mr. Leslie: Progress continues to be made across Government towards achieving targets outlined in departmental public service agreements. Details of public service agreements can be found on both departmental and HM Treasury websites and performance against those targets in departmental reports.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on progress with the public service agreement target to introduce new pay systems to improve Departments' performance. [21348]

Mr. Leslie: Departments and agencies are reviewing their pay systems in line with the principles of Civil Service Reform. Good progress is being made and we expect around 80 per cent. to have completed this by April 2002. Departments and agencies will continue to adjust their pay and performance management systems annually against central guidelines, to drive improvements in their performance.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action has followed fulfilment of the public service agreement target to publish a White Paper on modernising Government. [21345]

Mr. Leslie: The Government have moved into a second phase of modernisation, focused firmly on improved service delivery. The reorganisation of the centre of Government, including the creation of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit and the Office of Public Services Reform, is helping to take this agenda forward.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on progress this year with the public service agreement target for the saving on administration revenue. [21248]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office has a public service agreement (PSA) target to

> "achieve a 2.5 per cent. saving per year on administrative resources".

The Department's spending plans are agreed and monitored by Her Majesty's Treasury and its accounts and performance are audited by the National Audit Office.

The Department's 2000 spending review settlement reflected a reduction in resources available to the Cabinet Office in light of the 2.5 per cent. savings required. The Department has carried out several Better Quality Service Reviews and is continuing to develop and improve its planning, budgeting and procurement systems in order to ensure resources are deployed efficiently and effectively.

Machinery of Government changes have led to an expansion of the Department, which will result in an overall increase in administrative costs. However the Department intends not to exceed its agreed expenditure limit.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the performance of (a) the Cabinet Office and (b) other Departments in meeting the public service agreement for electronic service delivery by Government. [21349]

Mr. Leslie: Delivery is at the heart of our agenda for transforming public services and e-government is one of the most powerful catalysts we have for achieving that transformation. The Office of the e-Envoy produces both an annual report and regular monthly reports giving details of the progress that is being made. The latest annual report was published on 4 December and is available at http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/ukonline/champions/anrep_menu.htm.

The latest figures on progress towards the target of making Government services available electronically by 2005 show that over 50 per cent. of Government services are e-enabled now. Departments predict that 74 per cent. of services will be e-enabled by the end of 2002. This information is available at http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/publications/reports/esd/autumn2001/esdrep_2001.htm.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will make a statement on progress in securing departments' compliance with the regulatory impact assessment process as part of the Cabinet Office's public service agreement target on the subject; [21342]

(2) what action has been taken in pursuit of the public service agreement target for improved Government regulation to establish a baseline of compliance with the regulatory impact assessment process. [21344]

Mr. Leslie: In accordance with the published SDA target (reference Command Paper CM5119 July 2000), by the end of the 2001–02 financial year we aim to produce a baseline measure of the extent of departmental compliance with the Regulatory Impact Assessment process. Work on this is under way and we will make an announcement in due course.

Knowledge Pool

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on progress with testing and refining the Knowledge Pool approach to evidence-based policy. [21463]

Mr. Leslie: The Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS) is currently running a demonstration programme to assess the effectiveness of 'knowledge pools' in contributing to evidence-based policy making and delivery. 'Knowledge Pool' is an initiative to identify and bring together experts and evidence in specific policy areas. It is designed to replicate good practice in knowledge management and to address the need for policy making to be more effectively and efficiently informed by evidence.

The first phase is now almost complete—CMPS has identified knowledge pool topics, substantially refined the concept of knowledge pools and is currently working closely with sponsoring units to determine how knowledge pools could bring practical benefits to their policy areas.

Knowledge pools currently in development are sponsored by the Performance and Innovation Unit (Strategic Futures Project), the Social Exclusion Unit, the Regional Co-ordination Unit (Area Based Initiatives Forum) and the new cross-Government Excellence in Policy Making Network set up by CMPS. It is anticipated that further knowledge pools will join the programme in the near future.

CMPS have also been working together with sponsoring units to design and build a website. This will support collaborative working and knowledge sharing among experts in each of the knowledge pools. It will also provide a channel through which useful information can be made widely accessible. This will be launched early next year.

The independent evaluation of this programme to assess the effectiveness of knowledge pools in delivering evidence based policy making and practice will be completed in December 2003.

Expenditure and Receipts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if his Department maintained expenditure and receipts within the voted provision in 2000–01. [21465]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office's provisional outturn for 2000–01 against voted provision is reported in Table 3 of the Public Expenditure 2000–01 Provisional Outturn White Paper (Cm 5243), copies of which are in the Libraries of the House.

An Appropriation Account showing final outturn will be published as usual.

Performance Targets (Labour Costs)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if his Department achieved the key performance target in 2000–01 for increasing sales revenue for every pound of expenditure on direct labour costs. [21466]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office as a Department does not have a specific performance target for increasing sales revenue for every pound of expenditure on direct labour costs. However the Government Car and Despatch Agency (GCDA), which is an executive agency of the Cabinet Office, has a key performance target for increasing sales revenue for every pound of expenditure on direct labour costs.

The GCDA did not achieve its target for increasing sales revenue for every pound of expenditure on direct labour cost as price increases to customers were held below the rate of inflation. This was reported in the agency's annual report and accounts for the financial year 2000–01, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Computer Equipment

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the President of the Council, what has been the average time taken to *(a)* deliver and *(b)* install standard computer equipment to hon. Members' offices in (i) the House of Commons and (ii) constituency offices; and if he will make a statement. [22615]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* On average hon. Members who ordered computer equipment after 15 October had their machines delivered to Westminster within 20 days and installed within 24 days.

In the constituency, the times were 24 days and 28 days respectively. As I explained in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) on 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 323W, delays were mainly caused by the complexity of the distribution exercise, which by the end of the financial year will have involved delivering over 6,000 items to over 1,300 locations. In addition, some hon. Members have asked for a delay in installation for their convenience.

I am delighted to report that delays are now largely eradicated. Hon. Members can now expect to receive their equipment, complete with parliamentary software, as quickly as they would from a major high street retailer. Members who order this week can have both delivery and installation within 15 days if they wish.

Royal Prerogative

Norman Baker: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the orders made through the Privy Council under the royal prerogative in each year from 1997 to date. [21402]

Mr. Robin Cook: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The hon. Member may, however, like to know that the vast majority of Orders in Council are made under statute, and of the prerogative Orders in Council and Orders of Council that are made most relate to amendments of the charters, by-laws and statutes of chartered bodies (including universities) and the giving of Royal Assent to Channel Islands legislation.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Disability Discrimination Act

11. **Dr. Desmond Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to inform employers of their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 not to discriminate against disabled people. [19152]

Maria Eagle: The Government are running media campaigns to raise awareness of disability. Good practice guides and Codes of Practice are available. The Disability Rights Commission's Helpline and website and Equality Direct provide further advice.

Minimum Income Guarantee

15. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the take-up of the minimum income guarantee in Pendle in the last six months. [19156]

Mr. McCartney: There are about 2,900 people in receipt of minimum income guarantee in the constituency of Pendle. Nationally, as a result of the national take up campaign over 120,000 more pensioners are now receiving an extra £20 a week. Overall, during the last three years we have provided an extra £12.5 billion to pensioners through the minimum income guarantee.

18. **Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures his Department has taken to monitor uptake of the minimum income guarantee since the introduction of the shortened application form. [19159]

Mr. McCartney: A variety of statistical information will inform our judgment on the success of our new, much improved and shorter minimum income guarantee claim form.

As a result of the national take up campaign, over 120,000 more pensioners are now receiving an extra £20 a week.

There are 2,200 pensioners in receipt of minimum income guarantee in the constituency of Crawley.

Overall, during the last three years we have provided an extra £12.5 billion to pensioners through the minimum income guarantee.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the earnings disregard is in the calculation of the pensioners' minimum income guarantee; and how the disregard has changed since the introduction of the guarantee. [20293]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The earnings disregard is £5 for single pensioners and £10 for couples. In certain circumstances, concerning the receipt of particular premiums or engagement in a special occupation, the disregard may be £20 a week. These disregards have not changed since the introduction of the minimum income guarantee.

We are continuing to consider the treatment of earnings in the pension credit.

Employment Opportunities (Women)

19. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking to remove the obstacles to women's employment opportunities. [19160]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Women can benefit from the range of New Deals and welfare-to-work initiatives that we have introduced to help people overcome the barriers to employment and to make work pay, such as working families tax credit, the national minimum wage, the national childcare strategy and the sure start programme.

Measures are also being introduced in the current Employment Bill that will help working mothers to remain within the workforce through better balancing of their work and home commitments. This is good for parents, children and business.

Jobseekers

21. **Jim Sheridan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to improve co-ordination between the benefits system and the support given to people to help them find work. [19162]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Employment Service and those parts of the Benefits Agency that deal with people of working age are being brought together to form Jobcentre Plus.

53 Jobcentre Plus offices have now opened, providing for the first time a fully integrated employment and benefit service. First reactions from both individual customers and employers have been overwhelmingly positive. We plan progressively to extend this integration nation-wide beginning later next year.

25. **Mr. Simon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to enable those unemployed who are the hardest to help find work. [19166]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The range of new deals help disadvantaged groups to move from welfare into work. We are further increasing support for drug mis-users and will be exploring how we can extend that approach to other hard to help groups. We have also introduced Action Teams for Jobs and Employment Zones that, between them, have helped over 32,000 people in the most deprived areas into work.

In addition, on 28 November we announced StepUP, a new pilot programme to help people who have not been able to find a job through new deal. StepUP will provide transitional jobs lasting up to 12 months and will be the stepping stone for some of the hardest to help unemployed people to reconnect to their local labour markets.

Fuel Poverty

22. **Mr. Bailey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures are being taken to combat fuel poverty among pensioners. [19163]

Mr. McCartney: We have just published our Fuel Poverty Strategy. Measures which will help pensioners in particular include maintaining the winter fuel payment at £200 for the rest of this Parliament, improvements to the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, and the introduction of pension credit from 2003.

The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme provides grants of up to £2,000 for comprehensive packages of insulation and heating improvements, including central heating systems for the over-60s.

Pensioners (Benefits)

24. **Kali Mountford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to ensure pensioners who have savings for their retirement do not lose entitlement to benefits. [19165]

Mr. McCartney: I refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friend's oral statement on 28 November.

We have already raised the capital limits for pensioners in the Minimum Income Guarantee. When Pension Credit is introduced we will abolish the rule which excludes pensioners with £12,000 or more in savings from any help and halve the current assumed rate of income. In addition, for the first time, we will reward—not penalise—savings, ensuring those who have worked hard to save modest amounts gain from having done so.

27. **Mr. McWalter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps his Department is taking to help pensioners claim the benefits to which they are entitled. [19168]

Mr. McCartney: We are always concerned to ensure that those eligible for the receipt of benefits can achieve their legal entitlements and we are particularly concerned to ensure that the poorest among our pensioners have their entitlement increased to reach the Minimum Income Guarantee.

That is why we launched a national take up campaign in May 2000 writing to 2 million pensioners informing them about MIG. We are following this up and from 15 October 2001 callers to the Retirement Pension telecentre who are not already receiving MIG are asked a series of questions to identify if they may be entitled and encouraged to claim if they wish to do so. Those pensioners who claim Retirement Pension by post are sent a MIG leaflet.

We are looking at a number of options to extend this service so that a claim to MIG will be invited automatically following certain key life events, for example when the pensioner reaches age 75 or 80 or when another benefit such as Attendance Allowance is awarded.

We are also working in partnership with organisations for older people to improve access to benefits and take up of the MIG. This includes projects on a national good practice guide and a survey of local take up initiatives.

New Deal

28. **Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the impact that the new deal 50-plus has had on getting older people back into work. [19169]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We are committed to the principle of extending opportunity for all to everyone regardless of age, and tackling age discrimination in the workplace. A key element of this is the New Deal 50 plus which has already helped over 50,000 people move into work since its national launch in April 2000.

We are developing 3rd Age Apprenticeships to increase take up of the New Deal 50 plus training provision, and employer involvement in the programme. These will offer work-based training organised on a sectoral basis, making using of existing New Deal 50 plus funding arrangements, particularly the Training Grant.

The ongoing AgePositive campaign is challenging workplace attitudes towards age, ensuring employers realise the benefits of employing an age diverse workforce. On 3 December the campaign launched both a new AgePositive website and research studies, including the Evaluation of the Impact of the Code of Practice and Good Practice in the Recruitment and Retention of Older Workers.

36. **Mr. Plaskitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions he has had with employers on the new deal. [19177]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Since June of this year we have met with key employer organisations and many individual employers. Their input is central to the development of our employment policies and to ensuring that our employment programmes meet local labour market needs and employers' recruitment needs.

We have also created the National Employment Panel to ensure that employers, and other key customers, have a strong and permanent voice within the Department. The Panel is an employer-led body that will provide independent advice on the design, delivery and performance of our welfare to work initiatives.

Employers have a central role to play in achieving our goal of creating and sustaining employment opportunities for all.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what training is given to New Deal personal advisers in respect of the new deal 50 plus. [15842]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: All personal advisers receive training in interviewing, influencing and motivational skills; effective communication and interpersonal skills; awareness of the diversity of clients and their particular needs. They are also trained in practical skills such as how to conduct In Work benefit calculations, knowledge of the local labour market and ES programmes and services. In addition to this generic training detailed guidance is available on the new deal 50 plus process through the ESCOM computer system which is accessible to advisers in Jobcentres. An Open Learning handbook has also been produced for use by advisers to support the Age Diversity initiative. This contains a section addressing specific new deal 50 plus issues.

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on *(a)* the number of participants in the new deal for over-50 from Tynemouth constituency in the last 12 months, *(b)* the destination of people leaving the scheme and *(c)* the cost involved. [17991]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The new deal 50-plus blend of personal advice, jobsearch help and in-work financial support has proved very successful at helping people over 50 move off benefits and back into work.

The only measurement of participation in the programme is the number of those who move into work and claim the programme's in-work financial support, the Employment Credit. 92 people went into work with the help of the Employment Credit from Whitley Bay and North Shields Jobcentres, between October 2000 and September 2001. Others will have benefited from the advice and help available from personal advisers.

The Employment Credit wage top up is paid at £60 per week for full-time work (maximum £3,120) and £40 for part-time work (maximum £2,080), for up to 12 months. In addition, each individual in receipt of the Employment Credit is eligible for a £750 in-work Training Grant.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have entered the new deal gateway *(a)* once, *(b)* twice and *(c)* three times or more in the Buckingham constituency in respect of the (i) new deal for young people, (ii) new deal for 25-plus, (iii) new deal for 50-plus and (iv) new deal for lone parents. [17851]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: For new deal for young people, there had been 101 starts on the programme in Buckingham constituency to the end of September 2001. Of these, three young people had entered twice and none had entered three or more times.

For new deal for 25-plus, there had been 149 starts on the programme in Buckingham constituency to the end of September 2001. Of these, 16 people had entered twice and four had entered three or more times.

The new deal for lone parents and new deal 50-plus do not have gateways.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have entered the new deal gateway *(a)* once, *(b)* twice and *(c)* three times or more in Arundel and South Downs in respect of the (i) new deal for young people, (ii) new deal for 25-plus, (iii) new deal for 50-plus and (iv) new deal for lone parents. [18316]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: For new deal for young people, there were 129 starts on the programme in Arundel and South Downs constituency to the end of September 2001. Of these, 10 young people had entered twice and none had entered three or more times.

For new deal for 25-plus, there were 89 starts on the programme in Arundel and South Downs constituency to the end of September 2001. Of these, nine people had entered twice and three had entered three or more times.

The new deal for lone parents and new deal 50-plus do not have gateways.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* long-term unemployed and *(b)* lone parents have gained (i) subsidised and (ii) unsubsidised employment under the New Deal scheme in Wiltshire. [18409]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Up to the end of September 2001, the New Deal 25 plus had helped 58 long-term unemployed people move into subsidised employment and 412 into unsubsidised employment in Wiltshire Employment Service District.

Up to the end of August 2001, the New Deal for Lone Parents had helped 798 lone parents move into work in Wiltshire Employment Service District. Subsidised employment is not a feature of the New Deal for Lone Parents programme.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people on the New Deal for Young People in Arundel and South Downs have joined *(a)* the subsidised employment option, *(b)* the environmental task force option, *(c)* the voluntary sector option and *(d)* the full-time education or training option in each year since its inception. [18315]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table.

Number of young people starting NDYP options in Arundel and South Downs

	Subsidised employment	*Environment task force*	*Voluntary sector*	*Full-time education and training*
1998	4	1	2	5
1999	3	0	3	3
2000	1	0	1	8
2001[1]	3	1	0	1
Total	11	2	6	17

[1] To end September

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* long-term unemployed and *(b)* lone parents have undertaken training under the New Deal scheme in Wiltshire. [18408]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Up to the end of September 2001, 17 people had started education and training opportunities under the New Deal 25 plus in the Wiltshire Employment Service District.

Up to the end of August 2001, 102 lone parents had taken up education and training opportunities under the New Deal for Lone Parents in the Wiltshire Employment Service District.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans his Department has to monitor the effectiveness of the New Deal for Lone Parents. [19147]

Malcolm Wicks: The results of the New Deal for Lone Parents programme are published every month. These show that we have helped lone parents into over 127,000 jobs through this New Deal.

Extensive evaluation of the programme is being conducted and new items of research are published as they are completed. We expect to publish a report, bringing together findings from all strands of the evaluation, in 2003.

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on *(a)* the number of participants in the new deal for young people from Tynemouth constituency in the last 12 months, *(b)* the destination of people leaving the scheme and *(c)* the cost involved. [17992]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the tables.

Tynemouth constituency

Month	*Number of new deal for young people participants*
October 2000	240
November 2000	236
December 2000	231
January 2001	246
February 2001	245
March 2001	255
April 2001	259
May 2001	255
June 2001	245
July 2001	239
August 2001	237
September 2001	220

Note:

Figures are the number of participants at the end of each month and are the latest available. The figures are not cumulative.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Tynemouth constituency

Destination on leaving the new deal for young people	*Number of clients*
Unsubsidised employment	471
Other benefits	107
Other known destinations	214
Not known	285
Total leavers	1,077

Note:

Figures are cumulative to the end of September 2001.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Estimates of the cost of the programme are not available at constituency level.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people on the new deal for young people in the Buckingham constituency have joined *(a)* for subsidised employment, *(b)* the Environmental task force, *(c)* the voluntary sector and *(d)* the full-time education or training option in each year since its operation. [17850]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table.

Number of young people starting NDYP options in Buckingham

Year	*Subsidised employment*	*Environment task force*	*Voluntary sector*	*Full time education and training*
1998	2	1	4	2
1999	2	1	4	2
2000	1	3	5	0
2001[1]	0	1	0	1
Total	5	6	13	5

[1] To end September

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Pension Schemes

29. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on changes in the availability of final salary pension schemes. [19170]

Mr. McCartney: The Government recognise the valuable role that final salary schemes play in providing security in retirement. They also recognise, however, that employers provide occupational schemes on a voluntary basis and consequently it is for them to determine the most appropriate pension provision to suit their business needs. We welcome the broadening by occupational pension schemes of their eligibility criteria in response to the introduction of stakeholder pensions.

The stakeholder pension has helped increase the size of the overall pensions market. The value of new pension sales rose by 9 per cent. in the July to September quarter of this year to £2.8 billion. Regular pension premium business rose by 50 per cent. to £584 million compared with the same period last year.

There is also evidence of sustained growth in the amounts contributed to non-state pensions from £50 billion in 1997 to £69 billion in 2000.

Long-term Unemployment (Romford)

30. **Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action is being taken to alleviate long-term unemployment in Romford. [19171]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Our aim is employment opportunity for all throughout the country. We have put in place a framework that delivers:

a platform of economic stability and low inflation, to promote sustained growth in output and jobs;

investment in education and training so people have the skills they need to take up work;

a labour market policy with a strong work focus so all jobless people have access to vacancies, advice and help with jobsearch;

a range of new deal programmes which help disadvantaged groups, including the long-term unemployed, move from welfare into work;

policies such as the national minimum wage and working families tax credit designed to make work pay; and

locally focused initiatives designed to tackle the problems of particular areas.

Since 1997, these policies, alongside continued economic growth, have helped to reduce long-term unemployment by 55 per cent. in Romford.

The new deal for young people and new deal 25 plus are playing an important part in helping long-term unemployed people improve their job prospects and move into work in Romford. Up to the end of September, they had helped over 350 long-term unemployed people move into jobs in the constituency.

Housing Costs

31. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proposals he has for extending housing costs support to elderly low-income owner-occupiers. [19172]

Malcolm Wicks: Over 94,000 pensioners already receive help with their mortgage interest payments through our minimum income guarantee. We expect this number to increase to around 200,000 when the pension credit is introduced. Our detailed proposals for the pension credit were published on 28 November 2001.

Stakeholder Pensions

32. **Ms Stuart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many stakeholder pensions have been taken out on behalf of under 18-year-olds. [19173]

Mr. McCartney: 491,694 stakeholder pensions had been sold by the end of October 2001. Information on how many of those were taken out on behalf of under 18-year-olds is not yet available.

In its recent press release on 3 December the Association of British Insurers said

> "we should remember that stakeholder pensions are not the only story. Charges on group personal pensions have fallen as a result of stakeholder pensions, and employers have also widened their eligibility criteria for existing schemes. This means more people are able to save for their retirement—an aim shared by the Government and ABI."

34. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the take-up of stakeholder pensions. [19175]

Mr. McCartney: Figures from the Association of British Insurers (ABI) show that up to the end of October 491,694 stakeholder pensions had been sold. A more detailed breakdown of these figures will not be available until next year, but I consider that sales of almost half a million in the first seven months on the market is a very encouraging start. In addition, the ABI figures show 284,821 employers had designated stakeholder pension schemes for their staff.

In releasing these sales figures the ABI said

> "Stakeholder pension providers have worked hard to encourage employers to designate stakeholder schemes. The industry is keen to work in partnership with Government and employers in attracting more employees into employer-designated schemes. But we should remember that stakeholder pensions are not the only story. Charges on group personal pensions have fallen as a result of stakeholder pensions, and employers have widened their eligibility criteria for existing schemes. This means more people are able to save for their retirement—an aim shared by the Government and the ABI."

Disability Living Allowance

33. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on changes to eligibility for lower rate disability living allowance in respect of those suffering from fear or anxiety. [19174]

Maria Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 178W.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to ensure that applicants for disability living allowance are able to request a face-to-face completion service for application forms. [22031]

Maria Eagle: Not all customers who ask for help need or want face-to-face assistance. There is a range of services available including textphone communication, the benefit inquiry line and the DLA/AA helpline which can provide telephone assistance with forms completion and where necessary, customers can be visited in their own homes.

In addition caller offices have induction loop systems, private interview rooms and when required arrangements will be made for interpreters to assist in face-to-face interviews.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to produce information about disability living allowance in a sign language video format. [22027]

Maria Eagle: The Department is considering the most appropriate and cost-effective methods of providing information on benefits (not just disability living allowance and attendance allowance) to deaf people. One option being considered is the production of videos.

This approach, rather than just promoting a single benefit, would give potential customers the ability to decide for themselves what sort of help may be the most appropriate for them.

Action Teams for Jobs

37. **Dr. Ladyman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement about the effectiveness of action teams for jobs. [19178]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Action teams for jobs are one of a range of initiatives we have introduced to help people move into work. Action teams are performing well, so far helping over 15,500 jobless people in the country's most employment deprived areas move into work (41 per cent. of participants). Up to mid-October 2001, the Thanet action team had helped 727 people into work.

In October, we increased the number of action teams from 40 to 53, and in January 2002 we will increase the number further, to 63.

Employment Zones

38. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of employment zones in reducing unemployment. [19179]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Employment zones are one of a range of initiatives we have introduced to help long-term unemployed people move into work. The performance of the 15 employment zones is encouraging. Early indications are that almost half of participants find work. We are currently evaluating the zones before deciding how to take the initiative further.

Disabled Access

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to inform those who provide goods and services about the access requirements for disabled people. [19154]

Maria Eagle: The Government ran an awareness campaign late last year aimed at service providers. A further campaign will be launched in January. The revised Code of Practice for access requirements was laid before Parliament recently and will be published early next year.

Disability Rights Commission

Sandra Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases alleging discrimination against disabled people the Disability Rights Commission has supported financially in its first year of operation. [19155]

Maria Eagle: In its first year of operation, the Disability Rights Commission provided or arranged legal representation in 41 cases brought under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Pensioner Poverty

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how he plans to assist pensioners with income just above the poverty line. [19180]

Mr. McCartney: We have already taken a number of steps to tackle pensioner poverty.

We introduced the minimum income guarantee (MIG) to provide more money for pensioners as quickly as possible. For example a single pensioner aged 60 to 74 now receives £92.15 a week, an increase of £18 a week since 1997 over and above inflation. From April 2002 single pensioners will see their MIG rise by £6 to £98.15 a week.

From 2003 pension credit will ensure people aged 60 and over need not live on less than £100 a week (£154 for couples) and for the first time, saving will be rewarded instead of being penalised. Pension credit will provide a savings credit for those aged 65 and over who have saved for their retirement and have incomes up to £135 a week (£200 for couples), ensuring pensioners with even modest second pensions and savings will get more as a result of their thrift. In addition, we will abolish the rule which excludes pensioners with £12,000 or more in savings from any help and introduce a fairer system for taking into account income for savings.

Special Advisers and Press Officers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* press officers were employed (i) full-time, (ii) part-time and (iii) on a contract basis by his Department in each year since 1992. [6917]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed on 8 June 2001 from parts of the former Department of Social Security, parts of the former Department for Education and Employment and the Employment Service.

The Department for Work and Pensions currently employs two full-time special advisers and 11 full-time press officers.

Child Support

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if new assessments on existing Child Support Agency cases after April 2002 will be made on the new system; [10434]

(2) if he will make it his policy to bring all existing Child Support Agency cases on to the new formula by 2005. [10435]

Malcolm Wicks: From April 2002, new child support cases will have maintenance calculations made under the new system. Most existing cases will be transferred from a common date to the new system. However, some cases will convert earlier if they are linked to a new scheme case. Parents who have arranged their lives around current maintenance payments will need time to adjust to any changes resulting from the new calculation. For this reason, we plan to phase in the new liabilities in stages over a period of up to five years. There will therefore be cases in 2005 that have not reached their new scheme liability.

Departmental Promotions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much his Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in the financial years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 *(e)* 1999–2000 and *(f)* 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [12267]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is not available in the format requested.

For such information as is available on marketing expenditure for the year 2000, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on 27 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 828W.

Widowers' Benefits

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many widowers would have been eligible for widowers benefits between 1994 and 2000; and what is his estimate of the cost. [15474]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Estimated cost and number of recipients if widows' benefits had been available to men

	Number of recipients	*Estimated cost (£ million)*
1994–95	90,000	200
1995–96	90,000	200
1996–97	90,000	200
1997–98	90,000	250
1998–99	90,000	250
1999–2000	100,000	250
2000–01	100,000	300

Notes:

1. It is assumed that widowers' benefits were subject to the same overlapping benefit rules as widows' benefits.
2. No allowance is made for taxation effects, or for offsetting savings from reduced income-related benefit expenditure.
3. Costs are rounded to the nearest 50 million, recipients to the nearest 10,000.

Source:

Government Actuary Department estimates and DWP Policy Simulation Model.

ONE Pilots

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the integrated claim form piloted in the ONE callcentre pilots. [17998]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: As part of the ONE delivery evaluation programme research was carried out among clients and staff, including views on the Integrated Claim Form (ICF).

Around 48 per cent. of Call Centre clients in 2000–01 used the ICF to claim two or more benefits. Clients thought the Call Centre process was generally more convenient and they welcomed help in completing complicated forms, although the service was sometimes hampered by IT problems. Clients liked ICFs because they received a partly completed claim form and it reduced the number of forms that they had to complete. The ICF also advises clients as to what will be required at their Personal Adviser (PA) meeting.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the *(a)* costs and *(b)* benefits of the ONE pilots introduced in June and November 1999. [19038]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: ONE has a comprehensive evaluation programme designed to assess its costs and benefits. We expect final results from the cost benefit analysis to be available in winter 2002–3.

Published findings from the voluntary phase of ONE and the early findings from the full participation phase of ONE, which assess the impact of ONE, are available on the Department's website and in the Library.

Work Incentives

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he has taken to improve incentives for those with children to work; and how many have taken them up in Tynemouth constituency in the last year for which figures are available. [17997]

Mr. Nick Brown: This Government believe that work is the best form of welfare for those who are able. We have introduced a wide range of measures including the Working Families Tax Credit to help make work pay and the National Childcare Strategy to help make work possible for people with children. Since April this year, lone parents can also get help with childcare payments if they take up part-time work through the New Deal for Lone Parents.

We are also easing the transition to work through a range of benefit run-ons. Lone parents benefit run-on was introduced in 1999 and in the year 2000–01 helped over 50,000 lone parents nationally. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit run-ons have been available for a number of years and in 2000–01 were claimed by 140,000 people nationally. From April this year we have also introduced the Mortgage Interest run-on to help home owners moving from benefits to full time work. The numbers of people taking advantage of all of these run-ons are not available broken down by constituency.

Parliamentary Questions

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will answer the question tabled on 25 October by the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North concerning the suspension of child benefit payments. [18599]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer given to her on 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 707–08W.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by his Department were the subject of a holding answer in the last three Sessions of Parliament. [22015]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table.

Percentage of named day parliamentary questions for which holding replies were given

Session	*Percentage*
1998–99	6.5
1999–2000	9.0
2000–01	18.5

Medical Assessments

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 936W, on SEMA, if he will place in the Library, the IMPACT and Corporate Medical Group's assessments of Medical Services' performance against quality targets; if he will estimate the number of occasions that Medical Services have been required to develop and deliver action plans to improve performance where this fails to reach an acceptable standard; and if he will estimate the number of occasions that his Department has claimed service credits from SchlumbergerSema in each year since the contract was signed. [18225]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* A report on Medical Services' performance against quality targets will be prepared for publication before the parliamentary summer recess, and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Since the contract was signed, Medical Services have been required to develop and deliver one action plan involving all sites, and ten relating to individual Medical Services Centres, to improve performance against service level volume targets.

Service credits for performance against quantitative service level targets have been applied monthly since September 1999. Qualitative and customer service targets have only recently been introduced.

Diversity

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement (1) on the cost in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 of measures to meet the aspirational diversity targets referred to on page 35 of the 2001 Departmental report; [18976]

(2) on the cost in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 of the diversity and equal opportunities framework for action. [18982]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The cost of the measures which are intended to enable the Department to achieve its equality targets are inextricably linked to the broader costs associated with the promotion of equal opportunities and diversity, and cannot be separated. These are set out in the table. The key measures themselves are detailed in the Department's Diversity and Equal Opportunities Framework for Action.

The figures relate to the costs of the Department's central policy team and to corporately funded initiatives. They do not take into account local implementation costs which are managed within regional budgets. In addition, as the principles of equal opportunities and diversity are embedded into all of the Department's human resources policies and procedures it is not possible to identify those costs separately.

Year	*Cost*
2000–01	1,242,829
2001–02[1]	590,154

[1] To the end of October 2001

Pay Scales

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the cost of the reintroduction of common pay scales across his Department. [19262]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Common pay scales were reintroduced into the former DSS as part of the 2000 pay round. The overall cost of the pay package for that year was £67.57 million (equating to a 4.5 per cent. package). Of this, 1.2 per cent. or £17.9 million was the cost of bringing staff on to common pay scales.

Work is currently under way to inform and cost the approach for next year's pay award which will cover all staff in the newly formed Department for Work and Pensions (including Employment Service and ex DfEE staff).

Long-term Unemployed

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his statement of 28 November, in what circumstances benefit will be withheld from the long-term unemployed. [20272]

Malcolm Wicks: Starting in April next year, the Government will pilot a new approach to assist long-term unemployed people who need more intensive help to get into work. Long-term recipients of jobseeker's allowance will be guaranteed a full-time job, lasting up to a year, and paid at the national minimum wage. In return, they will be required to take up that opportunity. It is our intention to ensure that there will be a choice of jobs on offer but no choice of simply remaining on benefit. Anyone who refuses to take up a job offer without good reason will have their benefit withdrawn in the same way as those jobseekers who fail to take up an offer of suitable employment.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his statement of 28 November, (1) in what circumstances long-term unemployed may receive remuneration above the national minimum wage; [20275]

(2) how much of the remuneration for the long-term unemployed will be provided by *(a)* Government and *(b)* employers. [20280]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Long-term unemployed people participating in the new job guarantee scheme will be paid out of Government funds at the national minimum wage. Those with children will also be eligible to apply for working families tax credit in the same way as other workers. In addition, it will be open to employers to make payments on top of the funding provided by the Government but this will be entirely at their discretion.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his statement of 28 November, what targets he has set in respect of his proposals for the long-term unemployed, including targets for sustained unsubsidised employment following completion of the 12-month period of employment; and what plans he has made to evaluate his proposals. [20273]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The new approach to assisting long-term unemployed people by guaranteeing them a full-time job will be piloted in 20 areas, starting in April 2002. Because these are pilots, no targets have been set for the number of participants moved into sustained unsubsidised employment. The pilots will provide the information we need to set such targets if and when the scheme is extended.

The pilots are expected run for up to two years and will be subject to a full and thorough evaluation.

Deafness

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to ensure that examining medical officers acting on behalf of his Department are familiar with the problems of deaf people. [20791]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* All Medical Services doctors are trained to assess deafness in connection with medical examinations for benefit claims. They are trained to evaluate the effects of deafness, as measured by a person's ability to hear and understand the spoken voice, on activities of daily living.

A training module on "Sensory Impairment" will be delivered to all Medical Services doctors within the next nine months, as part of the Continuing Professional Education training programme. The module will update and reinforce previous training on assessment of people with hearing and/or visual impairment. It will draw doctors' attention to the communication problems experienced by deaf people, and to the need for effective communication between the doctor and the deaf person, through use of a sign language interpreter when appropriate.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he has taken to ensure that only qualified sign language interpreters are used during medical assessments for deaf people who claim disability living allowance. [22030]

Maria Eagle: Medical Services' existing procedures provide for a professional interpreter service for people with hearing difficulties. Where problems arise advice is sought from the Royal National Institute for the Deaf's helpline. However, some people may prefer to have a friend, relation or colleague to act as an interpreter.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many profoundly deaf people are panel members of the Appeals Service. [22028]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available. Last year the Appeals Service completed a Diversity Audit of service provision, including the support given to the tribunal members. The audit highlighted the fact that there was insufficient data on the particular needs of panel members. In order to collect this information the Appeals Service is currently undertaking a disability survey of all appeals tribunal members. The results will be available in the new year.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to undertake research into the take-up of disability living allowance among deaf people. [22029]

Maria Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), on 6 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 511W.

Vocational Rehabilitation

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what studies he has conducted into overseas *(a)* experience and *(b)* practice in connection with vocational rehabilitation. [20806]

Mr. Nicholas Brown [holding answer 6 December 2001]: We have commissioned a review of published evaluation evidence of vocational rehabilitation programmes in Europe, North America and Australia. We expect to publish the findings of this review in February 2002.

The Disability Services Research Partnership is undertaking a study of good practice in work preparation that will include lessons from international research. This project is expected to run until March 2002.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the report of the British Society for Rehabilitation Medicine "Vocational Rehabilitation—The Way Forward". [20800]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* We welcome the contribution of the British Society for Rehabilitation Medicine to the debate on how to keep those people with an illness or disability in touch with the labour market and to reduce the numbers claiming incapacity benefit. We have fed ideas from the report into the Job Retention and Rehabilitation Pilots, which are in the final stages of design.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what studies he has conducted into the cost-efficiency of *(a)* early and *(b)* interim (i) rehabilitation and (ii) work preparation after (A) trauma, (B) illness and (C) degenerative conditions of employees. [20799]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* In 2002 Job Retention and Rehabilitation Pilots will be implemented which will help people in work affected by the onset of a long-term illness or disability. These pilots will test the effectiveness of intervening early with work focused help provided by health, employment and other agencies. The pilots will focus especially on people who complete six weeks on statutory sick pay, and who at that stage are at risk of not working again.

The evaluation of the Job Retention and Rehabilitation Pilots will provide information on the cost effectiveness of a range of interventions aimed at maintaining in work people in the early stages of a potentially long-term illness or disability.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to improve liaison with *(a)* the Department of Health and *(b)* relevant agencies in connection with the delivery of (i) vocational rehabilitation and (ii) occupational health services. [20803]

Mr. Nicholas Brown [holding answer 6 December 2001]: Ministers from both Departments expect to meet soon to discuss possible arrangements for joint working to take forward work on vocational rehabilitation.

We have also been working closely with the Health and Safety Executive and Health Development Agency and we have had discussions with a number of representative organisations, companies and individuals.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has for *(a)* establishing a centre of excellence for and *(b)* disseminating good practice in vocational rehabilitation. [20804]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* We have examined existing vocational rehabilitation services in the UK and it is apparent that some of the work being undertaken is of high quality. We are looking for ways to make best use of this work and centres of excellence are one of the options being considered. Disseminating best practice is key to developing such complex strategies, and we expect the Job Retention and Rehabilitation Pilots to inform us about what works, and at what cost and why. We are still looking at how a possible UK vocational rehabilitation strategy might be structured and the organisations that will be involved.

Disability Employment Advisers

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of changes in the workload of disability employment advisers; and what plans he has to improve resources for this activity. [20801]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* Over the past year Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) have been affected by two major developments. The new deal for disabled people network of job brokers was launched in July this year and a full network was in place by September. The Access to Work (AtW) Process Review has led to the setting up of regional AtW business centres. The AtW role previously carried out in many regions by DEAs is now delivered through specialist AtW Advisers. These changes mean that DEAs are able to place a greater focus on helping disabled people claiming jobseeker's allowance and activities such as placing, assessment and advisory work with individuals and employers.

These changes, together with the radical modernisation programme being introduced through Jobcentre Plus, will help ensure a major overall improvement in the service provided to disabled people.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to improve training of disability employment advisers with particular reference to developments in *(a)* medical practice and *(b)* assistive technologies. [20802]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The training needs of both Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) and Access to Work (AtW) advisers are regularly reviewed and changes made where necessary.

DEAs focus on helping disabled people get or retain work and develop close links with health professionals, including GPs and occupational health workers. The information DEAs obtain from health professionals is used to help identify what employment might be suitable for the individual. This is based on what a person can do and what they might be capable of, with appropriate support or training, and also any continuing medication needs that need to be taken into account in agreeing goals.

AtW advisers attached to the new AtW business centres are able to use and pool their knowledge and expertise, and have access to expert external advice and assessment of need in relation to assistive technologies.

Departmental Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what was *(a)* the total expenditure of his Department and its agencies and *(b)* the total expenditure on counter-fraud work within his Department and its agencies in the last year for which figures are available. [21734]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on the Department's total expenditure is provided in Table 4 of the 2001–02 Departmental Report.

The Department set out its strategy for tackling fraud and error in the paper 'A New Contract for Welfare: Safeguarding Social Security' (Cm4276) published on 23 March 1999. The overall aim of the strategy is to have a benefit system which is secure from first claim to final payment.

The implementation of this strategy means that anti-fraud focus is integral to the work of the Department, as is dealing with the wider agenda of error and incorrectness in benefit payments. It is therefore not possible to account for the cost of anti-fraud work separately.

Remploy

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on progress in implementing the Remploy 21 board strategy for business development. [21517]

Maria Eagle: We welcome the progress being made in implementing the Remploy 21 strategy. We have been encouraged by Remploy's ability to adapt its business and take advantage of new opportunities, for instance in white goods recycling and call centre services. We also welcome the new emphasis on learning and development and the very encouraging increase in the numbers of disabled people being helped to progress to unsupported work outside Remploy.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions he has had with trade unions in connection with *(a)* delivery of the Remploy 21 strategy and *(b)* partnership working with management to deliver agreed objectives for that business. [21518]

Maria Eagle: None. Remploy is responsible for all discussions with its trades unions on its future strategy.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of people who became newly entitled for the 2000–01 winter fuel payment but did not make a claim before the cut-off date. [21935]

Mr. McCartney: According to our estimate about 1.5 million people could have been entitled to claim winter fuel payments in 2000–01 for the first time, and about 1 million have been paid.

It is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of the numbers who have not claimed because the estimate of those newly eligible was based on sample data. It is up to the individual, where a claim is necessary, to decide whether or not to make that claim.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of people who became newly entitled for the 2001–02 winter fuel payment and made a claim before 21 September. [21934]

Mr. McCartney: Our estimate is that some 500,000 people could be newly entitled to winter fuel payments in 2001–02. Of this figure, at least 255,000 are being paid automatically. By 21 September, 170,000 claims had been received. This figure had risen to 195,000 by 30 November.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of eligible people who have not received backdated winter fuel payments for the first three years of the scheme and the value of such payments. [21937]

Mr. McCartney: An estimated 1.9 million people were eligible for backdated payments for the first three years of the scheme. Around 1.2 million payments have now been made.

It is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of the numbers of unclaimed backdated payments, because the estimate of those eligible was based on sample data. There is no time limit on claiming backdated payments.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what is the estimated saving to the Exchequer from those who were newly entitled to the 2000–01 winter fuel payment and did not claim before the cut-off date. [21936]

Mr. McCartney: It is not possible to estimate reliably the value of unclaimed winter fuel payments for this group, because the estimate of those newly eligible was based on sample data. It is up to the individual, where a claim is necessary, to decide whether or not to make that claim.

Passported Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if recipients of the guarantee credit will be entitled to the same passported benefits as recipients of income support. [21651]

Mr. McCartney: Subject to the agreement of the devolved Administrations and parliamentary scrutiny of the State Pension Credit Bill and the new Tax Credits Bill, we propose that recipients of the guarantee credit should be entitled to the same passported benefits as recipients of income support.

Minimum Funding Requirement

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the time limits for scheme minimum funding requirements. [21442]

Mr. McCartney: The minimum funding requirement (MFR) was introduced from April 1997, and requires pension schemes to which it applies to correct underfunding within specified periods. During the transitional period, which ends on 5 April 2002, schemes which are underfunded on the MFR basis have until 5 April 2003 to bring funding up to 90 per cent. of the MFR level, and until 5 April 2007 to bring funding up to 100 per cent. of the MFR level.

We are currently consulting on a set of draft regulations which will introduce changes to the current MFR in advance of its replacement. One of the proposed changes will extend these periods to allow three years for schemes to reach the 90 per cent. level, and 10 years to reach the 100 per cent. level. The consultation ends on 10 December, and we plan to introduce new arrangements before April next year.

Pay Gender Gap

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the pay gender gap; what measures he has taken to address the issue; and if he will make a statement. [16871]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 22 November 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

The pay gap is at its lowest ever, and has halved since the introduction of the Equal Pay Act 1970. The new Earnings Survey 2000 indicates that women currently earn 81 pence for every pound a man earns.

Earlier this year the Government asked Denise Kingsmill to examine and report on possible measures to improve women's employment prospects and so reduce the pay gap. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office and I welcome this report, published on 5 December, which examines non-legislative and cost effective measures to improve women's employment prospects and participation in the labour market and to achieve greater equality of pay.

A number of Government initiatives are already under way to tackle this important issue, including key elements of the Employment Bill. The Government's full response to the 14 recommendations made in the Deputy Competition Commissioner's report is available in the Libraries of the House.

Bereavement Benefits

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on new bereavement benefits; what efforts have been made to publicise this benefit to the public; and under what circumstances someone would be eligible for the benefit. [20962]

Malcolm Wicks: Bereavement Benefits were introduced on 9 April 2001 and are available to both men and women for the first time. They concentrate the help available where and when it is needed most, on immediate needs and on families with children. Entitlement is based on the National Insurance record of the deceased spouse.

Since March 2000 the Department has issued leaflets on the new bereavement benefits to doctors' surgeries, Post Offices and benefit advisers. Articles explaining the new benefits were placed in a variety of magazines prior to their introduction in April 2001. In addition, to ensure that as many men as possible were able to claim Widowed Parent's Allowance from the outset, the Department identified over 11,000 potential male beneficiaries from the Child Benefit computer system and sent them claim forms in March 2001.

Tax Credits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much of the proposed expenditure on the pension credit in 2003–04 is attributable to *(a)* the guarantee credit and *(b)* the savings credit. [21099]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* It is estimated that our proposals for the Pension Credit will increase benefit expenditure by approximately £1 billion in 2003–04 when Pension Credit is introduced in October 2003. This expenditure is in addition to the expenditure of approximately £2¼ billion on the Minimum Income Guarantee which has been forecast for the same period.

Of the additional expenditure of £1 billion: approximately £220 million is attributable to the changes to Housing and Council Tax Benefits; approximately £450 million is attributable to the savings credit; and, the remainder is attributable to the other proposed changes such as the way in which capital is treated.

Savings Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate (1) the annual cost of extending entitlement to the savings credit to all those aged 60 years or over; [21104]

(2) the number of pensioners who would gain if the lower age limit for eligibility for the savings credit were reduced to 60 years. [21650]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* No.

As our response to the consultation exercise "The Pension Credit—the Government's proposals" makes clear, the qualifying age for the savings credit has been set at age 65 because we are required by law to treat men and women in the same way. Age 65 is the first point at which the state pension, including the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme, is available to both men and women. So this is the earliest point at which the savings reward can be paid without discrimination.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assumptions he proposes to make about the increases in claimants' pensions during the period between an initial pension credit claim and a routine reassessment of that claim. [21649]

Mr. McCartney: We propose to automatically uprate the pension credit each year taking into account changes in the state and non-state pensions the pensioner normally has during the five year assessed income period. The calculation will be based on information provided by the pensioner at the start of the award.

Severe Disability Allowance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate (1) the cost of abolishing the rule which withdraws severe disability premium from those who are cared for by someone who is receipt of ICA; [16765]

(2) the number of people who would benefit from abolishing the rule which withdraws severe disability premium from those who are cared for by someone who is in receipt of ICA. [16766]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 21 November 2001]:* The information is in the table:

Estimated cost and potential gainers in the event of a change to regulations

Benefit	*Costs (£ million per annum)*	*Potential gainers*
Income Support (including Jobseeker's Allowance (income based))	70	35,000
Housing Benefit	5	10,000
Council Tax Benefit	less than 2.5	10,000
Total	75	—

Notes:

1. The costs and potential gainers have been estimated from a Policy Simulation Model which models the benefit rules in 2001–02.
2. The estimates are based on data taken from the 1999–2000 Family Resources Survey, uprated to 2001–02 prices, benefit and earnings levels.
3. Costs are rounded to the nearest £5 million except for Council Tax Benefit where the cost would be less than £2.5 million. Potential gainers are rounded to the nearest 5,000. Costs and gainers include estimates for people who would become newly entitled to the income-related benefits in the event of such a change.
4. Potential gainers cannot be summed to a total because of overlap across the different benefits.
5. The estimates are based on small sample sizes and are therefore subject to a degree of uncertainty.

Working Time Directive

35. **Bob Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in the EU on the working time directive. [19176]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

None.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Meetings (Minutes)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish in the *Official Report* the guidance available to civil servants minuting meetings between Ministers and others. [21357]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The Civil Service Code requires all civil servants to undertake their official duties with integrity, impartiality and honesty. This applies to all activities including the minuting of ministerial meetings.

Royal Succession

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will amend the Act of Settlement 1700 to allow a non-protestant to succeed to the throne. [21537]

The Prime Minister: The Government have always stood firm against discrimination in all its forms and will continue to do so. We have no immediate plans to legislate in this area.

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will introduce legislation to repeal the Royal Marriages Act 1772. [21536]

The Prime Minister: There are no plans to do so at present.

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will take steps to ensure that succession to the throne is henceforth based on primogeniture irrespective of gender. [21534]

The Prime Minister: There are no plans to legislate in this area at present.

Senior Salaries Review Body

Ian Lucas: To ask the Prime Minister what the revised terms of reference of the Senior Salaries Review Body are. [22329]

The Prime Minister: The terms of reference of the Senior Salaries Review Body have been revised as follows to allow the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the National Assembly for Wales and the Greater London Authority to ask for advice on the pay, pensions and allowances of their members and office holders.

The Review Body on Senior Salaries provides independent advice to the Prime Minister, the Lord Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Defence on the remuneration of holders of judicial office; senior civil servants; senior officers of the armed forces; and other such public appointments as may from time to time be specified.

The Review Body also advises the Prime Minister from time to time on the pay and pensions of Members of Parliament and their allowances; on Peers' allowances; and on the pay, pensions and allowances of Ministers and others whose pay is determined by the Ministerial and Other Salaries Act 1975. If asked to do so by the Presiding Officer and the First Minister of the Scottish Parliament jointly; or by the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly; or by the Presiding Officer of the National Assembly for Wales; or by the Mayor of London and Chair of the Greater London Assembly jointly; the Review Body also from time to time advises those bodies on the pay, pensions and allowances of their members and office holders.

In reaching its recommendations, the Review Body is to have regard to the following considerations:

> "the need to recruit, retain and motivate suitably able and qualified people to exercise their different responsibilities;
>
> Government policies for improving the public services including the requirement on Departments to meet the output targets for the delivery of departmental services;
>
> the funds available to Departments as set out in the Government's departmental expenditure limits;
>
> the Government's inflation target."

In making recommendations, the Review Body shall consider any factors that the Government and other witnesses may draw to its attention. In particular it shall have regard to:

> "differences in terms and conditions of employment between the public and private sectors and between the remit groups, taking account of relative job security and the value of benefits in kind;
>
> changes in national pay systems, including flexibility and the reward of success; and job weight in differentiating the remuneration of particular posts; and
>
> the need to maintain broad linkage between the remuneration of the three main remit groups, while allowing sufficient flexibility to take account of the circumstances of each group."

The Review Body may make other recommendations as it sees fit:

> "to ensure that, as appropriate, the remuneration of the remit groups relates coherently to that of their subordinates, encourages efficiency and effectiveness, and takes account of the different management and organisational structures that may be in place from time to time;
>
> to relate reward to performance where appropriate;
>
> to maintain the confidence of those covered by the Review Body's remit that its recommendations have been properly and fairly determined; and
>
> to ensure that the remuneration of those covered by the remit is consistent with the Government's equal opportunities policy."

The Review Body will take account of the evidence it receives about wider economic considerations and the affordability of its recommendations.

Euro

Mr. Weir: To ask the Prime Minister if the results of a future referendum on UK membership of the euro will be broken down by each *(a)* nation and *(b)* region of the UK. [21779]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 2 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 883W.

Stephen Byers

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will investigate the circumstances surrounding the decision taken by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the right hon. Member for

Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), to expend departmental funds to pursue an action against Associated Newspapers and Simon and Schuster. [21741]

The Prime Minister: The circumstances are set out in the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 646W.

House of Lords

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to require persons raised to the peerage on his recommendations to serve as Ministers in the House of Lords, to relinquish their peerage when they cease to be Ministers of the Crown; and if he will make a statement. [22284]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 626W.

SCOTLAND

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many, and what proportion of letters received by the Department from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July were replied to in *(a)* under 15, *(b)* under 20, *(c)* under 30, *(d)* under 40 and *(e)* over 40 working days. [22006]

Mrs. Liddell: Further to my written answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 92W, six letters were replied to in under 15 days; one in under 20 days; and two in under 30 days.

Budd Report

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment she has made of the implications for private clubs and societies in Scotland of the proposals in the Budd report. [21538]

Mr. Foulkes: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport have recently carried out a public consultation on the Budd report. During this consultation, a number of representations were made about the recommendation in the report that jackpot machines should be removed from private clubs. The Government will put forward their proposals on the law relating to gaming once we have fully considered the points made in the consultation. The Scotland Office, and the Scottish Executive, are keeping in close touch with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in this area.

Fishing

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* licensed fishing boats and *(b)* people employed directly in offshore fishing there were in Scotland in each of the past 10 years. [21539]

Mrs. Liddell: This is a devolved matter, for which the Scottish Executive is responsible.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

County Court Judgments

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many orders were made in county courts in England setting aside county court judgments in the last three years; and how many of the judgments had been obtained by *(a)* Government Departments, *(b)* utilities and *(c)* others. [20938]

Mr. Wills: Specific figures concerning the setting aside of county court judgments are not collected in a way that makes them readily identifiable. Such information will be held within the individual court records and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Todd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received in 2001 from *(a)* the Countryside Agency and *(b)* the rural advocate on proposed closures of magistrates courts; and if he will make a statement. [21451]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department has received one representation from *(a)* the Countryside Agency, and two representations from *(b)* the rural advocate, on proposed closures of magistrates courts.

It is the Government's policy that decisions concerning the number, location and future of magistrates courts are for each magistrates courts committee to determine, in consultation with its local paying authority or authorities.

Parliamentary Questions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by the Lord Chancellor's Department were the subject of a holding answer in the last three Sessions of Parliament. [22022]

Ms Rosie Winterton: According to departmental records, the percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by the Lord Chancellor's Department which received a holding answer, during the parliamentary Sessions 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01, was 7.8 per cent. The figures for each parliamentary Session are provided in the table.

Percentage of named day PQs receiving a holding reply in the last three parliamentary Sessions

Session	*Number of PQs*	*Number of named day PQs*	*Number of holding replies*	*Percentage*
1998–99[1]	925	159	51	5.5
1999–2000[2]	837	206	74	8.8
2000–01[3]	402	131	44	10.9

[1] December 1998 to November 1999; sitting days 149

[2] November 1999 to November 2000; sitting days 170

[3] December 2000 to May 2001; sitting days 83

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Expenditure

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the total expenditure was on *(a)* advertising, *(b)* polling, *(c)* focus groups, *(d)* design consultants, *(e)* caterers, *(f)* production of departmental publications and *(g)* photographs/photographers by his Department for each year since 1995 in (i) cash and (ii) real terms; what was (A) the annual percentage increase in spending on each category and (B) spending on each category as a percentage of the total departmental running costs; and if he will make a statement. [6934]

Mr. MacShane: The known expenditure by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the categories listed by the hon. Member was:

Table 1: Expenditure on each category

£

	Advertising	*Design consultants*	*Publications*	*Photographs*
1995–96	0	547,193	2,188,776	not known
		(639,508)	(2,558,036)	
1996–97	0	366,383	1,465,534	not known
		(415,078)	(1,660,313)	
1997–98	54,038	687,199	2,748,800	330,634
	(59,391)	(755,270)	(3,021,084)	(363,385)
1998–99	1,029,850	364,640	1,458,564	227,040
	(1,101,033)	(389,844)	(1,559,380)	(242,733)
1999–2000	54,498	329,833	1,319,336	228,074
	(56,877)	(344,232)	(1,376,931)	(238,031)
2000–01	52,950	355,374	1,421,497	235,225
	(53,249)	(364,258)	(1,421,498)	(241,106)

Note:

Figures in brackets show expenditure in real terms relative to 2001–02 prices.

Table 2: Annual percentage increases in spending on each category

Year	*Advertising*	*Design consultants*	*Publishing*	*Photographs*
1995–96 to 1996–97	n/a	–33	–33	not known
1996–97 to 1997–98	n/a	+88	+88	not known
1997–98 to 1998–99	+1,906	–47	–47	–32
1998–99 to 1999–2000	–1,890	–10	–9	+0.5
1999–2000 to 2000–01	–4	+8	+8	+3

Note:

Percentages are rounded.

Table 3: Expenditure as a percentage of total FCO running costs

Year	*Advertising*	*Design consultants*	*Publishing*	*Photographs*
1995–96	n/a	0.13	0.5	not known
1996–97	n/a	0.09	0.35	not known
1997–98	0.013	0.16	0.66	0.08
1998–99	0.235	0.08	0.34	0.052
1999–2000	0.015	0.09	0.35	0.062
2000–01	0.012	0.08	0.33	0.055

Note:

Percentages are rounded.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office incurred no expenditure on 'polling' or 'focus groups' in the years concerned.

Catering expenditure is not separately identifiable in the FCO accounting system: to ascertain the figures would involve disproportionate effort and cost. The figures for publications include expenditure on public diplomacy, consular publications and annual reports. In addition to the expenditure identified, there was minor additional expenditure in London and overseas in the years concerned. This cannot be ascertained without disproportionate effort and cost.

The figures quoted for photographs were spent on still photographs used to promote Britain overseas; additional expenditure was incurred in the years concerned on photographs used in publications and exhibitions here in the UK. It would require disproportionate effort and cost to establish this expenditure.

The Government are committed to using only whatever channel is judged to be the most cost-effective way to deliver the publicity necessary to support the implementation of policy. Paid advertising is only resorted to after careful consideration of the cost-benefits. The figures for advertising include expenditure on consular publicity but exclude expenditure on advertising for recruitment, as identifying this expenditure would entail disproportionate effort and cost. The advertising figure for 1998–99 includes £1 million spent on a consular advertising campaign in the run-up to the World Cup 1998 in France.

Fair Trade

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what is the value of fairly traded *(a)* tea and *(b)* coffee used in his Department in each of the last five years; [17560]

(2) what fairly traded products, other than tea and coffee, have been purchased by his Department in each of the last five years; and what was their value. [17561]

Mr. MacShane: We do not keep records of purchases that fall into the fair trade category. Much of the tea and coffee consumed in the Department is purchased by individuals for their own consumption.

Renunciation Certificates (British Citizenship)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on the service provided by the High Commission in Harare to those seeking certificates of renunciation of British citizenship. [20179]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The British High Commission in Harare has received three representations on renunciation—two from individuals, and one in the form of a petition signed by a number of individuals. It has also received thousands of inquiries—by telephone, fax, letter and personal call—about the procedure for renunciation.

The British High Commission in Harare has widely publicised the procedures for renunciation, through the Zimbabwean press, its website, through the Consular Section and in briefings. The FCO has set up a procedure with the Home Office to enable dual nationals for the UK and Zimbabwe to speedily divest themselves of British citizenship in order to comply with the 6 January 2002 deadline set by the Zimbabwean Government in the recent amendments to Zimbabwean nationality law. This means that certificates of renunciation can now be issued within 10 working days.

ABM Treaty

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy on the ABM Treaty. [20507]

Mr. Bradshaw: The future of the anti-ballistic missile treaty is first and foremost a matter for the US and Russia as parties to the treaty. We welcome the US and Russian commitment to ongoing discussions on strategic issues, including both offensive and defensive systems. We are encouraged by this, and their declared mutual intention to make real reductions in nuclear forces, confirmed by President Bush and President Putin at their recent meeting in the US.

Mr. Jeremy Parks

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Government have made to the Colombian Government asking them *(a)* to bring to justice those involved in the death of Mr. Jeremy Parks and *(b)* to establish the facts behind his death. [20755]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are liaising closely with the judicial authorities in Colombia. The tragic death of Mr. Jeremy Parks is being investigated by the Technical Investigation Corps of the Fiscalia (The Prosecutor's Office), under the supervision of a magistrate. This is the normal procedure in cases of violent or unexpected death. The magistrate's report has not yet been finalised.

Terrorist Attacks (Israel)

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of how many Israelis have been killed by terrorist attacks in the nine months from 7 March; and how many were killed in such attacks in the nine months preceding that date. [20767]

Mr. Bradshaw: Casualty figures can be unreliable. Deaths and injuries are sometimes included which are not necessarily the direct result of violence. Israeli Government figures show that approximately 65 Israelis were killed in the six months before 7 March, and 166 since that date.

Tracey Housel

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the State of Georgia, USA, regarding the proposed execution of Tracey Housel; and if he will make a statement. [20855]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have taken and will take all the steps we properly can to ensure that Mr. Housel, a dual US/British national on death row in Georgia, USA, is not executed. The FCO is in close contact with Mr. Housel's legal team and the Georgia authorities are aware of our opposition to the death penalty.

Mr. Housel's final appeal is due to be heard by the US Supreme Court early next year. International law prevents us intervening in the judicial procedures of another sovereign state. However, if the court rejects Mr. Housel's appeal, we will immediately urge the Georgian authorities to commute his sentence to a term of imprisonment.

Gibraltar

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for Gibraltar to be *(a)* a constituency and *(b)* integrated into UK constituencies for the purposes of voting in the 2004 European parliamentary elections. [21763]

Peter Hain: We are committed to extending the European parliamentary franchise to Gibraltar in time for the 2004 European Parliament elections and we are seeking legislative time in order to introduce domestic legislation for this purpose. We have taken no decisions on the modalities.

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what joint statements with the Spanish Government were made regarding the sovereignty of Gibraltar during the talks in Barcelona on 20 November. [R] [21547]

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria he will use to assess success in talks with Spain over the future status of Gibraltar. [21663]

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further aspects of self-Government for Gibraltar have been discussed during talks with *(a)* Spain and *(b)* the Government of Gibraltar since the start of the Brussels Process. [21544]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 187W. A copy of the joint press communiqué issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs when they met under the Brussels Process in Barcelona on 20 November has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the action he has taken in respect of the resolution on Gibraltar passed at the European Council in Gothenburg. [R] [21423]

Peter Hain: The Gothenburg European Council conclusions state that

> "The European Council recalled the importance of the Single Sky initiative and noted that contacts are under way between the relevant member states on the question of its territorial application. It hopes that these contacts will produce early agreement".

The UK Government came to such an agreement with Spain enabling the Commission to bring forward its proposals on 12 October.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) on 1 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 811W.

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions were held with the Government of Gibraltar about the future status of Gibraltar before the date for the talks under the Brussels process was agreed. [R] [21424]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I discussed the resumption of talks under the Brussels Process and issues concerning the future of Gibraltar with the Chief Minister of Gibraltar before the date for talks under the Brussels Process was agreed. In addition normal official contacts continued throughout this period.

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the laws by which Gibraltar is a member of the European Union allow for its inhabitants to have access to health and education services in other European Union countries. [R] [21418]

Peter Hain: Yes.

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what conditions Spain is attaching to removing Gibraltar's suspension from the EU *(a)* Single Sky Agreement and *(b)* Regulation on Aviation Security. [R] [21420]

Peter Hain: The terms of the clause which the Government have agreed with Spain should be inserted in the Single Sky and Aviation Security Regulations provided that the application of the measures to Gibraltar Airport will be suspended until the arrangements in the joint declaration made by the Foreign Ministers of Spain and the United Kingdom on 2 December 1987 have come into operation. Neither measure has yet been adopted by the Council and the European Parliament.

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whether the laws by which Gibraltar is a member of the European Union allow for the free movement of *(a)* goods and services and *(b)* people between Gibraltar and the rest of the European Union; [R] [21419]

(2) what changes will be required in the laws of Gibraltar for it to achieve full rights of membership of the European Union. [R] [21421]

Peter Hain: The EC Treaty applies to Gibraltar by virtue of Article 299(4) TEC. But certain provisions of the Treaty do not apply by virtue of the UK's Act of Accession.

Article 28 of the Act of Accession excludes Gibraltar from the Common Agriculture and Fisheries policies and provisions on VAT. Gibraltar is also excluded from the Common Commercial policy and the Community Customs Territory and, in consequence, Community rules on customs and free movement of goods do not apply to Gibraltar.

The Treaty would have to be amended in order to revoke the derogations specified above and apply the EU Treaties fully to Gibraltar. Legislative changes would also be needed to give effect to any new Treaty provisions in Gibraltar.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects Spain to allow direct flights to Gibraltar from airports outside the UK to overfly its airspace. [R] [21545]

Peter Hain: We are not aware of any Spanish policy to refuse to allow civilian aircraft flying to Gibraltar from airports outside the UK to overfly Spanish airspace. As was made clear in the memorandum submitted to the Foreign Affairs Committee on 30 March 1999, in response to the Committee's Fourth Report, under Article 1 of the 1944 International Air Services Transit Agreement to which both Spain and the UK are party, aircraft of other contracting parties performing scheduled air services are granted the privilege of overflight. A right of overflight is accorded to aircraft performing non-scheduled (charter) services under Article 5 of the 1944 convention on International Civil Aviation to which both Spain and the UK are also party.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether legislation giving the people of Gibraltar the right to vote in the 2004 European parliamentary elections will require the *(a)* unanimous approval and *(b)* approval of the other member states of the European Union. [21530]

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if European legislation will be required to ensure that the people of Gibraltar have the right to vote in the 2004 European elections in addition to domestic legislation. [21662]

Peter Hain: We are committed to extending the EP franchise to Gibraltar in time for the 2004 European Parliament elections. The Government have now decided to seek legislative time in order to introduce domestic legislation for this purpose. The content of this legislation is a matter for the UK alone: it does not require the approval of other member states. There will be no additional EU legislation. Consultations are already underway between the Government and the Government of Gibraltar on the practical arrangements.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when consultations will begin with the Government of Gibraltar to ensure that the people of Gibraltar have the right to vote in the 2004 European parliamentary elections. [21531]

Peter Hain: We have been in contact with the Government of Gibraltar and are seeking an early meeting to establish exactly what will be required, in terms of legislative and practical arrangements, to ensure that the European Parliamentary franchise is extended to Gibraltar in time for the 2004 elections.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what jurisdiction the International Court of Justice has over the status of Gibraltar. [21747]

Peter Hain: Any dispute between the United Kingdom and Spain with regard to the status of Gibraltar can only be referred to the International Court of Justice with the agreement of both sides. Spain does not accept the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice with regard to Gibraltar.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to amend the Brussels Process to allow the Government of Gibraltar a veto over changes in the status of Gibraltar. [21706]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to my statement in Westminster Hall on 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 88–92WH. The Government will stand by the constitutional commitment to Gibraltar set out in the preamble to the Order in Council that established the 1969 Constitution. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State reiterated this in response to a question from the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) on 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 822–23.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if a date for further talks with Spain under the Brussels Process has been arranged; and if he will make a statement. [21707]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 312W.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last requested the Spanish Government to produce evidence of smuggling between Gibraltar and Spain; and what was the outcome of that request. [21434]

Peter Hain: We have repeatedly asked the Spanish Government to make available to us any current evidence that they have of cross-border smuggling. HMG with the Government of Gibraltar will investigate any such evidence.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes in the status of Gibraltar within the European Union are being considered [21435]

Peter Hain: Our objective is to build a secure, stable and prosperous future for Gibraltar, with greater self-government for the territory and better relations with Spain. If change in the status of Gibraltar within the EU could help advance these objectives, we are prepared to consider this.

Spain

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last spoke to his counterpart in Spain; and what was the subject of discussion. [R] [21548]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's last formal meeting with his Spanish counterpart was on 20 November 2001, as part of the Brussels Process talks on Gibraltar. However, they also meet regularly in the margins of other EU and international meetings, such as the 6–7 December North Atlantic Council, to discuss a range of foreign policy issues.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many, and what proportion of letters received by the Department from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July were replied to in *(a)* under 15, *(b)* under 20, *(c)* under 30, *(d)* under 40 and *(e)* over 40 working days. [21996]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 88W.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Departmental Staff Costs

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will estimate total annual staff costs for her Department and its agencies by nation and region of the UK; and if she will make a statement. [6859]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The estimated staff costs for the Department for Education and Skills by region of the UK are as set out. The figures reflect the machinery of government changes that took place following the June 2001 general election, including the transfer to the Cabinet Office of responsibility for the Government Offices for the Regions. The Department does not have staff outside England.

Region	*£ million*
North East	11
North West	10
Yorkshire and Humberside	29
London	58

Citizenship Lessons

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers were qualified to teach citizenship lessons in secondary schools in September. [8406]

Mr. Timms: This information has not been collected centrally. Citizenship does not become part of the secondary schools curriculum until September 2002.

Teacher Statistics

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers of non-EU nationality are employed in British schools. [8835]

Mr. Timms: This information is not collected centrally.

Teacher Recruitment (East Sussex)

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers have been recruited from overseas to fill teaching posts in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in East Sussex in the past year. [9860]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not held centrally.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on *(a)* the margin of failure and *(b)* the reason for failure to meet the public service agreement target of a 2 per cent. reduction in unit price per work-based trainee in 1999–2000 over 1998–99. [14053]

John Healey: The unit price per work-based trainee in 1999–2000 was £2,933 compared with £2,734 in 1998–99. This represents a real terms increase of 4.7 per cent.

Departmental plans for 1999–2000 were on the basis of a 2 per cent. overall efficiency gain. The consequential unit price was passed out for local negotiations to establish the actual local unit prices, within training and enterprise councils' agreed flexibilities. The range of young people being helped and the mix of occupational training delivered however also influenced the overall unit price. In 1999–2000, the average numbers on higher value and quality modern apprenticeships were 10 per cent. higher than in 1998–99 and numbers on higher value and quality national traineeships (now foundation modern apprenticeships) increased threefold. The result of negotiations and the factors for 1999–2000 was that training and enterprise councils delivered a more expensive menu of training than in the previous year and the overall unit price reflects this.

Student Finances

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much her Department has spent per student on *(a)* loans, *(b)* grants and *(c)* other maintenance support in each year since 1990. [16188]

Margaret Hodge: The table shows how much the Department has spent per student on average on higher education student loans, grants and other maintenance support in each academic year 1990–91 to 1999–2000 (latest data available).

Average expenditure per student on student loans in the United Kingdom; average expenditure per student on fees and maintenance in England and Wales [1,2]: Academic years 1990–91 to 1999–2000

Academic year	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Student loans[2]										
Total value of loans (£ million)	69.9	139.2	226.5	316.7	538.8	700.8	877.2	941.0	1,233.5	1,823.0
Average loan per student[3]	390	530	660	740	1,040	1,250	1,490	1,530	1,870	2,520
Student Fees[4]										
Total fee expenditure (£ million)	843.8	1,281.3	1,536.6	1,549.2	970.5	984.3	977.5	986.9	678.8	555.5
Average fee per student (£)[3]	1,700	2,250	2,310	2,100	1,250	1,250	1,250	1,260	870	700
Student maintenance grants[1,5]										
Total maintenance expenditure (£ million)	713.4	859.7	1,045.8	1,202.0	1,158.6	1,074.8	948.2	931.6	782.8	347.5
Average maintenance grant per student[3]	1,480	1,550	1,610	1,670	1,520	1,390	1,240	1,210	1,030	1,150
Additional allowances/grants/loans[6,7,8]										
Total expenditure on additional allowances/ grants/loans	79.2	104.2	137.4	173.6	196.5	190.7	179.3	171.2	164.9	164.1
Average additional allowance/grant/loan[3]	330	360	400	420	460	450	440	450	470	420

[1] Totals include both students funded under the mandatory scheme and those funded under the new student support scheme. New student support arrangements were introduced from academic year 1998–99. New students in 1998–99 received support for maintenance through income-assessed grants (comprising about a quarter of the support available) and non income-assessed student loans (comprising about three quarters of the support available). (The ratio for existing students is roughly 50 per cent. income-assessed grant and 50 per cent. non income-assessed student loan). In 1999–2000, students who entered higher education from 1998–99 onwards received support for maintenance entirely through loans, of which three quarters of the value was non income-assessed. Loans made under these arrangements are repayable on an income contingent basis.

[2] Student loans are available to eligible students normally domiciled in the United Kingdom. From 1999–2000 student loans have been made available to those aged 50 to 54 who plan to return to work after studying. A time series of data for England and Wales domiciled students is not available.

[3] Average loan, fees, maintenance grant and additional allowance/grant/loan rounded to the nearest £10.

[4] Most new students in 1998–99 and 1999–2000 were expected to contribute up to £1,000 and £1,025 respectively to their fees depending on family income.

[5] Maintenance shown in 1999–2000 relates to mandatory awards scheme students only.

[6] Up to academic year 1999–2000 data on additional allowances/grants/loans are included in the maintenance grants information, totalling will therefore include some double counting. 1999–2000 data relating to mandatory awards scheme students will also be included in maintenance grants, however those relating to students funded under the support scheme will not, as these students received support for maintenance entirely through loans.

[7] Students may receive more than one additional allowance/grant/loan. The average figures shown will include an element of double counting of student numbers. The profiles of additional allowances/grants/loans have not remained constant over the time period and this accounts for some of the variation in the average values shown.

[8] For student support scheme students, grants for living costs are no longer available except for some limited allowances, eg for students with dependants; single parent students; and disabled students. Grants for students with dependants and single parents students will be income-assessed but the disabled students allowance will not.

Source:

The Student Loans Company; F503G survey of local education authorities.

Student Loans

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what method of auditing applies to the administration of student loans. [19810]

Margaret Hodge: Student loans are paid and administered by the Student Loans Company (SLC). The SLC is a Non-Departmental Public Body. It is also a private limited company, and so subject to external audit. The SLC's external auditors are KPMG. The SLC publishes audited accounts each year in its Annual Report. In addition, as an NDPB, the SLC is required to have an internal audit function which meets the Government Internal Audit Standard (GIAS). The SLC has an audit committee which is chaired by one of its non-executive directors.

Copies of the SLC's Annual Report and Accounts are placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament and are sent to Companies House.

Staff Turnover

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* head teachers and *(b)* university lecturers have left the profession in each of the past five years. [19645]

Margaret Hodge: The available data are given in the following tables.

Head teachers leaving[1] the maintained school sector in England

Heads leaving in year prior to March:	*Number*
1995	1,940
1996	1,900
1997	2,300
1998	2,420
1999[2]	1,490

[1] The figures exclude head teachers who remain in the maintained sector but who step down to a lower grade.

[2] The effect of the change in the Teachers' Pension Scheme as from 31 August 1997 was that many more teachers (including heads) took early retirement in 1997 than in previous years. In the year prior to March 1999, there was a decrease in the number of heads retiring, and an increase in the number remaining in the sector but stepping down to a lower grade.

Full-time, wholly institutionally financed academic staff[1] leaving UK higher education institutions[2]

Academic year	*Leavers*
1995–96	3,800
1996–97	4,770
1997–98	3,930
1998–99	3,910
1999–2000	3,670

[1] Includes staff whose primary employment function is teaching or teaching/research. Staff whose primary function is research are not included.

[2] Staff who moved to other HE institutions, either in the UK or overseas, have not been classed as leavers and are therefore excluded from the table.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the annual staff turnover has been in Further Education colleges in the last five academic years. [20104]

John Healey: The Department does not collect information about the annual rates of staff turnover in the further education sector.

A survey carried out in 2001 on behalf of the Association of Colleges and further education unions, and partly funded by the Department, found that, in 1999–2000, the rate of staff turnover was 10 per cent. for lecturers and managers and 14 per cent. for support staff. We are not aware any comparative figures for earlier years.

University Resources

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information she has collected on growth in research income for universities in *(a)* the sciences and *(b)* the arts over the last five years; and if she will publish the figures for such growth, broken down by department. [19458]

Margaret Hodge: The information requested is laid out in the following table. These figures represent total research income from HEFCE and external sources over five years.

Time series of total research income[1]

Data are for England only

Subject group	*1995–96 (£ million)*	*1996–97 (£ million)*	*1997–98 (£ million)*	*1998–99 (£ million)*	*1999–2000 (£ million)*	*Change in income[2] (Percentage)*
Clinical medicine	463.2	501.0	521.8	562.7	603.6	30.3
Engineering	287.7	298.1	313.8	335.2	338.3	17.6
Sciences	670.1	684.2	737.7	803.9	854.3	27.5
Subjects allied to medicine	130.4	130.6	148.1	165.0	181.2	39.0
Total sciences	1,551.4	1,613.9	1,721.3	1,866.7	1,977.3	27.5
Arts	16.9	20.5	26.8	32.3	38.6	128.9
Education	50.1	50.6	49.0	60.2	62.3	24.4
Humanities	103.2	102.9	107.0	115.3	118.5	14.9
Social sciences	206.2	212.1	224.8	245.9	262.7	27.4
Total arts	376.4	386.1	407.6	453.7	482.2	28.1
Total	1,927.7	2,000.1	2,129.0	2,320.4	2,459.5	27.6

[1] External grants and HEFCE funding

[2] 1995–96 to 1999–2000

Source:

HESA Finance Statistics Returns and planned HEFCE research funding allocations as announced in recurrent grant circulars or as subsequently amended.

Tuition Fees

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total annual public funding is for academic institutions which charge student tuition fees. [19720]

Margaret Hodge: The planned annual public funding for Further and Higher Education in England in 2001–02 is £4,029 million and £5,826[1] million respectively. However the Further Education figure is included within the overall budget for the LSC and it will be for the LSC to decide how to allocate their budget.

[1] Publicly planned funding comprises institutional funding paid via the Higher Education Funding Council for England and tuition fees but excludes public funding from Research Councils, other Government Departments and the National Health Service.

Portable Buildings

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the cost of implementing Statutory Instrument 2718 and the guidance notice relating to portable buildings. [19898]

John Healey *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* Statutory Instrument 2718 is The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Amendment) (England) Order 2001. This order amends the planning guidelines relating to telecommunications masts, and has no relevance to portable buildings. There has thus been no assessment of the cost of implementing this Statutory Instrument.

However, the hon. Member did raise the issue of portable buildings in the debate in the Second Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation on Wednesday 21 November 2001 which considered the Prayer against both Statutory Instrument 2718 and Statutory Instrument 3335, The Building (Amendment) Regulations 2001. The Approved Document to Part L2 of the Building Regulations, which Statutory Instrument 3335 amended, gives guidance on how portable buildings may meet the requirements of Part L2 of the Regulations under the heading "Buildings constructed from sub-assemblies".

There is nothing in the guidance in the Approved Document that indicates that portable buildings will have to be disposed of after five years. It indicates that there are no restrictions at all on portable buildings that are moved from one place to another on the same site. With regard to buildings moved from one site to another the guidance is that a building constructed from external fabric sub-assemblies obtained from other premises or from a stock manufactured before 31 December 2001, would normally be considered to meet the requirement if the fabric thermal resistance or the prospective annual energy use will be no worse than the relevant performance standards given in the 1995 edition of Approved Document L.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what core funding was awarded each year to further education colleges in England from 1995–96, adjusted for inflation; [20692]

(2) what funding was allocated to further education colleges in England from 1995–96, adjusted for inflation. [20693]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* Funding allocated to further education colleges in England from 1995–96 adjusted for inflation is as follows.

Further education funding (2001–02 prices)

£ million

	1995–96 Outturn	*1996–97 Outturn*	*1997–98 Outturn*	*1998–99 Outturn*	*1999–2000 Outturn*	*2000–01 Original plans*	*2001–02 Planned*
Total FE funding cash	3,000.5	3,130.7	3,131.4	3,101.6	3299.8	3,502.1	4,028.5
of which:							
FE core participation funding	3,000.5	3,130.7	3,131.4	3,101.6	3216.4	3,323.1	3,609.5
additional capital grant	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	40.0	70.0	140.0
FE Standards Fund	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	34.9	80.0	165.0
FE Teachers' Pay Initiative	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	65.0
Other additional grants	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.5	29.1	49.0
Total FE funding 2001–02 prices	3,506.5	3,546.7	3,441.3	3,316.0	3,443.7	3,589.7	4,028.5
of which:							
FE core participation funding	3,506.5	3,546.7	3,441.3	3,316.0	3,356.7	3,406.2	3,609.5
additional capital grant	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	41.7	71.8	140.0
FE Standards Fund	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	36.4	82.0	165.0
FE Teachers' Pay Initiative	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	65.0
Other additional grants	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.9	29.8	49.0

Notes:

1. FEFC/LSC administration funding and FE student support funding excluded from all figures.
2. Additional employer contributions excluded (£35 million in 1999–2000 and £60 million in each 2000–01 and 2001–02.
3. Figures up to 2000–01 based on cash resources made available to the FEFC by the Department.
4. Figure for 2001–02 based on planned FE funding included in the Learning and Skills Council resources. Final decision on levels of funding are for the LSC to take.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment he has made of the impact of house prices on the recruitment and retention of further education college staff in the south-east of England. [20742]

John Healey *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* Turnover of staff in the further education (FE) sector in the south-east of England averages 11 per cent. for lecturers and 17 per cent. for support staff. Recruitment and retention difficulties arise from competition from other institutions and the wider economy.

We recognise that staff in the further education sector need to be able to find affordable homes within a reasonable distance from their work place. The average house price in the south-east of England is £161,748 compared with £124,379 for England as a whole. By 2003–04 capital investment in housing will have risen to more than £4 billion compared with planned spending of £1.5 billion in 1997–98. The Government plan to provide 100,000 new or improved homes for low cost renting or ownership over the next three years and to review the planning guidance to local authorities in order to help them to negotiate more affordable housing. Eligibility for loans or cash grants will be dependent on local arrangements.

We have also introduced a number of initiatives aimed at tackling recruitment and retention difficulties in the FE sector: the Teaching Pay Initiative, more than £300 million over the next three years, to reward high calibre teaching staff and create a proper career structure for teaching in the FE sector; and additionally, pilot initiatives such as Golden Hellos, student loan write-offs and training bursaries will all attract new staff to the profession.

Curriculum and Staffing Survey

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if a timetable has been established for the next curriculum and staffing survey; [8838]

(2) when she will answer the question tabled by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough on 18 October, Ref 73. [20827]

Mr. Timms: A timetable has not been established for the next curriculum and staffing survey.

Education Action Zones

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is the total spent by her Department on central *(a)* advertising and marketing and *(b)* administration of education action zones; and what each of these amounts are as a proportion of total departmental expenditure on education action zones. [20829]

Mr. Timms: The Department has spent currently this year £130,000 on publicity for Education Action Zones, which is 0.15 per cent. of the total annual departmental expenditure on Education Action Zones.

The total central administration cost of all Statutory Education Action Zones and Excellence in Cities Action Zones is £577,000. This is the annual running cost budget, which is 0.7 per cent. of the total annual departmental expenditure on education action zones.

Health and Safety

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much her Department has spent on health and safety in the workplace in each year since 1997. [21270]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Separate records are not kept for total annual spend on health and safety in my Department. Most expenditure on statutory and beneficial health and safety issues is subsumed within on-going works programmes covering a wide range of building maintenance and improvement projects.

External Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost was to her Department of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [21261]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Sacred Heart High School, Newcastle

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether she proposes to approve the conventionally financed capital allocation for the Sacred Heart High School, Newcastle. [20292]

John Healey *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The application put forward by Newcastle local education authority on behalf of Sacred Heart High School, is being considered, together with all other applications submitted on behalf of VA schools, against the criteria published as part of the guidance for the 2002–03 Schools Capital Allocation Round.

My noble Friend the Minister for Education in the Lords, who has responsibility for capital funding issues at voluntary aided schools, plans to announce successful projects later this month.

It is not appropriate, therefore, to comment on the likely outcome of an application in advance of the announcement.

Specialist Colleges

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list specialist colleges in the secondary school sector by subject area. [20976]

Mr. Timms: A list of the 685 specialist colleges currently operational, grouped by specialism within each LEA, has been placed in the Library.

Schools (Romford)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools in Romford are not opening for a full five-day week on a regular basis. [21011]

Mr. Timms: My Department is not aware of any schools in Romford that are operating on less than a full five-day week.

Education and Youth Council

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the outcome was of the Education and Youth Council held in Brussels on 29 November; what the Government's position was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [20363]

Margaret Hodge: I represented the UK at the morning (Education) session of this Council meeting; my right hon. Friend the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Minister for Children and Young People) and Jane Davidson AM (Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in Wales) represented the UK at the afternoon (Youth) session.

Education

The Council discussed the follow-up to the report on "Concrete Future Objectives of Education and Training Systems" (presented to the Stockholm European Council in March 2001) and adopted Conclusions setting out a number of principles concerning follow-up as well as a proposal timetable for taking work forward. The UK supported these principles, stressing the need for a coherent approach to work in this and other fields such as lifelong learning.

The Council also discussed co-operation with third countries in the field of higher education, in the context of a Communication from the Commission on that subject.

Ministers adopted without debate a

> "Resolution on the promotion of linguistic diversity and language learning in the framework of the implementation of the objectives of the European Year of Languages 2001";

and an

> "Opinion concerning education and training issues in the proposal for a Council decision on guidelines for member states' employment policies for 2002".

The Council received information from the Commission on its Communication "Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality"; and on the proposal for a

> "Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing the European Year of Education through Sport 2004".

Youth

The Council discussed the recently adopted Commission White Paper "A New Impetus for European Youth." Given the very short time scale since its publication on 21 November 2001, Ministers offered only an initial view of its content. The UK supported the generally positive response to the proposals in the White Paper and endorsed the suggested open method of co-operation as being an appropriate way of taking the policy forward.

Ministers adopted without debate a

> "Resolution on the added value of voluntary activity for young people in the context of the development of Community action on youth."

The Council received information from the Commission on the Evaluation Report of "Youth for Europe" and "European Voluntary Service" Community programmes for the period 1995 to 1999, and from the German delegation on the European Conference "Youth for Tolerance and Democracy" held in Berlin from 21 to 23 October 2001.

A copy of the Council minutes will be placed in the Library in due course.

Pre-Schools (Funding)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on what basis the period of funding of places at privately run pre-schools is set at 33 weeks. [20610]

Margaret Hodge: The 33 week entitlement is a minimum requirement and was decided following advice from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

Private Education

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children between the ages of 5 and 18 years who are domiciled outside the United Kingdom were educated within the private sector for each of the years 1997–98 to 2000–01. [21362]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* Information on pupils who are domiciled outside the United Kingdom and educated within the private sector is not available centrally.

Learning Mentors

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what role learning mentors play in supporting gifted and talented students. [21815]

Mr. Timms: Learning Mentors can help gifted and talented students to overcome barriers to learning, such as bullying, truancy or disaffection. We encourage partnerships to ensure that the different strands of Excellence in Cities are mutually supportive.

14 to 19 Education

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will undertake to publish her Department's consultation paper on 14 to 19 education before relevant clauses of the Education Bill have been considered in Committee. [21856]

Mr. Timms: We set out our outline plans for the development of a more coherent and flexible 14–19 phase of learning in our Green Paper, "Schools—Building on Success" and White Paper, "Schools—Achieving Success". The consultation document on 16–19 organisation and inspection provided further details.

During any Parliamentary debate on these clauses we will ensure that the Committee receives as much relevant information as possible on how the clauses relate to the wider policies on 14–19 learning.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many, and what proportion of letters received by the Department from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July were replied to in *(a)* under 15, *(b)* under 20, *(c)* under 30, *(d)* under 40 and *(e)* over 40 working days. [22008]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Between 20 June and 20 July 2001, the Department for Education and Skills replied to a total of 903 items of Ministerial correspondence. The Department replied:

	Number of replies sent	*Percentage of replies sent*
(a) in 15 working days and under	640	71
(b) in 16–20 working days	133	15
(c) in 21–30 working days	104	11
(d) in 31 working days and over	26	3
Total	903	

Parliamentary Questions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by her Department were the subject of a holding answer in the last three sessions of Parliament. [22011]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The percentages of parliamentary questions tabled to the Department for Education and Employment during the last three Parliamentary Sessions for which a holding answer was provided are as follows:

Year	*Percentage*
1998–99	26
1999–2000	48
2000–01	62

Learning and Skills Council

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the resources available to the Learning and Skills Council. [22277]

Margaret Hodge: Today, the Secretary of State issued the annual grant letter to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). In 2002–03, the Council will have available a resource budget of £7,310,890,000 to deliver the challenging objectives set out in the remit letter of November 2000 and the targets in the Council's corporate plan.

The Council has taken over many of the functions previously carried out by the Further Education Funding Council and TECs, as well as various activities carried out by the Department for Education and Employment and Government Offices. Our most recent estimate is that these organisations spent in total between £270 and £280 million on administering the functions which are now the responsibility of the LSC.

The Council takes on significant new responsibilities in 2002–03, including the funding of school sixth forms, further action to raise basic skills, and decisions at local level about the allocation of funds for young people's and adult learning provision. In total the new budget represents a 33 per cent. increase in funds compared with 2001–02, and even without school sixth forms represents a 6 per cent. real terms increase compared with the previous year.

In the light of these responsibilities, and the different VAT regime to which the LSC is subject compared with TECs, the Secretary of State has agreed to a £25 million increase in the administration budget of the LSC for 2001–02 and 2002–03, to £213 million and £218 million respectively.

This delivers the commitment given to Parliament during the passage of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 that there would be administrative savings of at least £50 million compared with previous arrangements.

Scottish Expenditure

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will list, in real terms, for each year since 1979 *(a)* the total sums of money spent directly by her Department in Scotland and *(b)* the total sums of money allocated by her Department for spending in Scotland through (i) the Scottish Office, (ii) the Scotland Office and (iii) the Scottish Executive; [16181]

(2) when she will reply to the question from the hon. Member for Beckenham (ref. 16181) of 14 November. [21659]

Estelle Morris: Expenditure in Scotland on programmes now administered by the Department for Education and Skills was estimated at some £2 million (real terms) in each of the years 1996–97 to 2000–01, most of which was for career development loans. No information for the years prior to 1996–97 is available.

Most education and skills expenditure in Scotland is not the responsibility of DfES: it is devolved to the Scottish Executive. Prior to devolution this expenditure was the responsibility of the Scottish Office.

New Deal

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of the young people in Wiltshire who found employment through the new deal have found sustained unsubsidised work. [18405]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I have been asked to reply.

Up to the end of September 2001, the new deal had helped 1,888 young people move into work in the Wiltshire Employment Service district. 72 per cent. of the jobs secured were sustained and unsubsidised.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Daily Mail (Stephen Byers)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the action initiated by her predecessor against the *Daily Mail* in respect of comments made in that newspaper on 19 March; for what reason the action initiated was not pursued to the courts; what assessment was made of the likelihood of a successful outcome to the action before it was embarked upon; and if she will make a statement. [21740]

Ms Hewitt: On 2 April 2001 my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), replied to a question from the hon. Member for Lewes as follows:

> I have engaged the solicitors Goodman Derrick to act on my behalf in response to the Daily Mail allegations made on 19 March. These allegations related entirely to my conduct as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. In line with Treasury advice published in response to a Public Accounts Committee Report in 1993 which states "it is appropriate to use public resources to deal with matters arising in the course of, or as a direct result of, the official duties of Ministers and civil servants", the reasonable costs of my present action will be funded publicly. (20 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 7W).

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North subsequently lodged a complaint with the Press Complaints Council on 26 April. The outcome was that the *Daily Mail* published a clarification on 5 October in which the newspaper accepted that the account given by my right hon. Friend of his involvement in the inquiry into companies associated with Geoffrey Robinson represented the true position.

I have no plans to make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the cost met from public funds of the legal action taken by the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) against Associated Newspapers. [21668]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) on 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 6W.

Portland Cement

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of Portland cement sold in the United Kingdom was *(a)* domestically produced and *(b)* imported in each of the last five years. [20517]

Mr. Wilson: The information requested is as follows:

Sources of grey Portland cement sales in the United Kingdom

Percentage

	Produced domestically	*Imported*
1996	91.2	8.8
1997	92.2	7.8
1998	90.4	9.6
1999	91.1	8.9
2000	89.4	10.6

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the Portland cement consumption per capita was for the United Kingdom in the last 12 months. [20605]

Mr. Wilson: During 2000 for the United Kingdom, the per capita consumption of grey Portland cement was 222 kg.

Nuclear Waste Transportation

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if it is her intention that the effect of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill will make publication of routes along which *(a)* nuclear waste and *(b)* spent nuclear fuel is transported illegal. [20445]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* In relation to nuclear material which is being transported, an offence would be committed under clause 80 of the Bill, only if an intentional or reckless disclosure of information is made that could prejudice the security of nuclear material being transported to or from a nuclear site in the UK used for a purpose mentioned in section 1(1) of the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 or being carried on board a UK ship. Whether an offence has been committed will depend on the facts of the case. The courts would have to assess whether the disclosure was capable of prejudicing security and whether the requirements of intention or recklessness have been met.

MOX Plant, Sellafield

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what account she took of a potential terrorist threat before giving authorisation to the MOX fuel plant at Sellafield. [20176]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The decision on the justification for the manufacture of MOX fuel was announced on 3 October by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Health and for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. In reaching their decision Ministers took full account of all relevant information including advice from the UK's civil nuclear security regulator, the Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS).

Energy Review

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received from BP in relation to her Department's energy review; what has been the nature of such representations; and if she will make a statement. [21401]

Mr. Wilson: It is the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) of the Cabinet Office, not the Department of Trade and Industry, that is carrying out the energy review. The PIU is due to report to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister by the end of the year and as such it would be inappropriate for me to make a statement at this time. BP has made two submissions to the energy review, both of which are on the PIU website.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the increase in the departmental expenditure limit from 2001–02 to 2002–03 will be accounted for by wage costs. [20673]

Ms Hewitt: Decisions on the funding of wage costs for 2002–03 will be taken as part of my Department's internal resource allocation process early in the new year. It is therefore not possible to say how much of any increase in the departmental expenditure limit will be accounted for by wage costs.

However, figures on my Department's spending plans for 2001–02 and 2002–03 were set out in the 2001 Expenditure Plans Report (Cm 5112), a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Over the 2001–02 to 2002–03 period, pay costs for the Department (including gross and net controlled agencies and ACAS but excluding trading funds) were planned to increase from £256 million to £271 million, as shown in table B9.

EU Procurement Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the estimated cost to public funds of the proposed EU directive on procurement. [20361]

Ms Hewitt: The proposals to amend the EC procurement directives are still under discussion. The emerging proposals are unlikely to have any net costs for public funds. As they stand the proposals for amending the rules provide the flexibility needed for the award of effective contracts, in particular the dialogue that is necessary when involving the private sector in the delivery of public services.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people were employed by her Department under the new deal for over-25s; and at what cost to public funds in 2001–02. [21680]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has employed 13 members of staff under the new deal for the over-25s during the current financial year. None was based within my executive agencies. New deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot readily be identified.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people are employed by the Department under the new deal for young people; and at what cost to public funds. [21327]

Ms Hewitt: My Department currently employs six members of staff under the new deal for young people, with a further 12 being employed within my executive agencies. New deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot readily be identified.

External Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost was to her Department of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [21247]

Ms Hewitt: This information is not readily available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Sickness

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many days were lost owing to sickness absence in the Department in each of the last four years. [21337]

Ms Hewitt: Average number of staff days lost per staff year through sick absence in the DTI group:

1996: 8.8

1997: 8.2

1998: 8.0

1999: 7.8.

The DTI Group, in addition to DTI HQ, consists of: ACAS, Companies House, Patent Office, Insolvency Service, National Weights and Measures Laboratory, Employment Tribunals Service, and The Radiocommunications Agency.

The figures are taken from the annual reports on public sector sick absence commissioned by the Cabinet Office each year. Various adjustments are made to the figures to take account of factors such as flu epidemics that may occur in any given year.

The figure for the year 2000 is not yet available.

Sub-Post Offices

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 859–60W, on the rural White Paper, what the criteria are for financial support for projects to refurbish and improve rural sub-post offices; and if this support is a one-off payment. [20029]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The £2 million sub-post office start-up capital subsidy fund is intended to support initiatives by volunteer or community groups to maintain or reopen post office facilities in areas where the traditional post office is closing or has recently closed. The scheme provides a framework for payments of top-up grants towards the initial capital cost of setting up a sub-post office as many proposals to save rural sub-post offices fail because of lack of a small amount of start-up capital. Eligible costs are widely drawn to cover all categories of one-off costs necessary to secure the future of the sub-post office. The scheme is flexible, recognising that every case for funding will be different and will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

This scheme is one part of a package of measures designed to secure the future of the post office network. Funding arrangements for the rural network beyond 2003 are being developed in the context of advice recently received from the Postal Services Commission on the best way to channel financial assistance to rural post offices from 2003. The £2 million fund targets a specific problem that exists now but will cease to exist when those longer-term funding arrangements are in place from 2003.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the measures taken by Consignia to prevent sub-post office closures in the Huntingdon constituency; and if she will make a statement. [17481]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* The formal requirement placed on Consignia last November to maintain the rural network and to prevent avoidable closures remains in place and will apply in the first instance until 2006. Post Office Ltd. has set up a team of rural transfer advisers to explore all options for keeping rural sub-post offices open and is administering the £2 million Government fund to assist volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or re-establish post office services in rural communities. Through such measures, Post Office Ltd. is continuing its efforts to reopen sub-post offices where there have been recent closures in the Huntingdon constituency.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the measures taken by Consignia to prevent sub-post office closures in the constituency of Galloway and Upper Nithsdale; and if she will make a statement. [18032]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* The formal requirement placed on Consignia last November to maintain the rural network and to prevent avoidable closures remains in place and will apply in the first instance until 2006. Post Office Ltd. has set up a team of rural transfer advisers to explore all options for keeping rural sub-post offices open and is administering the £2 million Government fund to assist volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or re-establish post office services in rural communities. Through such measures, Post Office Ltd. is continuing its efforts to reopen sub-post offices where there have been recent closures in the Galloway and Upper Nithsdale constituency.

European Structural Funds

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to obtain structural funds assistance for UK domestic routes. [20210]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* I have no such plans since the structural funds programming documents for the current period 2000–06 have all been agreed, and there is no specific provision in them for assistance for UK domestic routes.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what level of structural funds are available from the European Union for subsidising domestic UK flights. [20211]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* None of the structural funds programming documents for the period 2000–06 includes specific support for subsidising domestic UK flights.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the experience of France, Spain and Greece in gaining European structural funds for their domestic flights. [20213]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* No such assessment has been made, nor is one envisaged.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria have to be met by an air route in order to receive European structural funds. [20212]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* Whatever its sector of activity, for a project application to be successful in gaining European structural funding, the programming document for the region concerned has to include the ability to fund such a project. The project would have to be wholly contained within the region, and score highly against the selection criteria which have been agreed for each of the sectors within the programming document.

Internal Market, Consumer and Tourism Council

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the outcome was of the Internal Market, Consumer and Tourism Council held in Brussels on 26 November; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [18900]

Ms Hewitt: The Commission presented two reports concerning tourism, highlighting a need for a more systematic and co-ordinated approach among tourism stakeholders through a package of 10 activities. The Commission acknowledged the long-term impacts of September 11 on tourism.

The Council reached political agreement on the Seventh amendment to the Cosmetics Directive which will introduce a EU-wide ban on animal testing of cosmetic products. This means that cosmetic products cannot be sold in the EU if the finished product, or any of its ingredients or combinations of ingredients, have been tested on animals, once an alternative to that test has been accepted and published by the OECD.

The Council reached political agreement to amend Directive 76/769/EEC on dangerous substances, which would introduce a ban on certain carcinogenic azodyes. There was also a common approach agreed on the ban of carcinogens, mutagens or substances toxic to reproduction (CMRs)—22 substances would now be banned under this directive. A progress report on phthalates was also discussed

The Presidency gave an oral progress report on the proposal for the establishment of the European Food Authority. The Commission said that it would report in about a year's time on the implementation of the Data Protection Directive.

The Council adopted a draft Resolution on consumer over-indebtedness, and the Presidency gave a short report on the October Brussels conference on consumer involvement in the Single Market.

The Council discussed the principles of the Community patent focusing in particular on the role of National Patent Offices and the language regime.

The Council agreed draft conclusions on the Commission's proposals to make a negotiated agreement (rather than introduce legislation) with car manufacturers to make cars less dangerous for pedestrians.

Commissioner Byrne gave an account of the green paper on Consumer Protection. He spoke on the opportunities of the internal market, the Euro and e-commerce being dependent on consumer confidence and said that enforcement at EU level was particularly important. The green paper would be open to a formal hearing and in-depth consultation.

The Council discussed simplification of the regulatory environment focusing on the Commission's Action Plan and the report by the intergovernmental Mandelkern Group. Member states welcomed the Mandelkern report and the Presidency concluded there would be further discussion of this at Laeken.

The two proposed directives on public procurement (which aim to simplify, clarify and modernise public procurement) were subject to a progress report, and the Commission called on the Council to aim for a common position as soon as possible.

The Council reached political agreement on the insurance intermediaries directive. This aims to create a passport for insurance intermediaries to operate throughout the EU and to set minimum professional standards and information requirements to ensure consumer protection. Political agreement was also reached on the proposed regulation concerning cross border payments in euro—which proposes that the price of retail cross-border payments in euro should be the same as the price of equivalent domestic payments.

The Council agreed conclusions on Services of General Economic Interest (SGEI) which envisaged a new framework on state aid and SGEI; an examination of the case for a horizontal Directive based on Article 16; steps to improve the evaluation of SGEI.

The Council took note of the joint work programme of the three Presidencies (Belgium, Spain and Denmark) and there were presentations on the Single Market Scoreboard, the Commission's Services Strategy and the Commission's Internal Market Strategy.

The Council reached agreement on the following legislative items: political agreement was achieved on cosmetics directive, dangerous substances directive covering azocolourants, CMRs, the insurance intermediaries directive and the regulation on cross-border Euro payments, all of which the UK supported. The Commission's voluntary agreement with industry on pedestrian protection was approved again with UK support.

Nuclear Reactors

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to commission new nuclear reactors at existing nuclear power stations in the south-west. [20281]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has no plans to commission new nuclear power stations either in the south-west or elsewhere nor has it received any application from others to do so.

EU Chemicals Strategy

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the names and positions of *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* officials and *(c)* political advisers in her Department who communicated with UK MEPs prior to the European Parliament's vote on the Schoerling report on the EC White Paper on Chemicals on 15 November; and if she will make a statement on information given by them to MEPs on this matter. [20856]

Ms Hewitt: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science and Innovation; Lord Sainsbury, has been in contact with Glyn Ford MEP to explain the overall UK position on the EU Chemicals Strategy. The UK position which he set out was entirely consistent with the overall Government policy on this issue, on which my right hon. Friend the Minister for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs leads. The UK Government support the aims and objectives of the EU Chemicals Strategy. We wish to see a workable strategy which protects the environment and human health by targeting chemicals of most concern through the authorisation process while at the same time minimising animal testing, encouraging innovation and maintaining the competitiveness of the chemicals industry. We support the inclusion in the authorisation process of chemicals which are at the same time persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic (PBTs) and which are very persistent and very bioaccumulative (vPvB), once the necessary criteria for identification of PBTs and vPvBs are established; and also the inclusion of known endocrine disruptors when agreed scientifically valid test methods and criteria are established to identify these substances. Background briefing was also provided to Glyn Ford MEP in early September on a range of DTI issues, including on the EU Chemicals Strategy. This again was entirely consistent with the Government policy as set out above.

Parliamentary Questions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by her Department were the subject of a holding answer in the last three sessions of Parliament. [22020]

Ms Hewitt: Following is the information requested.

Year	*Percentage*
1998–99	62
1999–2000	52
2000–01	47

Ariane Programme

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment her Department has made of the impact of the termination of the UK's involvement in the Ariane programme on the manufacturing and service sector; and what effect this will have on Government funding for the Galileo project. [21678]

Ms Hewitt: There has been no reduction in the UK's involvement in the Ariane programme. Our contribution was decided upon at the European Space Agency Ministerial, which was hosted by the UK recently in Edinburgh.

There is therefore no effect on other programmes.

EGNOS Projects

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment her Department has made of the relationship between the *(a)* amount of funding provided by European Space Agency member states to the EGNOS project and *(b)* amount and quality of work won by contractors from each ESA member state; if this assessment will affect UK funding for the Galileo project; and if she will make a statement. [21679]

Ms Hewitt: The amount and quality of work won by contractors under ESA contracts is in direct proportion to the investment made by member states due to the application of juste-retour to all ESA contracts.

The UK took a 20 per cent. stake in the EGNOS programme to secure key elements of the infrastructure (i) to ensure that UK industry secured high technology contracts, and (ii) to maximise our influence in the eventual operation of the system. I believe that we have been successful in achieving both these objectives.

My Department is working closely with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and others within Whitehall to examine the economic case for providing further funding to the Galileo project, if it goes ahead.

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish details of the research underlying the statement in her press release number 250/01 dated 21 November on the proportion of households without a gas supply living in fuel poverty. [19628]

Mr. Wilson: The information on the number of fuel poor households without mains gas is included in the report of the working group on extending the gas network. This report will shortly be published on the Department of Trade and Industry website http://www.dti.gov.uk and copies placed in the Libraries of the House.

BNFL

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial losses have been made by BNFL plc in each of the last two years; and how have these losses been financed. [19252]

Mr. Wilson: BNFL Group's independently audited annual report and accounts stated that BNFL made a loss for the financial year after exceptional items of £46 million in the year to 31 March 2001 and £262 million in the year to 31 March 2000.

The annual report and accounts also included an equivalent amount transferred from accumulated reserves in each year to cover the losses.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 163W, on BNFL, where BNFL Inc.'s accounts are published in the United States; and if she will make a statement. [19409]

Mr. Wilson: BNFL's Inc.'s accounts are not published in the US. BNFL Inc. is part of BNFL plc's Nuclear Clean UP and Decommissioning Business Group for which segmental information is published in BNFL's annual report and accounts.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultants have been retained by her Department to advise on the review of BNFL's nuclear liabilities. [19258]

Mr. Wilson: Work carried out by the Department on the future of BNFL included reviewing the management of BNFL's liabilities. The work was done with the assistance of the following advisers:

Credit Suisse First Boston (financial advice);

HSBC (financial advice);

Slaughter and May (legal advice);

Arthur Andersen (strategy and accounting advice (jointly to DTI and BNFL));

Deloitte and Touche (accounting advice);

Lane, Clark and Peacock (actuarial advice); and

Mercers (strategy advice).

Arthur D Little also conducted an independent assessment for DTI of BNFL's 1999–2000 liabilities review.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total remuneration, including bonuses, paid in the last financial year to *(a)* Paul Miskimin, President of BNFL Inc. and *(b)* Charles Pryor, President and Chief Executive Officer of Westinghouse Electric. [19257]

Mr. Wilson: This information is a matter between the companies and those individuals. Details of their remuneration are not a matter of public record.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 163W, on BNFL, by how much the final cost of constructing the Sellafield MOX plant differs from the carrying value in the latest BNFL published account. [19329]

Mr. Wilson: Information relating to the construction costs of the Sellafield MOX Plant (SMP) was included in the report produced by the independent consultants A. D. Little assessing BNFL's business case for operation of the plant. This was published in July 2001 with certain commercially sensitive information excised.

As can be seen from figure 21 of the report, A. D. Little noted that PA Consulting's earlier 1997 report on the economic case for SMP considered that the construction costs were at least £300 million. A. D. Little assessed that at the time of their own 2001 report, commissioning having continued since the PA Consulting report, sunk costs in respect of SMP were around £470 million. BNFL's annual accounts for the financial year ending 31 March 2001 give a carrying value for SMP of £473 million.

Please note that my answer of 20 November contained an error. It gave the carrying value of SMP in BNFL's latest annual accounts as £462 million. This value was in fact taken by mistake from BNFL's accounts for the previous financial year ending 31 March 2000.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what annual operational cost savings have been achieved in *(a)* electricity generation and *(b)* reprocessing as a result of the integration of BNFL and Magnox Electric. [19254]

Mr. Wilson: The merger of BNFL and Magnox has brought integrated management of the Magnox fuel cycle as well as a sensible relationship between the component parts of the business. There is also now a clear strategy on Magnox power station lifetimes. Detailed information about operational costs is a commercial matter for BNFL. However, information about the commercial performance of BNFL's Magnox Generation Business is provided in BNFL's annual report and accounts.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her assessment is of the total amount of money BNFL Inc. has lost in *(a)* the Hanford River Protection project, *(b)* the East Tennessee Technology Park, *(c)* BNFL Savannah River Corporation, *(d)* Rocky Mountain Remediation Services and *(e)* the Advanced Mixed Waste Treatment project in Idaho Falls. [19256]

Mr. Wilson: Details of the financial performance of individual contracts are commercially confidential. Information on the losses incurred on the East Tennessee Technology Park contract was disclosed on page 51 of the BNFL Annual Report and Accounts 2000 because, in the company's view, that was an exceptional item as described in the Companies Act 1985.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether her Department has carried out an independent assessment to determine the future commercial viability of BNFL Inc. [19255]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has received independent advice on many aspects of BNFL's business, including BNFL Inc., as part of the work undertaken by the

Department. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced on 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 990–96, the conclusions to this work.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 163W, on BNFL, if she will list the reasons for the commercial sensitivity and whether throughput capacities of BNFL's other production plants are publicly available. [19331]

Mr. Wilson: Information about throughput capacity of BNFL plants is generally considered to be commercially sensitive. The A. D. Little report on BNFL's economic case for operation of the Sellafield MOX Plant was published in July 2001. As was stated in the decision document published by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, the only information withheld from the published report was

> "that judged to be commercially sensitive for BNFL, the publication of which would prejudice BNFL's commercial opportunities with respect to the manufacture of MOX fuel."

Nevertheless, the published A. D. Little report does note at paragraph 1.4.3 that the nominal design capacity is 120 tonnes of heavy metal per year. A. D. Little state in a footnote to paragraph 1.4.3 of their report that the plant operating capacity is commercially sensitive but that the figure is less than 100 tonnes of heavy metal per year.

Liabilities Management Authority

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will appoint the head of the Liabilities Management Authority. [20974]

Mr. Wilson: The Liabilities Management Authority will be established by a Bill which will be brought forward in due course. The LMA's head will be appointed in accordance with the Code and Guidance issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments following the LMA's establishment.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish the terms of reference for the Liabilities Management Authority. [20454]

Mr. Wilson: The Liabilities Management Authority will be responsible for Government's interest in the discharge of public sector civil nuclear liabilities. It will provide the driving force and incentives to get on with the job of systematically and progressively reducing the hazard posed by legacy facilities and wastes. It will have a specific remit to develop an overall UK strategy for decommissioning and clean-up.

A Bill to establish the LMA will be brought forward in due course. More detailed proposals for the operation of the LMA will be set out in a White Paper to be published in the Spring.

Nuclear Liabilities Review

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the terms of reference are for the review of nuclear liabilities being undertaken by her Department; and which other Government Departments are involved in the review. [19259]

Mr. Wilson: The management of public sector civil nuclear liabilities was considered as part of the quinquennial review of the UK Atomic Energy Authority.

The terms of reference for the review were announced on 19 April 2000 by the then Minister for Energy on 19 April 2000, *Official Report*, column 548W. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made a statement to the House on 28 November 2001 *Official Report*, columns 990-96, about the future management of public sector civil nuclear liabilities which reflected the outcome of this work.

Copies of the QQR report have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The report identifies the wide range of Government Departments and other stakeholders which were consulted in the course of carrying out the review.

Regulations

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many regulations affecting business have been abolished since 1997. [20126]

Ms Hewitt: Records relating to the regulations introduced since 1997, which would provide details of how these regulations related to existing regulations, showing how they amended or abolished them, are held not centrally but by the management units responsible for the policy areas concerned. They could be assembled and analysed only at disproportionate cost.

Energy Supply (Middle East)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment she has made of energy supplies and the middle east in response to the events of 11 September; and if she will make a statement; [19768]

(2) what percentage of the UK oil supply comes from middle east countries; what percentage comes from each such country; which other countries supply the UK with oil; and if she will make a statement. [19766]

Mr. Wilson: Although the UK is a net exporter of crude oil, significant quantities of particular grades of crude oil are imported for processing in UK refineries. The table provides the full detail requested. Of the total of 88 million tonnes of crude oil and refinery feedstocks processed in the UK during 2000, 44 per cent. was of crude oil from the UK sector of the North sea, 37 per cent. from the Norwegian sector, with crude oil from middle east countries accounting for 3 per cent. of total UK refinery throughput during the year. Of this, the majority came from Saudi Arabia.

In light of the events of 11 September I am keeping security of energy supplies under constant review. Despite the response of the coalition against terrorism to the tragedy in the US on 11 September there has been no impact on oil and gas supplies from the middle east or from elsewhere in the world. As mentioned above, the UK has a low reliance on the middle east as a source of oil supplies.

UK imports of crude oil and refinery feedstocks in 2000

Country of origin	*Thousand tonnes*	*As a percentage of total UK refinery intake*
Saudi Arabia	2,053	2.3
Syria	234	0.3
Other near and middle east	144	0.2
Total middle east	2,431	2.8
Norway	32,317	36.7
Russia	2,775	3.2
Egypt	1,412	1.6
Libya	1,362	1.5
Denmark	1,345	1.5
Estonia	1,331	1.5
Venezuela	1,092	1.2
Sweden	747	0.8
Mexico	729	0.8
France	654	0.7
Algeria	564	0.6
Netherlands	472	0.5
Belgium	323	0.4
Germany	276	0.3
Ireland	265	0.3
Lithuania	214	0.2
Switzerland	140	0.2
Other countries	936	1.1
Total imports	49,386	56.1

Source:
Data supplied to DTI by UK oil companies

Caspian Oil Pipelines

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make an assessment of the Russian-Kazakhstani pipeline schemes for the Caspian oil fields; and if she will make a statement. [19767]

Mr. Wilson: Kazakhstan is the second largest oil producer (after Russia) among the former Soviet republics and is committed to the development of multiple oil pipelines from the country to international markets. Currently, Kazakhstan sends the majority of its oil exports via Russia using three main existing pipelines:

(i) the 691 km pipeline from Atyrau in Kazakhstan to Samara in Russia, capacity of which is being increased to c.300,000 barrels per day (bbl/d);

(ii) the Kenkyak-Orsk (Russia) pipeline, which transports oil from the Aktyubinsk fields in western Kazakhstan to the Orsk refinery in Russia, capacity of which is c.130,000 bbl/d, and;

(iii) the 1,580 km Tengiz-Novorossiisk (Russia) pipeline, which was officially opened recently on 27 November. This pipeline has an initial capacity of c.600,000 bbl/d, which could eventually be increased to 1.3 to 1.5 million bbl/d.

These pipelines, and other projects in the Caspian region which do not involve Russia, help to provide more diverse regions of world oil supply.

Natural Gas

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what procedures are in place to ensure that the energy *(a)* policy and *(b)* regulation of Great Britain does not discriminate against the Northern Ireland natural gas Industry. [18613]

Mr. Wilson: The energy market in Northern Ireland is separate from that in Great Britain. However, both the Department of Trade and Industry and Ofgem consult widely on all proposals and there is an opportunity for Northern Irish companies to comment if they believe they may be affected. Ofgem and DTI also keep their counterparts in Northern Ireland informed of relevant proposals.

Women Entrepreneurs

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what help her Department is offering to women entrepreneurs; and if she will make a statement. [17329]

Ms Hewitt: My Department recognises the increasingly important contribution that women entrepreneurs make to the nation's economy. It also recognises however that relatively fewer women set up business in the UK than in comparable countries such as the US. Through the Small Business Service (SBS) my Department is therefore working to research and better understand their needs and tackle any specific barriers that they may face in starting and running their own businesses.

Women who are thinking of setting up or who are already running their own businesses are able to make use of the full range of services provided by the SBS through Business Link operators. In addition the SBS:

has undertaken research about the characteristics of women entrepreneurs, including the sponsorship of a three day conference at Durham University on female entrepreneurship ("Shifting the Gears" 10–12 September 2001).

is responsible for the Phoenix Development Fund, which is looking at various innovative ways of providing business support and training to women entrepreneurs. All 96 Development Fund project are available to women and of these 16 have women as their main focus. Details of all of these projects can be found at www.sbs/phoenix/devbid.asp

is providing specific advice to women as part of the Business Link website, at "http://www.businesslink.org/cgi-bin/bv1/index.jsp?urlid=5&P COID=-9156&subtupe=4#gohere" which also provides links to other relevant organisations.

First Class Post

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the achievement of the Government target for first class post being delivered next morning. [18920]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* It is the Postal Services Commission and not the Government which is responsible for setting and enforcing standards of service. It has, on the advice of Postwatch, set a target for the average performance in February and March 2002 of 92.1 per cent. of first class post to be delivered next day. An assessment of whether the target has been achieved will be made by the Postal Services Commission with Postwatch.

Atomic Energy Police

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the operational value is of running three Volkswagen, two Mitsubishi and one Peugeot vehicle for the Atomic Energy Police. [19758]

Mr. Wilson: The Constabulary employ their vehicles on patrol and escort duties. Two of the four-wheel drive Volkswagen Transporter Synchro vehicles are employed as dog patrol vehicles and one is employed on general patrol duties. The Mitsubishi products are armoured vehicles performing duty as escort vehicles for special material convoys. The Peugeot Expert van is another general patrol vehicle.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the advantages are of *(a)* not operating and *(b)* operating a central purchasing policy for the Atomic Energy Police. [19757]

Mr. Wilson: The UK Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary (AEAC) operates a Central Purchasing Policy. Vehicles are purchased through the Home Office Framework Arrangement for the purchases of vehicles and spare parts by the Police and Fire Authorities. The advantage of operating such a policy is the value for money that this provides. The negotiation with the various manufacturers is made on behalf of the entire Police Service and the rates of discount are applied across the Service. Rates of discount available outside the framework arrangement are nowhere near as beneficial. In relation to clothing, the Constabulary purchases from a consortium with other forces, again being able to take advantage of the benefits that buying on a larger scale brings. Both of these initiatives are supported by the Police Authority as best value initiatives.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what personal vehicle is available to the Chief Constable of the Atomic Energy Police. [19759]

Mr. Wilson: A range of vehicles is available to the Chief Constable up to a certain value. He has selected a Mercedes 'C' class saloon.

Small Business (Chorley)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much funding from her Department has been allocated to help start small businesses in Chorley in each of the last five years. [19756]

Nigel Griffiths: Business Link North West Lancashire spends £270,000 per year (12 per cent.) of core funding on "Starting Out".

In the Chorley area, the most recent figures on the number of businesses assisted to start up are 23, 35 and 51 for years 2001–02 (until August), 2000–01 and 1999–2000 respectively.

Engineering and Technology Board

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the role of the Engineering and Technology Board is; who the chairman is; and if she will make a statement. [21504]

Mr. Wilson: The Engineering and Technology Board (ETB) has been set up to be responsive to the needs of the "wider engineering and technology community" and reflect the interests of key stakeholder groups, including business and industry, registered engineers, professional institutions, academia and the rapidly developing technology sector. It is based on extensive preparatory work undertaken by The Hawley Group and an ETB 'Shadow Board'.

The ETB starts work formally in the new year and high on the ETB's list of priorities will be issues such as: skills; the importance and attractiveness of engineering and technology-based careers; and the needs of the rapidly growing technology sector.

The first chairman of the Engineering and Technology Board is Dr. Robert Hawley, who also chaired the shadow ETB and the Engineering Council. On 1 January 2002 Sir Peter Williams will replace him as ETB chair.

A second organisation, the Engineering Council (UK) (ECUK) took over the former Engineering Council's regulatory functions at the close of the 6 December Engineering Council Senate meeting. Professor Patrick Dowling was named as the first EC(UK) chair.

Ministerial Visits (North-East)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times since November 2000 Ministers from her Department have visited *(a)* the Teesside area and *(b)* Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency to meet with locally based businesses. [19073]

Ms Hewitt: On 3 November 2000 the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry attended a lunch with local business people at Gisborough Hall in Guisbourough and visited Tetley Teas in Eaglescliffe near Stockton-on-Tees that same afternoon.

Security (Protec)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what security services at British nuclear facilities are provided by Protec. [20159]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* SDA Protec Ltd. in the UK is a Government approved security company that has carried out work across the nuclear industry, including UKAEA, BNFL and British Energy. It is not appropriate for me to comment on individual commercial contracts.

Oil Exploration

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will make a statement on what discussions her Department has had with oil companies regarding oil exploration projects in central Asia in the last 12 months; [19411]

(2) if she will make a statement on what discussions her Department has had with Shell UK on their interests in central Asia in the last 12 months; [19412]

(3) if she will make a statement on what discussions her Department has had with representatives of BP in the last 12 months. [19410]

Mr. Wilson: Over any 12-month period, there are numerous discussions between DTI and Trade Partners UK (TPUK) ministers and officials, and representatives of all UK oil companies, including BP and Shell. These discussions take place in the UK, and in our overseas posts around the world.

Central Asia, in particular Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, is currently a major region for international oil company investment. Many of the DTI and TPUK discussions with UK oil companies over the last 12 months will have covered their activities in, and plans for, this part of the world.

Enron

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of the current trading status of Enron on utilities in the UK; and if she will make a statement. [20750]

Mr. Wilson: Four of Enron's businesses in the UK are now in administration. Enron Direct and Teesside Power continue to operate. Ofgem and DTI are continuing to monitor the situation.

Ofgem is closely monitoring Enron's trading position. It is working with all parties involved to ensure security of supply.

Arrangements exist in the event of a supplier's failure for Ofgem, the independent regulator, to ensure that customers continue to receive a supply.

Sustainable Energy

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent research her Department has in place into energy production from agricultural products. [20628]

Mr. Wilson: Under the Department's Sustainable Energy Programme, we have 24 projects in place into energy production from agricultural products. The total value of these projects is £4.7 million of which the Department is contributing £2.6 million. A list of the projects follows.

Project title	*Contract start date*	*Contract end date*
Call-Off Contract for Advice on Energy Grasses	16 February 2000	16 February 2002
Trial of the Suitability of Switchgrass and Reed Canary Grasses as Biofuel Crops under UK Conditions	1 August 2000	31 March 2005
Evaluating Grasses as a Long Term Energy Resource	5 January 2001	4 January 2003
Development of a Prototype Specialist Shuttle Vehicle for Chipped Woodfuel	1 November 2001	30 April 2003
Coppice Establishment—Consultancy	1 July 1998	31 October 2002
Evaluation of Low-cost Establishment Systems for Short Rotation Coppice	1 January 1999	30 June 2003
Miscanthus—Practical Aspects of Biofuel Development	9 April 1999	8 April 2003
Yield Models for Energy Coppice of Poplar and Willow—Phase IV	1 June 1999	31 May 2005
Short Rotation Coppice (Task 1)	17 April 2000	16 April 2002
Short Rotation Coppice (Tasks 3 and 4)	17 April 2000	16 April 2002
Short Rotation Coppice (Task 5)	17 April 2000	16 April 2002
Maintenance of First Generation Coppice Plots- Phase 2	1 March 2000	28 February 2003
Negotiation of Land Use Agreements for Mature Coppice Plots	29 February 2000	31 January 2003
Development of an Integrated Wood Fuel Supply System to Deliver SRC from Field to Power Station	15 March 2000	31 March 2002
Storage of Forest Residues and Short Rotation Coppice in Compressed Fiberlogs	1 May 2001	31 January 2003
Identification and Characterisation of Factors Affecting Losses in the Large-scale, Non-ventilated Bulk Storage of Wood Chips and Development of Best Storage Practices	5 February 2001	5 August 2002
A Further Evaluation of Herbicides for Post Emergence Use in Short Rotation Coppice	7 June 2001	7 April 2002
An Evaluation of the Optimum Timing for Planting Short Rotation Coppice	9 March 2001	1 May 2004
Investigation of Single Stem Tree Plantations for Bioenergy	1 April 2001	30 June 2002
Investigation of Low-till Systems for the Establishment of Willow Coppice in Grassland	1 January 2001	28 February 2003
The Effects on Flora and Fauna of Converting Grassland to Short Rotation Coppice	1 April 2001	31 December 2005
Willow Varietal Interactions in Mixtures, Contributing to Optimum Sustainability	1 November 2001	31 October 2004
Adding Value to Wood Fuelled Heating in Commercial Glasshouses	1 July 2001	31 December 2002
Improving Willow Breeding Efficiency	1 November 1998	30 September 2002

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* interim payments and *(b)* final payments have been made to former miners and their estates under the chronic emphysema and bronchitis compensation scheme in *(a)* the Wansbeck constituency, *(b)* Northumberland and *(c)* the UK. [19940]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has made interim and full and final payments in respect of compensation for respiratory disease in the above regions as follows:

	Number of		
Region	*Interim payments*	*Full and final payments*	*Total damages paid (£ million)*
(a) Wansbeck constituency	569	215	3.29
(b) Northumberland[1]	881	361	5.41
(c) UK	42,053	13,351	226.7

[1] Northumberland as defined by the areas denoted by the following postcodes: NE 15, 18–20, 23–26, 41–49, 61–71 and TD 12, 15

Constituency and headline statistics can now be found on the Department's website at www.dti.gov.uk/coalhealth.

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many compensation claims have been made to date in respect of chronic bronchitis and emphysema in *(a)* the Wansbeck constituency, *(b)* Northumberland and *(c)* the UK. [19936]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has registered claims in respect of compensation for respiratory disease in the above regions as follows:

Region	*Number of claims registered*
(a) Wansbeck constituency	2,564
(b) Northumberland[1]	4,243
(c) UK	171,087

[1] Northumberland as defined by the areas denoted by the following postcodes: NE 15, 18–20, 23–26, 41–49, 61–71 and TD 12, 15

Constituency and headline statistics can now be found on the Department's website at www.dti.gov.uk/coalhealth.

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the average length of time taken between receipt of a claim under the chronic bronchitis and emphysema compensation scheme and an offer being made to the claimant in *(a)* the Wansbeck constituency, *(b)* Northumberland and *(c)* the UK. [19938]

Mr. Wilson: Claims are not all processed at the same rate. Claims are being handled, as set out in the handling agreement, agreed with the claimants' solicitors, whereby the most elderly and ill claimants are prioritised. Widows are also being dealt with first, wherever possible and are given priority over estates' claims. The time taken to settle a claim will therefore depend on the number of priority points allocated to it. The problems there have been getting the scheme up and running also affected the time taken to deal with claims.

The Department is unable to provide the average length of time between receipt of a claim for compensation for respiratory disease and an offer being made to the claimant. There is, however, no discrimination on where the claimant lives.

It should also be noted that across the 171,000 claims registered to date, each claim is different and the time taken to settle claims accurately and fairly will vary widely.

Wind Farm, Wales

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reason her Department did not allocate the funding requested by the Awel Amen Tame to develop Wales' first community owned wind farm. [16663]

Mr. Wilson: The Department provided £70,000 of funding for Awel Aman Tawe for the initial phase of their community wind farm development programme. This was used to fund a number of awareness raising and information dissemination activities and culminated in a local referendum to assess the level of local support for the proposed wind farm.

A further request for funding of the second phase of the project was received in response to a call for proposals for our new and renewable energy programme. That was assessed and rejected by a panel of independent assessors and by our programme managers. Broadly, much of the work content was concerned with normal development activities and only some elements seemed novel.

Of the £100 million for renewables announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in March, it has been decided to allocate £10 million to support community developments across a range of technologies. Once this scheme has been developed, Awel Aman Tawe may be interested in applying for further support.

Nuclear Security

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor), on 12 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 541W, on Sellafield, what assessment she has made of how long it would take a commercial passenger plane flying at 2,200 ft above sea level two nautical miles from Sellafield to crash into Sellafield. [15572]

Mr. Wilson: No such assessment has been made.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultations have been undertaken since 11 September with *(a)* non-governmental organisations and *(b)* independent academic experts on the security of nuclear installations and nuclear materials in transport by the Office for Civil Nuclear Security; and what were the (i) dates and (ii) matters covered in the meetings. [19871]

Mr. Wilson: There have been no consultations since 11 September 2001 between the Office for Civil Nuclear Security and non-governmental organisations or independent academic experts on the security of nuclear installations and nuclear materials in transport.

Nuclear Reprocessing (Toxic Effects)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the report published on 23 November by the European Parliament's Scientific and Technological Options Assessment Programme on possible toxic effects from the nuclear reprocessing plants at Sellafield and Cap de la Hague, France. [19874]

Mr. Wilson: None. The subject matter of this report—which was prepared by an organisation called WISE-Paris—appears to relate to assessment of the possible environmental impacts of reprocessing. In the UK such matters fall to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs to whom I understand my hon. Friend has addressed a similar question.

I am aware, however, that the objectivity and scientific validity of the study produced by WISE-Paris have been called into question by Members of the European Parliament and that, in view of this, the European Parliament body that commissioned the report in response to a request from a separate committee formally sought from three experts an independent evaluation of the report.

The Chairman of the Scientific and Technological Options Assessment Panel (STOA) makes clear in a letter written as a cover to the study on its publication that publication of the document

> "does not imply adoption of its contents and these do not necessarily reflect the views of members of the STOA Panel or the European Parliament".

The letter goes on to state

> "the STOA Panel expresses regret that WISE-Paris saw fit to break the confidentiality clause in its contract by making public parts of the study prior to its publication. This behaviour of WISE-Paris is not in line with the long-standing tradition of STOA, which has always endeavoured to associate its work with the highest scientific and ethical standards".

As the letter explains, at its meeting on 23 October the STOA Panel took note of the WISE-Paris study and decided to publish it

> "as a first contribution to the scientific debate".

STOA also decided to make public the assessments of the WISE-Paris work that STOA obtained from the independent experts.

Energy Policy

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what dates the Energy Minister attended meetings of the performance and innovation unit inquiry into energy policy; and on what further dates this year he expects to attend such meetings. [17936]

Mr. Wilson: I attended and chaired meetings of the PIU steering group on 16 July, 17 October and 22 November of this year. There was also a meeting of the PIU steering group on 25 September which I was unable to attend. No further meetings of the PIU steering group are currently planned.

Nuclear Industry (North-West)

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her Department's estimate is of the value of the nuclear industry to the output of the economy of the north-west region *(a)* in real money value and *(b)* as a percentage of overall north-west output in the last 12 months; and what predictions her Department has made of the future value of the industry. [17353]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 23 November 2001]:* The DTI does not hold this information. The DTI has not made any prediction of the future value of the nuclear industry to the north-west.

Civil Nuclear Liabilities

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is her estimate of the *(a)* current and *(b)* projected liabilities arising from radiological contamination owned by (i) BNFL, (ii) UKAEA and (iii) the oil industry; and if she will make a statement on what steps she plans to take to deal with these liabilities. [19881]

Mr. Wilson: As at 31 March 2001, BNFL manages some £35 billion liabilities (undiscounted) of which it is financially responsible for £24 billion (undiscounted). It was announced on 28 November by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry that the liabilities will be increased by some £1.9 billion (discounted at 2.5 per cent.) due to the recently completed review of historic waste management by BNFL.

As at 31 March 2001 UKAEA manages some £7.4 billion liabilities (undiscounted) (excluding those at BNFL sites).

The figures represent current best estimates of lifetime liabilities and do not take account of the potential cost of changes in regulatory and policy requirements.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made a statement to the House on 28 November about the future management of public sector civil nuclear liabilities.

The Government do not have an estimate of the oil industry's liabilities arising from radiological contamination.

Railtrack

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his Department is undertaking investigations into potential insider dealing regarding Railtrack shares in the period immediately before the suspension of shares in Railtrack; and if he will make a statement. [19784]

Ms Hewitt: It is not the policy of my Department to comment on the affairs of particular companies. However, in view of the Department's concurrent responsibility with the Financial Services Authority for insider dealing from 1 December, the Department is willing to consider, in conjunction with the Financial Services Authority, any information the hon. Member may have suggesting insider dealing in Railtrack shares.

Low-cost Electricity

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she has reviewed the impact of the Competition Act 1998 on the provision of low-cost electricity for persons over 60; and if she will make a statement; [19654]

(2) for what reason the stay warm scheme which provides electricity at a lower price is being offered in every area of the nation apart from the east of England; and if he will make a statement. [19653]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* TXU Energi has not made its Stay Warm tariff available to its "home" customers in the north-west and east Anglia, although I understand that it is considering whether to do so. The standard licence conditions for electricity introduced on 1 October 2001 removed remaining restrictions on incumbent suppliers such as TXU operating in their "home" areas. Like other suppliers, TXU remains subject to the operation of competition law, including the Competition Act 1998, which protects competitors and consumers from companies' abuse of a dominant position. It is for TXU, like companies in other markets, to judge whether offers to particular groups of consumers could be deemed anti-competitive. The Competition Act 1998 provides the opportunity for companies to seek guidance or a direction on schemes from the Office of Fair Trading.

Employment Regulation Costs

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the annual cost to employers of implementing the *(a)* Working Time Regulations 1998 (SI 1833), *(b)* employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1996 (i) excluding and (ii) including firms with between 15 to 20 staff, *(c)* national minimum wage, *(d)* reduction in the qualifying period for unfair dismissal from two years to one, *(e)* Public Interest Disclosures Act 1998, *(f)* rise in the upper limit for compensation for unfair dismissal from £12,000 to £51,700, *(g)* Maternity Leave etc. Regulations 1999 and other rights for parental leave and *(h)* the Part-Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000. [19760]

Alan Johnson: The Government prepare regulatory impact assessments when proposals for new legislation are introduced. The table summarises the quantified annual costs to employers together with the benefits (both quantified and non-quantified).

	Policy costs	*Implementation costs*	*Benefits*
Working Time Regulations	£2.3 billion[1]	£1.5 to £3 million[1]	2 million employees get increased rest periods. 3.5 million night workers get right to health assessments. 3.1 million employees get four weeks paid annual leave (or pro rata for part-time workers).
Disability Discrimination Act Employment provisions			
excluding employers with 15 to 20 staff	£3.25 million[2]	£1 million[2]	All disabled employees gain from fairer treatment and greater employment opportunities. 0.4 million disabled employees in small enterprises benefit from being treated on the same basis as disabled employees in larger enterprises.
including employers with 15 to 20 staff	£3.4 million[2]	£1.1 million[2]	
National Minimum Wage (original 1999 Regulations)	£2.4 billion[2]	£2 to £3 million[2]	Workers benefit from higher pay (£2.4 billion).
Increase in youth rate for NMW (2000)	£45 million[2]	Nil[2]	Workers benefit from higher pay (£45 million).
Increase in adult rate for NMW (2000)	£180 million[2]	Nil[2]	Workers benefit from higher pay (£180 million).
Increase in NMW (2001)	£635 million[3]	Nil[3]	Workers benefit from higher pay (£635 million).
Reduction of qualifying period for unfair dismissal	£2.5 to £10 million[2]	£2.5 to £4 million[2]	2.8 million employees gain from increased security.
Public Interest Disclosure Act	Negligible	Negligible	Society gains from greater exposure of wrongdoing.
Rise in the upper limit for compensation for unfair dismissal	Minimal	Nil	Potential benefits to a few employees who are wrongly dismissed.
Enhancement to maternity leave	£16 million[2]	Negligible	85,000 mothers have their leave increased and spend more time with their new-born child.
Parental leave	£42 million[2]	£0.2 million[2]	2.7 million employees gain the right to parental leave. Improved family life.
Time-off for dependants	£7 million[1]	£0.1 million[1]	Employers benefit from improved commitment and reduced turnover. 0.6 million employees benefit directly and 2 million benefit indirectly.
Part-time workers (prevention of less favourable treatment) Regulations	£23 million[2]	£4 million[2]	400,000 part-time workers benefit directly from improved pay and conditions (£23.4 million), 6 million indirectly through greater security. Employers benefit from increased labour supply.

[1] 1998 prices
[2] 1999 prices
[3] 2001 prices

Rural Petrol Stations

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to ensure the continued supply of road transport fuels at affordable prices in rural areas that are disadvantaged through the closure of retail filling stations. [13262]

Mr. Wilson: I am at present considering whether there is a case for putting in place more effective mechanisms to support the objectives discussed by my hon. Friend.

Acquired Rights Directive

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to ensure that those employers who lost out because of the improper implementation of European Directive 77/187 in the TUPE regulations of 1981 will receive compensation; and if she will make a statement. [21938]

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to ensure recompense for those affected by the UK breach of its obligations under the 1977 Acquired Rights Directive. [20890]

Alan Johnson: The Government have admitted that, until the TUPE Regulations were amended in 1993, the Acquired Rights Directive was not implemented correctly, and that this was a sufficiently serious breach of the UK's EC obligations to give rise to a liability for damages, where anyone suffered losses as a result. The Government are therefore prepared to compensate anyone affected provided that they can show that they suffered loss as a result of that breach.

BAE Systems

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of *(a)* BAE Systems' decision to close the Regional Jet RJ and RJX programme; and *(b)* the impact the closure will have on (i) the future prospects and competency of the UK's civilian aerospace industry and (ii) the aerospace component supply industries. [20353]

Mr. Wilson: The Government regret the recent announcements of job losses within BAE Systems and the Department is maintaining a close dialogue with the company to evaluate the situation. Officials of the relevant Government Departments and local support agencies are working with the company to mitigate the effect of the Regional Jet programme closure. I understand that Employment Services met the company on 5 December.

The Government deeply regret any job losses announced as a response to the downturn in aviation. BAE System's announcement is essentially a commercial decision and is partly in response to the downturn in aerospace sector exacerbated by the impact of events of 11 September.

The prospects for the aerospace sector in the medium to long term remain robust.

Textile Industry

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the job losses in the textile industry for each year since 1991. [20250]

Mr. Wilson: Information is not available for job losses.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many public appointments she has made since 7 June. [20248]

Ms Hewitt: In the period between 7 June and 30 November 2001 a total of 167 ministerial appointments were made to bodies for which my Department is responsible, of which 99 were re-appointments of serving members.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the *(a)* DTLR and *(b)* DTI regarding the environmental impact of third generation mobile phone masts. [19303]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* None. The Association of National Park Authorities, together with the Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, have written to me to raise concerns about telecommunications in national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty. I have asked officials to initiate joint discussions with DTLR and DTI to consider the issues raised.

Recycling

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out the penalty arrangements which will apply in the event of local authorities failing to meet the Government's targets for recycling. [18541]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* The statutory performance standards for household waste recycling and composting are demanding but realistic targets that each local authority should be able to achieve, and ideally exceed, without need for penalties. Nevertheless, the performance standards have been established under the best value regime and this provides extensive powers for direction and, if necessary, intervention in the event of targets not being reached. I have made it very clear to all local authorities that the Government expect them to achieve their targets and will use the power available, if necessary, to ensure that they are met.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of UK municipal waste was recycled in the last 12 months. [19051]

Mr. Meacher: Annual recycling data for UK municipal waste are not available. Information on the percentage of municipal waste that was recycled or composted in England and Wales is obtained from the Department's annual Municipal Waste Management Survey. The latest available data from 1999–2000 show a recycling rate of 11 per cent.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what targets the Government have set for domestic waste recycling. [19052]

Mr. Meacher: "Waste Strategy 2000" announced challenging targets to increase the amount of municipal waste recycled and composted in England and Wales. These targets are:

To recycle or compost at least 25 per cent of household waste by 2005

To recycle or compost at least 30 per cent. of household waste by 2010

To recycle or compost at least 33 per cent. of household waste by 2015.

To ensure that local authorities contribute to achieving these targets, the Government have set Statutory Performance Standards for recycling and composting for individual authorities. These can be found in the Government's "Guidance on Municipal Waste Management Strategies", published in March 2001. Copies are available in the House of Commons Library and from the DEFRA website: http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/management/guidance/mwms/index.htm

Waste Directive

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the average cost to farms of applying the provisions of the EU waste directive; and if she will make a statement. [18875]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 November 2001]:* We are preparing the regulations necessary to apply the provisions of the Waste Framework Directive to those types of agricultural waste which are not excluded from control under Article 2. On completion, we will issue a draft of the regulations for consultation with the farming industry and other interested groups. A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) is also being prepared. The RIA will form part of the consultation paper and will assess the average cost to farms of applying the Directive's provisions. I will ensure that a copy of the consultation paper is sent to the hon. Member when it is issued.

Departmental Strikes

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1029W, (Ref 17635), on strike action, how many staff have been engaged in industrial action; and in which divisions of her Department. [20685]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* On 28 September, the last day on which PCS members in all DEFRA offices were asked to take action, 2,102 members of staff took action. Since then there has been further action but this has affected only a limited number of DEFRA offices, and thus staff, on any particular day.

Most divisions which have staff in PCS grades who are covered by the proposed pay settlement for staff formerly in MAFF have lost some staff days due to industrial action.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 30 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1172W, on industrial action, if she will list the targets on service standards that are likely to be missed. [21361]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* It is recognised that the current industrial action could potentially put at risk our ability to meet all our service standard targets. However, it is not possible to predict which of those targets might be missed.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 30 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1172W, on industrial action, if she will list the *(a)* total and *(b)* per capita amount of payments by category that have been delayed since the dispute began. [21360]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* All payments are currently being made within the payment periods set in the EU regulations.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what is the value of payments due to farmers which have been delayed by industrial action in her Department; and what was the value on the last day of each month since May. [20665]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* Industrial action, which commenced in August, has mainly affected the Arable Area Payments Scheme. Payments under this scheme are made in a payment window running from 16 November to 31 January. In a normal year 60–70 per cent. of the aid would be paid out in the first two to three weeks. This year the figure is likely to be a little over 50 per cent.

Dioxin Emission Limits

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to apply the same dioxin emission limits to cement kilns burning waste as apply to purpose built incinerators. [18542]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* The Environment Agency already applies the same dioxin emission limit to that portion of gas generated by burning hazardous waste in cement kilns as for waste burned in incinerators. This is in accordance with the pro-rating rules of the Hazardous Waste Incineration Directive (91/689/EEC).

Livestock Movements

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to permit forage movements between livestock farms under force of restrictions and farms which have surplus stocks of fodder. [18030]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* This matter is currently under consideration. We are looking to allow such movements subject to appropriate safeguards.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to provide financial assistance to farms which were subject to Form D restrictions. [11735]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 1 November 2001]:* Farms subject to Form D restrictions are eligible for assistance from the Farms Business Advice Service which was launched last year with a budget of £5.25 million. It provides free on-farm advice for up to three days to farmers to help them develop better business practices, diversify or decide to leave the industry. An additional £1.5 million was made available in November.

These farmers may also seek help through the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise.

Under the EU state aid rules, we are unable to offer additional financial assistance to these farmers through the Business Recovery Fund, established to help a range of businesses following the impact of FMD.

Environmental Management

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the EU eco-management and audit scheme is one of the measures of environmental management standards recognised by her Department as demonstrating a commitment to responsible environmental performance; and if she will make a statement. [20513]

Mr. Meacher: The Department acknowledges the importance and value of the EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS). The EMAS regulation, in its recently revised form, incorporates the international standard for environmental management systems, ISO 14001, to manage environmental risks and impacts and improve performance. Significantly, EMAS additionally requires the publication of independently validated information on environmental performance. EMAS therefore focuses on performance by providing for disclosure that helps to meet stakeholders' interests in openness and transparency.

Refrigerators

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 993W, of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, on refrigerators, what progress has been made in publishing guidance for *(a)* retail outlets who previously have collected old refrigerators when supplying new refrigerators to customers and *(b)* small retail businesses who have previously collected old refrigerators from large retail outlets and then sold them as secondhand items. [20746]

Mr. Meacher: Retailers have been kept informed of the impacts of EC Regulation No. 2037/2000 through a series of stakeholder meetings (both general and specifically for retailers). My Department has also written to small retail businesses through a number of trade associations to outline the impacts of EC Regulation No. 2037/2000 on the management of waste fridges and freezers. My Department's website also contains information on the requirements of the regulation with regard to these issues.

Ozone Levels

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 425W, on ozone levels, (1) if she will list the number of days per site in rural areas on which pollution levels were *(a)* at and *(b)* below national air quality standards in (i) 1996, (ii) 1997, (iii) 1998, (iv) 1999 and (v) 2000; [18832]

(2) if she will provide a breakdown of *(a)* the different measures of pollution and *(b)* their levels in rural areas in (i) 1996, (ii) 1997, (iii) 1998, (iv) 1999 and (v) 2000. [18833]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* Levels of ozone are measured as part of the UK national urban and rural air pollution monitoring network. There are currently 120 automatic monitoring sites within this network that also measure a range of other pollutants. The number and location of monitoring sites are predominantly determined by the reporting requirements as set out in the Air Quality Framework Directive and the Air Quality Daughter Directives. The UK has been divided into air pollution monitoring areas (zone or agglomerations) for the purposes of the First Air Quality Daughter Directive.

Sixteen national monitoring sites are located in rural or remote areas. These sites measure particulates (PM10), nitrogen dioxide, oxides of nitrogen, sulphur dioxide and ozone. However, not every site measures every pollutant. Table 1 lists the pollutants currently monitored at each rural monitoring station.

The independent Expert Panel on Air Quality Standards (EPAQS) has developed recommendations on natural air quality standards. The standards are based on assessment of the health effects of each pollutant. When air pollution levels are above the standard mild effects, that are unlikely to require action, may start to be noticed by sensitive people. Table 2 lists the air quality standards.

Table 3 shows the number of days at rural sites on which levels of ozone were above the national standard of 100 $\mu g/m^3$ measured as a running eight hour average mean. Ozone episodes are caused by a combination of sunlight reacting on volatile organic compounds and nitrogen dioxide. These pollutants can be transported long distances and a proportion of the ozone measured during these episodes is likely to have originated from continental sources.

Table 4 shows the number of days at rural sites on which levels of PM_{10} were above the national standard of 50 $\mu g/m^3$ measured as a running 24 hour average mean.

Table 5 shows the number of days at rural sites on which levels of sulphur dioxide were above the national standard of 266 $\mu g/m^3$ measured as a 15 minute mean.

The nitrogen dioxide standard (287 $\mu g/m^3$ measured as a one hour mean) has not been exceeded at any rural site at which monitoring is undertaken.

Table 1: Automatic rural network stations—29 November 2001

Name	*Location*	*Pollutants measured*	*Start date*
Wicken Fen	Cambridgeshire	O_3, NO_x, SO_2	15 October 1997
Ladybower	Derbyshire	O_3, NO_x, SO_2	15 July 1988
Yarner Wood	Devon	O_3	26 June 1987
Lullington Heath	East Sussex	O_3, NO_x, SO_2,	4 October 1986
Rochester[1]	Rochester	O_3, NO_x, SO_2, PM_{10}	26 January 1996
Weybourne	Norfolk	O_3	20 May 2001
High Muffles	North Yorkshire	O_3	16 July 1987
Harwell	Oxfordshire	O_3, NO_x, SO_2	22 June 1976
Somerton[1]	South Somerset	O_3	26 January 1996
Sibton	East Anglia	O_3	1 July 1973
Lough Navar	Northern Ireland	O_3, PM_{10}	2 April 1987
Eskdalemuir	South Scotland	O_3	23 April 1986
Strath Vaich	North Scotland	O_3	18 March 1987
Bush	South Scotland	O_3	1 April 1986
Narberth[1]	Pembrokeshire	O_3, NO_x, SO_2, PM_{10}	10 March 1997
Aston Hill	Mid-Wales	O_3	26 June 1986

[1] Affiliate site

Notes:

Ozone—O_3

Nitrogen dioxide—NO_2

Sulphur dioxide—SO_2

PM_{10}

Table 2: Current UK air quality standards

Pollutant	*Concentration*	*Standard measured as*
Benzene	16.25 μg/m^3	Running annual mean
1,3 butadiene	2.25 μg/m^3	Running annual mean
Carbon monoxide	11.6 μg/m^3	Running 8 hour mean
Lead	0.25 μg/m^3	Annual mean
Nitrogen dioxide	287 μg/m^3	1 hour mean
Ozone	100 μg/m^3	Running 8 hour mean
PM$_{10}$	50 μg/m^3	Running 24 hour mean
Sulphur dioxide	266 μg/m^3	15 minute mean

Table 3: Days on which ozone levels were above the national standard at rural sites

Site	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Aston Hill	24	24	11	22	20
Bush Estate	12	11	3	8	3
Eskdalemuir	10	17	6	17	6
Harwell	27	39	13	30	12
High Muffles	25	27	15	31	15
Ladybower	20	28	8	21	7
Lough Navar	6	5	3	6	7
Lullington Heath	40	54	27	49	28
Narberth	—	27	12	27	—
Rochester	28	42	20	38	18
Sibton	28	31	17	23	13
Somerton	40	38	23	34	26
Strath Vaich	11	12	10	26	10
Wicken Fen	—	—	11	31	10
Yarner Wood	28	21	20	34	14

Table 4: Days on which PM$_{10}$ levels were above the national standard at rural sites.

	Narberth	*Rochester*
1996	—	—
1997	0	6
1998	3	4
1999	0	1
2000	1	1

Table 5: Days on which sulphur dioxide levels were above the national standard at rural sites

Site	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Harwell	2	—	5	2	4
Ladybower	6	1	7	0	0
Lullington Heath	0	0	0	0	—
Narberth	—	0	0	—	0
Rochester	18	6	3	2	1
Wicken Fen	—	—	0	0	0

Departmental Targets

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many targets set for her Department she *(a)* will and *(b)* will not meet by the set date. [20947]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The Department is responsible for the Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets previously published for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and for the work transferred from the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. DEFRA is on course to meet all its PSA targets.

Biodiversity

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to encourage biodiversity in British agriculture. [20751]

Alun Michael: Many of DEFRA's activities are intended to conserve and enhance farmland biodiversity. Most notable among these are our agri-environment schemes, which we are expanding greatly under the England Rural Development Programme. Other measures include:

delivery of free conservation advice to farmers, focusing especially on priority BAP species and habitat;

cross-compliance measures to ensure good environmental management of set-aside land and to tackle over-grazing and inappropriate supplementary feeding of livestock;

support for planting of trees on former agricultural land through the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme;

controls on approval, storage, marketing and use of pesticides;

flood management measures;

a biodiversity and conservation management research programme worth over £2 million a year;

our contribution to the many UK Biodiversity Action Plans for which agricultural management is a factor and, in particular, our lead partner role for the Habitat Action Plans for cereal field margins, ancient and/or species-rich hedgerows and upland hay meadows.

We are also leading the campaign for reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. One of our objectives is to shift its emphasis away from production subsidies and towards support for rural development and more environmentally-friendly farming practices. The England Biodiversity Strategy, which will be published next summer, will consider how biodiversity delivery can be further improved in the agriculture sector.

Parliamentary Questions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by her Department were the subject of a holding answer in the last three sessions of Parliament. [22010]

Mr. Morley: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was created on 8 June 2001, therefore the historical information requested is not available. However, according to our records from Monday 25 June 2001 to Monday 10 December this Department received a total of 2,795 parliamentary questions, of which 905 were named day written questions, of which 73 per cent. received a holding answer.

Household Waste

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of household waste was recycled in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* the North East and *(c)* South Tyneside in each year from 1998 to 2001. [20969]

Mr. Meacher: Data are available for England and Wales from the Department's annual Municipal Waste Management Survey. The percentage of household waste recycled is listed.

Percentage

	1998–99	*1999–2000*
England and Wales	8.8	10.3
North East	3.7	4.3
South Tyneside	3.7	4.2

2000–01 data are currently being collected from local authorities.

Correspondence

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to reply to the letters of 25 June, 10 July, 5 October and 6 November from the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden, concerning a constituent, Ms Carin Beumer, Finance Director of the Natural Health Company (International) Ltd., Hitchin, over her Department's handling of the company's applications for standard certification of bovine sourced product. [15725]

Mr. Morley: I replied to the letter from the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden on 6 December 2001.

Arable Farmers (Compensation)

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what factors underlay her decision not to draw upon EU moneys to compensate UK arable farmers. [20629]

Mr. Morley: We considered the case for payment of optional agrimonetary compensation to the arable sector, the cost of which would largely have been borne by the UK Exchequer. While we acknowledge the difficulties that the sector is facing, we decided not to draw down these funds given the many competing demands on the Exchequer, not least the cost of eradicating foot and mouth disease. The arable sector will, however, be receiving £28 million in compulsory agrimonetary compensation this autumn.

Landfill

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what impact she anticipates *(a)* the increase in landfill tax in (i) 2001 and (ii) 2002, *(b)* national recycling targets for local authorities, *(c)* the implementation of the EU directive on fridge recycling, *(d)* the implementation of the EU directive on end-of-life vehicles and *(e)* the implementation of the EU directive on landfill will have on the level of council tax in English local authorities; and if she will make a statement. [19594]

Mr. Meacher: The amount of council tax individual authorities choose to raise is a matter for individual councils to decide. Spending Review 2000 looked at pressures on local authority services funded through the Environment, Protection and Cultural Services (EPCS) block, which included increases in landfill tax and the 2003–04 statutory targets for recycling and composting of household waste. SR2000 provided an increase in EPCS Standard Spending Assessment of £1.1 billion over the period covered by the spending review.

Regarding the cost of managing waste fridges, my Department has announced an extra £6 million in the local government finance settlement. This will help local authorities with the extra costs of handling fridges to the end of this financial year.

It has not yet been decided how the take-back and treatment of end-of-life vehicles under the directive will be funded between 2002 and 2007. The Government are now assessing the responses to their consultation on options for implementing the directive, and will take these into account when deciding the way forward.

Spending Review 2000 will establish future levels of local authority funding for 2003–04 to 2005–06 with regard to the pressures they will face.

Flooding

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what meetings she has had in 2001 with agencies involved in flooding; what assessment she has made of the performance of flooding agencies *(a)* in relation to the reconstruction work made necessary by the winter 2000–01 flood damage and *(b)* the work done to prevent a recurrence of these events this winter; and if she will make a statement. [21648]

Mr. Morley: I hold regular meetings with the Environment Agency which is the principal flood defence operating authority and which exercises a general supervision over all matters relating to flood defence.

Last year's flooding was truly exceptional and followed the wettest autumn on record. Flood defences damaged last year have all been repaired and reinstated, and in some cases improved. This means that communities are now at least as well defended as they were before the floods, and are often better defended. Longer term work to improve defences is under way in many areas. The arrangements for responding to flooding, which proved to be effective last year, have been further improved in the light of lessons learned.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement of her policy on a ban on tests and experiments on live animals in the United Kingdom. [17757]

Mr. Meacher: In line with Government policy on experiments on live animals, the policy of my Department is to seek a reduction in such experimentation wherever possible, consistent with the protection of human health and the environment. We take the view that, while a complete ban is not yet achievable, much more can and should be done to reduce the numbers of animals used in determining the environmental fate and effects of chemicals.

We have made it clear to the Commission of the European Communities and to other member states that a key objective of the EU Review of Chemicals legislation must be to keep the need for animal experimentation to an absolute minimum. This should include:

requiring companies to share information about chemicals

prioritising chemicals for testing

finding and validating test methods which do not require the use of animals.

International Trade (Agricultural Products)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the reform of international trade in agricultural products. [20753]

Mr. Morley: I am delighted that the WTO Ministerial meeting in Doha last month agreed to pursue a further programme of agricultural trade reform. The agreement commits members to:

> "comprehensive negotiations aimed at: substantial improvements in market access; reductions of, with a view to phasing out, all forms of export subsidies; and substantial reductions in trade-distorting domestic support".

and to conclude a new Agreement on Agriculture by 1 January 2005.

Sellafield

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the representations *(a)* made to and *(b)* received from the European Commission in respect of the Sellafield MOX Plant since 1 January. [19408]

Margaret Beckett: We received two responses to our July 2001 consultation paper, "Assessment of BNFL's Business Case for the Sellafield MOX Plant", from Mr. D. Taylor and Mr. M. M. Deffrennes at the European Commission. Copies of all responses to our consultation papers can be read at the DEFRA Library in Ashdown House, 123 Victoria street, London SW1.

A copy of the responses from Messrs. Taylor and Deffrennes has been made available in the Library of the House today.

Combined Heat and Power

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she last met the Chancellor of the Exchequer to discuss combined heat and power and the climate change levy. [10425]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* I am in regular contact with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on a wide range of matters that affect the business of my Department. We are both members of the cabinet committee that meets to discuss environmental matters.

In addition, my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment meets regularly with Treasury Ministers to discuss a whole range of matters related to energy and environmental policy. CHP and the climate change levy have featured in these discussions.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she has taken to address the change in export of power from combined heat and power since the introduction of the new electricity trading arrangements (NETA). [16774]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government recognise the economic difficulties faced by CHP.

Ofgem's Report to DTI on the Review of the Initial Impact of NETA on Smaller Generators issued on 31 August 2001, indicated that the export of power from CHP has reduced by around 60 per cent. since the introduction of NETA. Ofgem suggested the lower export prices for electricity were one factor, but that higher costs (especially gas prices) may also have contributed.

On 1 November 2001, I issued a consultation document in response to Ofgem's reports "The New Electricity Trading Arrangements—Review of the First Three Months" and "Report to the DTI on the Review of the Initial Impact of NETA on Smaller Generators" of 31 August 2001. This consultation closed on 1 December 2001.

The Government's key proposals are, broadly, to ensure imbalance prices are genuinely cost reflective; and to ensure that effective consolidation services emerge. I have proposed setting up a working group to look at obstacles to consolidation, and to report back to me by 31 January 2002.

The Government also invited views on other proposals put forward by industry. The Government are considering responses to this consultation carefully.

Of course the Government welcome reductions in electricity prices but have been concerned by the effect the increase in gas prices has had on the competitiveness of industrial gas consumers, including CHP operators.

I am actively pursuing a three-part strategy intended to address higher gas prices, including continuing to push for liberalisation across Europe, improving market functioning and tackling any anti-competitive behaviour. As part of taking forward this strategy, on 2 November 2001 I published a consultation document on gas issues entitled "A consultation into Concerns About Gas Prices and Possible Improvements to Market Efficiency". This is available on the DTI website at www.dti.gov.uk/energy/gasconsult/gascondoc.pdf.

In addition, DEFRA is developing, in close collaboration with other Departments, a draft CHP Strategy, which will set out the measures needed to achieve the Government's target of at least 10,000 MW of installed CHP electrical capacity by 2010. This is expected to be published in the coming months.

Rural Payments Agency

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on *(a)* farm cash flow and *(b)* farmers' livelihoods of delays in the (i) despatch and (ii) processing of (A) livestock and (B) ESA scheme claim forms and payments from the Rural Payments Agency in Worcester; and if she will make a statement. [20022]

Mr. Morley: The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) office at Worcester closed as a processing centre at the end of October but remains open as a drop-in centre for the receipt of forms. RPA work previously undertaken at Worcester is now undertaken by other RPA offices. Agri-environment schemes are dealt with by the Rural Development Service.

Payments of livestock claims by RPA are expected to be made within the stipulated time frames. However the impact of FMD, the need to develop computer software upgrades incorporating changes to the payment arrangements and the need to conduct FMD cross checks to establish entitlement to payment mean that rather more claims than normal will be paid towards the end of the period.

For some ESA cases there has been a delay in despatching claim forms because of queries that need resolution. However the majority of claim forms were sent out in September. This is about one month later than normal and was due to the restructuring of ex MAFF regions. Payments are however expected to be made within the two month Citizen Charter target. Farmers' cash flows and livelihoods should not therefore be significantly affected.

Fruit and Vegetable Consumption

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with *(a)* the Fresh Produce Consortium, *(b)* the Horticultural Development Council and *(c)* Government Departments on proposals to increase the consumption of fruit and vegetables by the population; and if she will make a statement. [20138]

Mr. Morley: The Government aim to increase consumption of fruit and vegetables, including improving access and awareness, through the five-a-day programme as part of the NHS plan. This Department liaises closely with the Department of Health on many aspects of this, most notably the National School Fruit Scheme; as well as with the Fresh Produce Consortium, the Horticultural Development Council and other stakeholders. The contribution of fruit and vegetables towards a healthy diet is well recognised and setting a trend for increasing consumption will also provide welcome opportunities for growers.

Potatoes

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of this autumn's weather conditions on the storage of this year's national potato crop; and what advice her Department has issued to growers and producers on the correct conditions for the mass storage of potatoes. [20136]

Mr. Morley: The assessment of the impact of this autumn's weather conditions, and advice to growers on potato storage, have been undertaken by the British Potato Council (BPC). This non-departmental public body was established in 1997 as a statutory levy funded development council. The BPC has kept growers informed of conditions throughout harvesting and warned of the necessity for careful store management and monitoring to overcome the effects of poor field conditions. The Council has also set up a telephone helpline to provide storage advice, published storage advice sheets and regularly updates storage advice on its website.

Hunting

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the results of her consultation on the permit conditions to allow resumption of hunting with hounds. [22052]

Alun Michael: The period in which interested parties were invited to make comments on the permit conditions ran until 7 December. Ministers are considering the comments which have been made. The final details of the permit scheme will be published and placed in the Library of the House by the time the temporary permit system opens on 17 December.

Horticulture Research International

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to conduct a quinquennial review of Horticulture Research International. [22256]

Margaret Beckett: I am today announcing a quinquennial review of Horticulture Research International. The terms of reference are as follows:

> "To conduct an evaluation of the performance of Horticulture Research International since the last Review in 1996;
>
> To consider in the light of this evaluation and the views of customs and other stakeholders whether executive NDPB status remains the most cost-effective way of achieving its own and Departmental aims, as well as Government-wide aims such as those relating to science policy, sustainable development and Modernising Government. As part of the review, to consider the sponsorship arrangements between HRI and DEFRA, including funding.
>
> In reaching a view about HRI's status, to consider whether the current arrangements are:
>
> > responsive to the needs of the UK horticulture industry and HRI's other stakeholders;
> >
> > financially sustainable; and
> >
> > operationally flexible so as to be able to adjust easily and quickly to changes in technology, industry requirements, consumer demands and funding opportunities.
>
> If the review concludes that HRI should continue to function as an NDPB, then to consider what changes, if any, are required to its Management Statement in the light of the findings of the review. If, however, the review concludes that a different delivery system would provide high quality, more effective and better value for money services, then to set out the rationale and to recommend appropriate costed options to Ministers".

The review will be conducted by a Review Team attached to DEFRA's Science Directorate working in consultation with the Cabinet Office, Treasury and the Office of Science and Technology.

Interested parties are invited to submit their views to the Review Team by 22 March 2002. Details of how to contact them are contained in DEFRA's news release issued today.

TREASURY

Stamp Duty

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his target for the proportion of purchases of residential properties in disadvantaged areas with stamp duty exemption for each income quintile. [20483]

Mr. Boateng: No such target has been set. The areas qualifying for this stamp duty exemption were identified on the basis of each country's most recent Index of Deprivation. The effect of the exemption will be monitored and evaluated.

Financial Services and Markets Act

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements have been made for dealing with disciplinary cases that a regulator had started before the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 came into force on 1 December. [22445]

Ruth Kelly: The right hon. Sir Roy Beldam has been appointed President of the Interim Tribunal which has been set up under Article 86 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Transitional Provisions) (Partly Completed Procedures) Order 2001 (S.I. No. 2001/3592) to hear outstanding disciplinary cases that were started before commencement of the main provisions ("N2") of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. Sir Roy, who became a judge in 1981, was Chairman of the Law Commission (1985–89), Lord Justice of Appeal (1989–2000) and was, up until N2, Deputy Chairman of the Securities and Futures Authority Panel of Tribunal Chairmen.

Departmental Underspending

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of the provisional underspend for 2000–01 by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions was money allocated to improving transport infrastructure. [13199]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The 2000–01 Appropriation Accounts for the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions will be published early in the new year.

Smuggling (Andorra)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the incidence of smuggling from Andorra to the UK and the consequent loss to the Exchequer in each of the last five years. [19134]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* Customs do not produce estimates of the incidence or the revenue evaded related to smuggling from Andorra to the UK.

Imports (Preference)

Richard Burden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what action is being taken by Customs and Excise to stop goods produced in illegal settlements in the west bank and Gaza being imported into the UK under preference by being labelled "Made in Israel"; [20095]

(2) what assessment he has made of the implications for the work of Customs and Excise of the decisions of the European Commission regarding the import, under preference, of goods produced in illegal settlements in the west bank and Gaza but which are labelled "Made in Israel"; [20092]

(3) what action is being taken by Customs and Excise to investigate allegations that goods produced in illegal settlements in the west bank and Gaza are being imported into Britain under preference and labelled "Made in Israel"; [20094]

(4) what action is being taken by his Department to inform importers of goods produced in illegal settlements in the west bank and Gaza that they cannot use preference irrespective of whether they are labelled "Made in Israel". [20093]

Mr. Boateng: As part of an EC-wide exercise, Customs and Excise will be taking all appropriate steps to ensure that the origins of imports from these areas are properly declared.

This will include providing advice to importers via the Joint Customs Consultative Committee, the Customs website, the computerised entry processing system noticeboard, and articles in trade magazines.

Customs will also be taking steps to identify and monitor imports from these areas, will initiate post-clearance verification inquiries with the competent authorities and take appropriate action dependent on their responses.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the compliance of the aggregates levy with article 1 of the first protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights; [20200]

(2) what assessment he has made of the compliance of the aggregates levy with the *(a)* World Trade Organisation agreement on subsidiaries, *(b)* articles 87 and 88 of the EC Treaty and *(c)* article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights. [20189]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The UK Government are currently pursuing with the European Commission the state aid case for phasing in of the levy in Northern Ireland; the aggregates levy otherwise complies with the provisions of articles 87 and 88 of the EC Treaty.

The aggregates levy is compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights and all relevant international agreements and treaties.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions has he had with *(a)* the Quarry Products Association, *(b)* the British Aggregates Association and *(c)* other representative bodies on the subject of the proposed aggregates tax. [20705]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The Quarry Products Association and British Aggregates Association are among the industry representatives who form part of the aggregates levy consultation group established by HM Customs and Excise. This group has met regularly since the introduction of the aggregates levy was announced.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what studies he has undertaken of the impact of the aggregates tax upon the international competitiveness of the United Kingdom. [20708]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* All imports will be subject to the aggregates levy. Exports of aggregate from the UK will not be subject to the levy. This will protect the international competitiveness of the UK's quarrying industry.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to simplify the regulations for the new aggregates tax. [20707]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The Government will ensure that the aggregates levy regulations are as straightforward as possible.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish studies he has undertaken of the impact the new aggregates tax will have on public sector infrastructure projects. [20709]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* An increase in the price of aggregates will provide an incentive to use aggregates efficiently and encourage wider use of recycled aggregates, regardless of whether they are being used in public or private sector projects.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evaluation he has made of the impact of the proposed aggregates tax on *(a)* the rural economy and *(b)* rural employment. [20710]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The rural economy will benefit from the levy funded 0.1 percentage point reduction in employers' national insurance contributions and the new £35 million Sustainability Fund which will deliver local environmental benefits to areas subject to the environmental costs of aggregates extraction.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research the Treasury has undertaken into the impact upon Northern Ireland of the introduction of the aggregates tax. [20717]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The Government have looked closely at the impact of the levy on the producers of processed aggregate products (such as precast concrete) in Northern Ireland and recognise that they are at greater risk of increased international competition than their mainland counterparts, because of the land boundary with the Republic of Ireland.

As announced in the pre-Budget report, the Government are proposing to address this by phasing the levy in over five years in Northern Ireland, beginning with a complete exemption in 2002–03. This will provide further time for affected businesses to adapt. This is subject to EU state aid approval.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the full list of exemptions from the aggregates list will be published. [20716]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* Details of all the exemptions from the aggregates levy are contained within the Finance Act 2001. A list of prescribed industrial and agricultural processes which will be relieved under section 30 will be published shortly as part of the aggregates levy general regulations.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the reasons are for the levy of £1.60 per tonne on the extraction of *(a)* sand, *(b)* gravel and *(c)* rock. [20706]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* Independent research has verified that there are significant environmental costs associated with quarrying that are not already covered by regulation, including noise, dust, visual intrusion, loss of amenity and damage to biodiversity. The levy will bring about environmental benefits by making the price of aggregates better reflect their true social and environmental costs, and encouraging the use of alternative materials which would otherwise have to be landfilled, thus reducing the amount of extraction.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what environmental impact assessment he has undertaken of the effects of the introduction of the new aggregates tax; and if this includes the cost of the disposal of unsaleable secondary aggregates. [20711]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* Independent research has shown that there are significant environmental costs associated with quarrying which are not already covered by regulation, including noise, dust, visual intrusion, loss of amenity and damage to biodiversity. The levy will make the price of aggregates better reflect these social and environmental costs and encourage efficient use of aggregates, as well as the increased use of recycled aggregates and other alternatives to virgin aggregate, thus reducing the amount of extraction.

In the pre-Budget report the Government announced that in consultation with the aggregates industry, they are examining proposals to deliver additional environmental benefits through the aggregates levy by encouraging the use of aggregates waste.

VAT

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implication of judgment of the European Court of Justice against the Kingdom of the Netherlands (Case C-338/98) for *(a)* the policy of HM Customs and Excise with regard to input-VAT deductions for taxable employers on the expenses of their employees and *(b)* annual irrecoverable VAT revenue for HM Treasury; and if he will make a statement. [20387]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* Customs and Excise are exploring the implications of this decision with the European Commission, and will consider whether any changes are required to ensure the UK's VAT rules are compatible. The Government will consult UK businesses closely about these implications, but are not prepared to impose any unnecessary costs or burdens on them. In the meantime, UK businesses can continue to rely on current UK law, policy and practice.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the ratio of value added tax receipts to consumptions was, setting out the variation between the forecast VAT/consumption ratio and its actual outturn, in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [20219]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* As the hon. Member will be aware, since pre-Budget 1997 the VAT receipts forecast is governed by a National Audit Office assumption that the VAT/Consumers' Expenditure ratio declines by 0.05 per cent. per year.

VAT/consumers' expenditure ratio

	Implied by forecasts for respective Budgets	*Ratio outturns*
1997–98	9.69	9.51
1998–99	9.77	9.24
1999–2000	9.46	9.44
2000–01	9.59	9.36

Amateur Sports Clubs

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if the tax relief he proposes to extend to community and amateur sports clubs will include mandatory relief from business rates; [20946]

(2) pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed) of 30 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1150W, on sports clubs, if he will list the taxes paid by community and amateur sports clubs on which he intends to grant tax relief. [20945]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* Community amateur sports clubs (CASCs) pay a range of taxes depending on their circumstances. The Government recognise the valuable and important role CASCs play in promoting the health and cohesion of their local communities. The consultation document "Promoting Sport in the Community" seeks views on the best way for tax relief to help CASCs that make a positive contribution to their local communities, and is held in the House Library.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment has been made of the number of community amateur sports clubs which would qualify for *(a)* charitable status and *(b)* Inland Revenue administered tax relief under the proposals contained in the consultation paper; [21718]

(2) what criteria, additional to those required by Inland Revenue administered tax relief a community amateur sports club must comply with to qualify for charity status under the proposals contained in the consultation paper. [21719]

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the revenue which will be forgone following implementation of the Charity Commission's proposals on community amateur sports clubs; [21698]

(2) what estimate he has made of the total revenue which would be forgone if the Government implemented their proposals to reform the taxation of community amateur sports clubs as set out in paragraphs 21–22 of Promoting Sport in the Community. [21699]

Mr. Boateng: The consultation document "Promoting Sport in the Community" seeks views on the best way to help CASCs that make a positive contribution to their local communities. The cost and number of clubs which would qualify depend upon the outcome of the consultation.

The Charity Commission has decided to recognise as charitable

> "the promotion of community participation in healthy recreation by the provision of facilities for the playing of particular sports".

CASCs would need to meet the Charity Commission requirements to qualify for charitable status. The revenue forgone will depend upon the number of clubs given charitable status.

Drug/Tobacco Smuggling

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what basis Customs and Excise allocate staff members to tackle *(a)* drug trafficking and *(b)* tobacco smuggling; and if he will make a statement. [20405]

Mr. Boateng: The Law Enforcement function of HM Customs and Excise presently has around 7,000 staff—based across the UK and overseas—and broadly divided between detection, investigation and intelligence arms. A great many of these staff, particularly uniformed officers at ports and airports, are trained to act multifunctionally in order to deal with detections of drugs, tobacco and all other contrabands. Customs deploys its enforcement staff on a flexible resourcing-to-risk basis with a view to delivering the strategic outcomes to which it is committed in the drugs and tobacco areas as well as meeting its commitments in other tax fraud and criminal areas in which it has a responsibility. National, regional and local intelligence assessments inform the day-to-day allocation of resources to specific tasks at specific locations.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to assess the impact of the climate change levy on employment in the manufacturing sector. [20467]

Mr. Boateng: The climate change levy only became operational in April this year and the first payments are still being received by Customs and Excise. It is too early to assess its impact.

However, the impact on any specific sector will depend on a number of factors, including:

> The future energy consumption of firms in the sector and the use they make of levy funded energy efficiency support.
>
> Employment levels in those sectors and the benefits received from the levy funded national insurance contribution cuts.
>
> The number of energy intensive firms in that sector that are eligible to receive a discount on the main rates of the levy by signing up to an energy efficiency agreement.
>
> The use that firms in that sector make of electricity generated from levy exempt 'new' renewable sources of energy and combined heat and power.

Entrepreneurs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what has been the total cost of researching and producing the book on entrepreneurs referred to in the Budget Red Book 2000, HC 346, para. 3.73; [20460]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the book on entrepreneurs referred to in the Budget Red Book 2000, HC 346, para. 3.73; [20459]

(3) on what date he commenced writing the book on entrepreneurs referred to in the Budget Red Book 2000, HC 346, para. 3.73. [20463]

Mr. Boateng: A range of options for the format of the publication, including book and magazine styles, is currently under consideration. As these matters are still under consideration the book has not yet been published and no costs have yet been incurred.

Manufacturing Investment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the most recent figures relating to manufacturing investment; [20473]

(2) what assessment he has made of recent trends in the level of manufacturing investment in the economy. [22075]

Mr. Boateng: The world economy is experiencing its first synchronised slowdown for three decades, and the Government fully appreciate that manufacturers are exposed to faltering global demand and heightened uncertainty. In these circumstances it is more vital than ever that we maintain the conditions for domestic growth and stability that our macroeconomic frameworks have established.

Ministerial Meetings

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when was the last meeting between Treasury Ministers and Ministers of the National Assembly for Wales. [20594]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury Ministers meet on occasion with Ministers of the National Assembly for Wales.

Trader Fraud (VAT)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the methodology used to calculate value added tax missing trader fraud in 2000–01. [20332]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to pages 18 and 19 of the Customs and Excise paper "Measuring Indirect Tax Fraud" that was published on 27 November 2001, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Scientists and Engineers

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when he will publish the review by Sir Gareth Roberts into the supply of scientists and engineers; and if he will make a statement; [21506]

(2) if he will list the main areas in which the Roberts Review into the supply of scientists and engineers will make recommendations. [21507]

Mr. Boateng: Sir Gareth Roberts is expected to send his final report to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in February 2002, at which time arrangements will be made to publish the report.

Chapter 3 of the 2001 pre-Budget report included a section that set out the main areas that Sir Gareth Roberts has indicated he intends to cover in his recommendations. Copies of the pre-Budget report are available in the Library. Additional information relating to Sir Gareth Roberts' Review was included in a document, "Review of the Supply of Scientists and Engineers; A Summary of the Responses to the June 2001 Consultation Paper", published alongside the pre-Budget report. Copies of this document, too, are available in the Library.

The Government welcome the independent assessment provided by Sir Gareth and look forward to receiving his proposals for addressing issues highlighted by the review.

Care of the Elderly

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with members of the Scottish Executive since 3 May on free care for the elderly in Scotland; and what was the outcome of such discussions. [21629]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Discussions take place on occasion between the Treasury and the Scottish Executive on a number of issues. Free care for the elderly in Scotland is a devolved matter which the Scottish Executive are responsible for taking forward.

Barnett Formula

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Barnett formula was last reviewed as regards Northern Ireland funding, with particular reference to regeneration in areas of civil disturbance; and if he will make a statement. [21681]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The funding arrangements for the devolved Administrations, including the Barnett formula, were published in the updated Statement of Funding Policy in July 2000. It is for the Northern Ireland Executive to decide how to allocate their assigned budget.

VAT (Education)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the reasons underlying his policy on charging VAT on the operations of *(a)* further education colleges and *(b)* schools. [19619]

Mr. Boateng: VAT is not charged on the educational operations of further education colleges and schools.

Parliamentary Questions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by his Department were the subject of a holding answer in the last three sessions of Parliament. [22018]

Mr. Boateng: The proportion of named day written questions answered substantively on the nominated day is as follows:

	Percentage
1998–99	35
1999–2000	59
2000–01	63
2001–02[1]	71

[1] To date

Customs Union

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which areas within the European Union are not part of the Customs Union. [21443]

Mr. Boateng: The treaty establishing the European Community applies to the 15 member states and their territories as set out in Article 299. The extent of the customs territory of the Community is set out in Article 3 of the Community Customs Code (Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2913/92).

Article 3 lists the following exclusions from the customs territory:

the Faroe Islands and Greenland;

the Island of Heligoland and the territory of Büsingen;

Ceuta and Melilla;

the French overseas territories and 'collectivités territorials';

the municipalities of Livigno and Campione d'Italia and the national waters of Lake Lugano which are between the bank and the political frontier of the area between Ponte Tresa and Porto Ceresio.

In addition, the Customs Code does not apply to territories for whose external relations a member state is responsible, such as Gibraltar.

Sport Clubs

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when HM Customs and Excise intends to issue revised guidance on the implications of VAT for sport clubs and associations. [21714]

Mr. Boateng: Customs and Excise are currently modernising their external guidance and making it available on the internet. A new version of the VAT Notice for sports clubs will be published early in 2002.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many, and what proportion of letters received by the Department from hon. and right hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July were replied to in *(a)* under 15, *(b)* under 20, *(c)* under 30, *(d)* under 40 and *(e)* over 40 working days. [21993]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 63W.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations the Treasury has made to *(a)* London Underground and *(b)* the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions on the incentive regime for public-private partnership in the last three months. [21742]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury, DTLR and London Underground officials are in regular contact about various aspects of the PPP. London Underground is responsible for negotiating the PPP contracts.

Tobacco

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the annual volume of *(a)* cigarettes, *(b)* cigars and *(c)* rolling tobacco legally brought into the United Kingdom by other EU nationals for their personal use on short-stay visits in the UK. [22040]

Mr. Boateng: Customs does not produce estimates of the annual volumes of tobacco products legally brought into the UK by other EU nationals on short-stay visits.

Railtrack

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer where the debts of Railtrack will appear in the national accounts if Railtrack is in administration next April. [21060]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Railtrack is a private sector company. During administration it will continue to be classified to the private sector in national accounts. Its debts will be recorded as a financial liability in the balance sheet of the private corporations sector.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what representations he has received from *(a)* British and *(b)* foreign public sector investors regarding the administration of Railtrack; [15041]

(2) what assessment he has made of the likely impact on the level of US investment in the United Kingdom that will result from the impact on US investors affected by the administration of Railtrack; [15267]

(3) what representations he has received from *(a)* US investors, *(b)* US investment companies and *(c)* US investor representative bodies regarding the administration of Railtrack; [15268]

(4) what assessment he has made of the impact the administration of Railtrack on US investors will have on the terms on which future US investment is made in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [15270]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury Ministers receive representations from organisations outside the Government on a regular basis. DTLR has lead responsibility for matters relating to Railtrack.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the decision was taken to place all HIV positive applicants for *(a)* leave to remain and *(b)* asylum in a group awaiting policy guidance; and how many such cases there now are (i) in total and (ii) in each category of applicants. [20901]

Angela Eagle: The policy on handling applications for leave to remain by overseas nationals on the basis of being HIV positive or suffering from AIDS was reviewed last year in the light of recent developments in drug therapy and to take account of developments in European Convention on Human Rights case law. A decision was taken in September 2000 to stockpile about 80 cases pending clarification of the new policy. These have now been considered and a further 258 applications have been received.

There are no parallel arrangements to deal with asylum applicants who may be HIV positive.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are in place to ensure that applicants for asylum who are refused permission to stay and who disappear from the system are *(a)* caught and *(b)* deported. [19951]

Angela Eagle: We are taking a range of measures to apprehend and remove failed asylum seekers. These include a substantial increase in the number of caseworkers and immigration officers engaged on removals work, expansion of the detention estate, creation of additional immigration arrest teams and development of a network of reporting centres.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many sites for accommodation centres for asylum seekers have now been identified; where they are located; and when the location of the others will be secured. [19112]

Angela Eagle: Further to the Home Secretary's statement to the House on 29 October, the Home Office plans to establish a number of accommodation centres for asylum seekers with a total capacity of 3,000. My officials are currently looking at a number of potential sites, but no decisions have yet been taken.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of his Department's preferred providers of accommodation for asylum seekers there are; and what conditions they must *(a)* fulfil and *(b)* maintain in order to qualify for their status. [19113]

Angela Eagle: The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has 21 contracted accommodation providers. All contractors are expected to fulfil the terms of their contract. Contracted accommodation must meet a strict specification laid down by NASS in consultation with others including the Refugee Council. The NASS Housing Management Team conducts random inspections of properties throughout the country on a weekly basis. In addition NASS Contract Managers are responsible for ensuring that contractual obligations are met.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers were held in Wandsworth Prison on 26 November. [20438]

Angela Eagle: The latest available information on the number of persons detained under Immigration Act powers relates to 30 September 2001. As at that date, 60 persons (to the nearest five) who are recorded as having claimed asylum at some stage were being held in Her Majesty's Prison Wandsworth, which includes 15 persons detained under dual Immigration Act and other powers.

Under the withdrawal plan, no new cases have been sent to Her Majesty's Prison Wandsworth since 12 November, and it is currently planned to withdraw totally from the prison by 15 December.

Information on Immigration Act detainees as at 31 December 2001 will be published on 28 February 2002 on the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate web site at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average time for processing a visa for indefinite stay in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001 to date; and how many staff were employed processing visa applications other than for asylum seekers in each year from 1997 to 2001. [18403]

Angela Eagle: The average time, in days, to decide applications for indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom was 53 in 1997 and 72 in 1998. The average time excludes those cases where indefinite leave to remain is refused but limited leave is granted in some capacity. Comparable data for later years are not available.

The number of staff in post, full-time equivalent, to process after entry applications, excluding asylum applications, was 402 in 2000 and 462 in 2001. Earlier figures are not available as the casework functions were not broken down to enable identification of work.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civil servants have been seconded from other Government Departments to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate this year to help reduce the immigration casework backlog; and at what Civil Service grade. [19935]

Angela Eagle: There are currently 18 staff on loan to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate as a whole from other Government Departments, helping it to achieve its key business objectives. The grades (or equivalents) are as follows: four members of the Senior Civil Service, one Grade Six, five Grade Sevens, six Senior Executive Officers, one Higher Executive Officer (D) and one Higher Executive Officer.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by how many caseworkers at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate have been increased in the last 12 months. [19933]

Angela Eagle: The number of caseworkers in the Integrated Casework Directorate (the casework directorate of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate) increased by 463 between 19 February 2001 and 31 October 2001. Information to distinguish casework staff was not collected prior to 19 February.

Art and Antiques Squad

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what resources have been provided since 1999 to finance the Art and Antiques Squad and the national database relating to stolen works of art. [R] [20007]

Mr. Denham: The only police art and antiques unit is that operated by the Metropolitan police, which is financed from the general resources provided to the Metropolitan Police Service. There is no national database relating to stolen works of art, although the Metropolitan police art and antiques unit does maintain a database of stolen works of art which may be used to provide information for other police forces.

Metropolitan Police

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Metropolitan police officers left the service in the last month for which figures are available; and how many of these *(a)* retired for reasons other than sickness, *(b)* retired sick, *(c)* transferred to another police force and *(d)* left early to take other employment. [20388]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the number of officers set out in the table left the Metropolitan Police Service in October 2001.

Reason for leaving	*Number*[1]
Retirement	43.5
Medical retirement	9.67
Transfer to another force	39.36
Resignation	42.15
Other	8.0
Total	142.7

[1] Full-time equivalents

The force does not hold information to show how many of those who resigned did so in order to take other employment.

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Metropolitan police recruits there were undertaking 18 weeks training and 10 weeks street duty course in the last month for which figures are available. [20391]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that on 23 November 2001 (the date of the last passing out parade) there were 933 recruits undertaking the 18 week training course.

I understand that the Metropolitan Police Service does not keep central records of the number of officers undertaking the 10 week street duty course.

Visa Applications

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 958W, if he will investigate the handling of Mrs. Allen's case. [20206]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* I am satisfied that Mrs. Allen's case has been dealt with in accordance with established procedures.

Correspondence

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will reply to the letter of 25 September from the hon. Member for Poole on behalf of Avtaz Singh, reference 51037677. [20546]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* We are considering the representations made by the hon. Member and expect to reply to his letter soon.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many and what proportion of letters received by his Department between 20 June and 20 July were replied to *(a)* in under 15, *(b)* in under 20, *(c)* in under 30, *(d)* in under 40 and *(e)* in over 40 working days; [18583]

(2) how many, and what proportion of letters received by the Department from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July were replied to in *(a)* under 15, *(b)* under 20, *(c)* under 30, *(d)* under 40 and *(e)* over 40 working days. [21997]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The available information on public correspondence relates solely to volumes and the number and proportion of replies sent within target. The information is not held in such a way to provide the more detailed breakdown requested. The volume of letters received from members of the public between 20 June and 20 July was 3,556. Of those, 2,736 or 76 per cent. were replied to within the target of 20 days.

The following tables give the information requested for MPs' correspondence. Information on letters on Immigration and Nationality matters, which make up roughly half the postbag, is set out in Table B. Non-Immigration and Nationality correspondence is set out in Table A.

Table A: Letters from MPs received between 20 June and 20 July (non-Immigration and Nationality correspondence)

	Number	*Percentage*
Number and percentage of replies:		
Under 15 days	189	40
Under 20 days	266	57
Under 30 days	380	81
Under 40 days	416	89
Over 40 days	52	11

Table B: Letters from MPs received between 20 June and 20 July (Immigration and Nationality matters)

	Number	*Percentage*
Number and percentage of replies:		
Under 15 days	199	22
Under 20 days	334	37
Under 30 days	414	46
Under 40 days	455	51
Over 40 days	445	49

My Department receives large amounts of correspondence from hon. Members and members of the public. We aim to send a substantive reply to all letters as soon as possible. I am determined to achieve a high level of performance in dealing quickly with correspondence.

We are working with our Information Technology partners to develop next year a Customer Contact Centre which will radically change the way we handle letters, e-mails and telephone inquiries. In the short term we are implementing a number of organisational and process changes to bring about improvements in the quality and timeliness of replies and to prepare for the Contact Centre.

Police Response Vehicles

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police response vehicles have been in road accidents while on operational duty in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995, *(c)* 1996, *(d)* 1997, *(e)* 1998, *(f)* 1999 and *(g)* 2000; and if he will make a statement. [20617]

Mr. Denham: The table sets out, from police force returns to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, the number of accidents involving police vehicles which were engaged in immediate/emergency response or pursuit at the time of the accident.

Year	*Number of accidents*
1994–95	5,386
1995–96	6,611
1996–97	4,972
1997–98	5,057
1998–99	5,037
1999–2000	5,382
2000–01	5,969

Note:

Four forces did not submit a return in 1994–95, two forces in 1995–96, two forces in 1996–97, and one force in 2000–01.

Chief officers of police share fully the Government's view that everything possible must be done to minimise the risk of accidents involving police vehicles, while recognising the need to ensure a prompt response to emergencies. The police are taking forward a number of initiatives to help to achieve this, including the implementation of recommendations from an Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) report on police pursuit driver training. In addition, ACPO has produced a guide to pursuit management to be used by forces, and a new police driver training course, launched December last year, introduced a universal standard for driving in England and Wales which recognises the need to give priority to public safety above all other considerations.

It is police practice to consider continuously the consequences of a pursuit and whether to break it off. Other operational measures employed to avoid or curtail pursuits include the use of helicopters, the early deployment of tyre deflation devices across the carriageway, and the use of tactical pursuit and containment, where a number of police vehicles box in a target vehicle to bring it safely to a halt.

Prison Officer Housing Units

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officer housing units are available for allocation to prison officers in England and Wales. [20433]

Beverley Hughes: Entitlement to occupy quarters was ended for Prison Officers in 1987. Since that time quarters have been sold either to occupying officers under discount sales schemes or, where vacant on the open market. Fifty quarters are retained for occupation by Chaplains who continue to have a quarter entitlement. Also, approximately 400 quarters retained on security or operational grounds are available for occupation by prison staff, and these are reallocated by Governors upon becoming vacant.

Sri Lankan Tamils

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Sri Lankan Tamils are being held in *(a)* detention centres and *(b)* prisons in the United Kingdom awaiting removal from the UK for immigration offences; and if he will make a statement. [20439]

Angela Eagle: The latest available information on persons detained under Immigration Act powers relates to 30 September 2001. The number of Sri Lankans being held in detention centres and prisons as at that date is given in the table.

Place of detention	*Sri Lankan Immigration Act detainees as at 30 September 2001*[1]
Immigration detention centres	10
Dedicated Immigration Service wings[2]	20
Prison establishments[3]	20
Total persons detained in detention centres and prisons[3]	55

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest five, and may not sum due to rounding. Excludes persons detained at Oakington Reception Centre.

[2] Persons detained at the dedicated Immigration Service wings at Haslar, Lindholme and Rochester.

[3] Includes 10 persons detained under dual immigration and other powers.

It is not possible to separately identify how many of these persons are Sri Lankan Tamils. Information on how many of these persons were awaiting removal from the United Kingdom for immigration offences on 30 September 2001 is not available and could be obtained only by examining individual case files at disproportionate cost.

Information on Immigration Act detainees as at 31 December 2001 will be published on 28 February 2002 on the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate website at http: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Rape

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of rape were reported in England and Wales in 2000 that resulted in charges being made against the alleged perpetrators. [20435]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The requested details are not collected centrally. Of the 8,593 offences of rape recorded in England and Wales in the year ending March 2001, 3,992 were detected. During the 2000 calendar year a total of 2,046 individuals were proceeded against at magistrates courts for rape. As the recorded crime figure relates to offences, and the proceedings figure relates to individuals, who may be prosecuted for more than one rape offence, these figures are not directly comparable.

Home Office Research Study 196 'A question of evidence? Investigating and prosecuting rape in the 1990s' found that 42 per cent. of a sample of recorded cases of rape of a female in 1996 resulted in a charge.

Police Corruption

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were cautioned in the course of an investigation for corruption in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999 and *(e)* 2000. [20499]

Mr. Denham: The information required to answer this question is not held centrally and to seek this information from all police forces would involve a disproportionate cost.

Hoax Emergency Calls

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of hoax calls to the emergency services he estimates to be made from mobile telephones; and if he will require mobile telephone operators to co-operate with the investigation and prosecution of hoax callers. [20487]

Mr. Denham: Making a hoax call to the emergency services constitutes improper use of a public telecommunication system and is an offence under section 43 of the Telecommunications Act 1984. Data on the number of prosecutions for malicious abuse of the public telephone system are not collected centrally.

Accidental calls, characterised by silence on being answered, account for some 20 per cent. of 999 calls. Silent calls are now routed to a recorded message requiring confirmation that emergency services are required. Oftel is working with manufacturers to improve mobile phone design to reduce the risk of accidental engagement of 999.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for reducing the fear of crime. [17314]

Mr. Denham: The target is to ensure that by 2004 levels of fear of crime in the key categories of violent crime, burglary and car crime are lower than in 2001. The measure is the British Crime Survey, and the 2001 survey provides us with a baseline against which to measure progress against this target. The 2001 baseline is: 22.3 per cent. of the population fear violent crime; 16.5 per cent. fear burglary and 18.5 per cent. fear car crime.

Tackling the fear of crime is critical to improving the quality of life for many. The British Crime Survey shows that fear of crime has been falling in the key crime categories over a number of years, although we know that some individuals, communities or groups may be more susceptible to fear than others. Our crime reduction programme aims to secure substantial reductions in the level of fear of crime by 2004, as we achieve real reductions in actual crime levels.

Police Complaints

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints were *(a)* registered and *(b)* upheld and what the level of complaints was as a percentage of the effective strength of each police constabulary in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years. [20370]

Mr. Denham: Available information is for England and Wales only. Complaints and discipline statistics are published annually in a Home Office Statistical Bulletin. The latest statistics relating to 2000–01 were published on 14 November 2001 in issue number 21/01. Details are given in the tables.

Complaints received by the police

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	976	1,035	852	871	845
Bedfordshire	217	247	161	207	194
Cambridgeshire	458	473	410	390	281
Cheshire	489	600	597	556	495
Cleveland	375	342	326	400	318
Cumbria	419	315	289	286	283
Derbyshire	384	443	400	421	298
Devon and Cornwall	760	911	798	645	704
Dorset	185	164	165	239	267
Durham	166	163	181	168	181
Essex	573	559	510	538	549
Gloucestershire	323	328	272	296	258
Greater Manchester	2,149	2,181	2,211	2,281	1,807
Hampshire	948	897	654	594	523
Hertfordshire	312	466	416	502	491
Humberside	431	444	425	410	364
Kent	657	675	624	678	620
Lancashire	886	848	850	918	682
Leicestershire	292	266	280	315	333
Lincolnshire	169	141	310	328	313
London City of	133	126	69	63	60
Merseyside	2,028	2,270	1,429	1,312	911
Metropolitan Police	9,122	8,037	7,154	6,611	5,830
Norfolk	423	519	326	433	365
Northamptonshire	294	331	256	212	221
Northumbria	650	671	629	668	661
North Yorkshire	370	343	363	441	441
Nottinghamshire	754	812	689	817	770
South Yorkshire	473	454	551	666	582
Staffordshire	587	598	511	629	803
Suffolk	287	308	268	374	229
Surrey	497	561	639	477	460
Sussex	864	1,076	1,153	1,734	1,814
Thames Valley	742	604	768	756	768

Complaints received by the police

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Warwickshire	165	180	206	194	205
West Mercia	506	517	454	578	410
West Midlands	1,681	1,676	1,590	1,868	1,884
West Yorkshire	966	864	796	871	795
Wiltshire	162	185	259	230	266
Dyfed-Powys	202	183	180	148	157
Gwent	427	446	505	557	487
North Wales	392	353	381	439	297
South Wales	965	723	752	733	747
England and Wales	33,859	33,335	30,659	31,854	28,969

Complaints against the police upheld

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	15	26	28	16	27
Bedfordshire	14	3	11	9	6
Cambridgeshire	23	42	15	28	18
Cheshire	16	11	17	11	10
Cleveland	13	2	12	0	5
Cumbria	2	1	7	7	0
Derbyshire	26	5	8	2	7
Devon and Cornwall	14	38	26	24	22
Dorset	3	6	7	3	5
Durham	7	5	1	5	4
Essex	14	22	25	6	12
Gloucestershire	12	12	3	11	5
Greater Manchester	22	20	20	30	40
Hampshire	30	22	24	22	20
Hertfordshire	15	12	10	8	20
Humberside	8	18	9	14	14
Kent	27	26	24	26	63
Lancashire	30	12	15	13	26
Leicestershire	10	15	10	5	13
Lincolnshire	12	6	6	5	7
London City of	7	5	6	4	3
Merseyside	11	7	12	6	36
Metropolitan Police	203	236	146	168	138
Norfolk	26	11	28	11	17
Northamptonshire	9	1	6	9	7
Northumbria	8	12	6	3	12
North Yorkshire	13	10	27	20	16
Nottinghamshire	15	13	1	12	26
South Yorkshire	3	13	11	18	14
Staffordshire	7	9	6	20	34
Suffolk	12	11	24	11	5
Surrey	7	5	17	7	17
Sussex	33	23	31	54	79
Thames Valley	27	32	23	37	45
Warwickshire	6	6	4	6	9
West Mercia	14	6	23	13	11
West Midlands	23	61	47	26	38
West Yorkshire	54	26	13	13	19
Wiltshire	2	27	5	3	11
Dyfed-Powys	1	3	1	5	4
Gwent	7	3	5	3	8
North Wales	5	9	14	7	13
South Wales	28	17	11	13	17
England and Wales	834	850	745	714	903

Complaints received as a percentage of police strength

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	33	35	29	29	29
Bedfordshire	19	23	15	20	19
Cambridgeshire	37	36	32	31	23
Cheshire	24	29	29	27	25
Cleveland	26	23	22	28	23

Complaints received as a percentage of police strength

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Cumbria	38	28	25	25	26
Derbyshire	22	25	23	24	17
Devon and Cornwall	26	32	27	22	25
Dorset	15	13	13	19	20
Durham	12	11	12	11	12
Essex	20	19	17	19	20
Gloucestershire	29	29	25	27	23
Greater Manchester	31	32	32	33	27
Hampshire	28	26	19	17	15
Hertfordshire	18	26	24	29	28
Humberside	21	22	21	21	19
Kent	21	21	19	21	19
Lancashire	28	26	26	28	21
Leicestershire	15	14	14	16	17
Lincolnshire	15	12	26	29	28
London City of	15	15	8	8	8
Merseyside	46	54	34	31	22
Metropolitan Police	33	30	27	25	23
Norfolk	30	36	23	31	26
Northamptonshire	26	28	22	19	20
Northumbria	18	18	17	17	17
North Yorkshire	28	26	27	33	34
Nottinghamshire	33	35	30	37	35
South Yorkshire	15	14	17	21	18
Staffordshire	27	27	22	28	37
Suffolk	25	26	23	31	20
Surrey	30	35	40	29	26
Sussex	28	35	38	61	64
Thames Valley	20	16	20	20	21
Warwickshire	17	19	22	21	23
West Mercia	25	25	23	29	22
West Midlands	24	24	22	26	26
West Yorkshire	19	17	15	17	16
Wiltshire	13	16	22	20	24
Dyfed-Powys	20	18	18	14	15
Gwent	41	36	41	45	39
North Wales	28	26	27	32	21
South Wales	32	24	25	25	26
England and Wales	27	27	25	26	24

Complaints upheld as a percentage of police strength

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	0.50	0.87	0.94	0.53	0.92
Bedfordshire	1.24	0.27	1.02	0.86	0.58
Cambridgeshire	1.86	3.23	1.16	2.20	1.46
Cheshire	0.80	0.54	0.83	0.53	0.50
Cleveland	0.92	0.14	0.81	0.00	0.36
Cumbria	0.18	0.09	0.60	0.62	0.00
Derbyshire	1.47	0.28	0.45	0.11	0.39
Devon and Cornwall	0.48	1.33	0.88	0.83	0.77
Dorset	0.24	0.47	0.53	0.23	0.38
Durham	0.50	0.34	0.07	0.32	0.26
Essex	0.49	0.74	0.85	0.21	0.43
Gloucestershire	1.06	1.06	0.27	1.00	0.45
Greater Manchester	0.32	0.29	0.29	0.44	0.59
Hampshire	0.90	0.64	0.69	0.63	0.58
Hertfordshire	0.88	0.68	0.57	0.46	1.13
Humberside	0.39	0.88	0.45	0.71	0.72
Kent	0.87	0.80	0.74	0.81	1.97
Lancashire	0.95	0.37	0.46	0.40	0.82
Leicestershire	0.52	0.77	0.50	0.25	0.65
Lincolnshire	1.05	0.50	0.50	0.44	0.63
London City of	0.81	0.58	0.73	0.51	0.41
Merseyside	0.25	0.17	0.28	0.14	0.88
Metropolitan Police	0.74	0.88	0.56	0.64	0.54
Norfolk	1.86	0.77	1.96	0.80	1.23
Northamptonshire	0.78	0.08	0.51	0.79	0.63
Northumbria	0.22	0.33	0.16	0.08	0.32
North Yorkshire	0.98	0.75	1.97	1.50	1.25

Complaints upheld as a percentage of police strength

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Nottinghamshire	0.65	0.56	0.04	0.54	1.18
South Yorkshire	0.10	0.41	0.35	0.57	0.44
Staffordshire	0.32	0.41	0.26	0.89	1.57
Suffolk	1.05	0.93	2.02	0.92	0.44
Surrey	0.43	0.31	1.06	0.42	0.95
Sussex	1.07	0.75	1.03	1.90	2.80
Thames Valley	0.73	0.87	0.61	0.99	1.20
Warwickshire	0.61	0.65	0.43	0.66	1.00
West Mercia	0.69	0.29	1.14	0.64	0.58
West Midlands	0.32	0.86	0.66	0.36	0.53
West Yorkshire	1.05	0.50	0.25	0.26	0.39
Wiltshire	0.16	2.34	0.43	0.26	0.98
Dyfed-Powys	0.10	0.30	0.10	0.49	0.38
Gwent	0.67	0.24	0.41	0.24	0.63
North Wales	0.36	0.66	1.00	0.50	0.93
South Wales	0.93	0.57	0.37	0.44	0.58
England and Wales	0.67	0.68	0.60	0.58	0.74

Note:

Police strength as of 31 March before the beginning of each financial year

Ethnic Minority Police Officers (Coventry)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there are in Coventry; how many are from ethnic minorities; and what measures there are to encourage more people into the police service. [20957]

Mr. Denham: I understand from the chief constable of West Midlands police that there are 830 police officers in Coventry and that 33 are from the ethnic minorities.

The Crime Fighting Fund was established to provide chief officers with resources to recruit 9,000 extra officers, over and above their previous recruitment plans for the three-year period from April 2000 to March 2003. West Midlands police has been allocated 523 Crime Fighting Fund recruits over the three years.

The first ever National Recruitment Campaign for the police service was launched in August last year to assist forces to meet their recruitment targets. By 25 November 2001 there had been more than 45,000 expressions of interest in joining the police service. 1,837 of these have been passed to West Midlands police for further action.

Parliamentary Questions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by his Department were the subject of a holding answer in the last three Sessions of Parliament. [22025]

Mr. Blunkett: In the last three parliamentary Sessions, 4,749 named day parliamentary questions (the only type for which holding replies are used) have been tabled to the Home Office. Of these, 1,015—or 21 per cent.—were given a holding answer. The figures for each session are given in the table.

Session	*Percentage of answers given holding replies*
1998–99	15
1999–2000	21
2000–01	30

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the question from the hon. Member for Beckenham of 14 November (ref. 16179) [21661]

Mr. Blunkett: I am replying to the question from the hon. Member today. I apologise for the delay.

Styal Women's Prison

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inmates there were in Styal women's prison in each of the last 20 years. [18441]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is set out in the table.

Number of prisoners in Styal prison 30 June 1982 to 2001

	Number
1982	226
1983	239
1984	278
1985	261
1986	270
1987	276
1988	272
1989	226
1990	186
1991	193
1992	196
1993	175
1994	226
1995	237
1996	249
1997	267
1998	281
1999	446
2000	449
2001	424

The step change in population from 281 in 1998 to 446 in 1999 was due to the opening of an additional houseblock in April 1999 and the transfer of prisoners from Risley.

Departmental Expenditure (Scotland)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, in real terms, for each year since 1979 *(a)* the total sums of money spent directly by his Department in Scotland and *(b)* the total sums of money allocated by his Department for spending in Scotland through (i) the Scottish Office, (ii) the Scotland Office and (iii) the Scottish Executive. [16179]

Mr. Blunkett: The information requested is not readily available. Public expenditure information by territory and function is available in the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (PESA) 2001–02 (Cm 5101) for the years 1995–96 to 1999–2000, and earlier years are available in previous PESA publications. Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

My Department does not allocate money for spending in Scotland through the Scottish Office, the Scotland Office or the Scottish Executive.

Dungavel Detention Centre

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if employees of local authorities who carry out duties within Dungavel Detention Centre have *(a)* been fingerprinted and *(b)* had photographic records taken. [21817]

Angela Eagle: It is not current policy to fingerprint or photograph visitors to Dungavel Detention Centre, who are on official business including representatives from local authorities.

Community Relations

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Home Office policies to improve community relations in areas which have suffered from recent disturbances. [5672]

Mr. Denham: The Government took immediate steps in response to the disturbances last summer. In the short term, we made available £7 million to fund additional summer activities for young people. In addition £3 million has been made available to fund the appointment of community facilitators for those areas most in need.

Other measures taken by Government and proposals for further action are set out in the report of the Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion. That report will be published tomorrow together with the report of the independent Review Team, led by Ted Cantle, announced by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in his statement of 10 July 2001, *Official Report,* column 663. Copies will be placed in the Library.

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the letters of reflection that are to be prepared by Ministers as a result of the scrutiny of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, indicating in each case when the letter is to be deposited in the Library. [19872]

Mr. Blunkett: Taking into account the consideration given to the Bill up to and including the second day of Lords Committee (29 November, 2001), the following letters have been prepared:

From	*To*	*Date*	*Subject*
Private Secretary to the Home Secretary	Rt. hon. Denzil Davies MP	23 November	SIAC and appeals
Private Secretary to the Home Secretary	Mark Fisher Esq. MP	27 November	Definition of "terrorist"
Lord Rooker	Lord Dixon-Smith	28 November	Disclosure of information
Lord Rooker	Lord Philips	28 November	Disclosure of information
Beverley Hughes MP	Humfrey Malins CBE MP	29 November	Security of pathogens and toxins
Beverley Hughes MP	Tam Dalyell MP	29 November	Security of pathogens and toxins

I will ensure that copies of these letters are placed in the Library.

Victor Dan Iliescu

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reach a decision on the application for leave to remain by Victor Dan Iliescu (HO Ref. JS33533/3(S); PO 01423/01). [19643]

Angela Eagle: Mr. Iliescu has now been granted leave to remain in the United Kingdom until 30 November 2006.

Young Offender Institutions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the *(a)* use and *(b)* role in punishment and rehabilitation of young offender institutions run by the Army. [20958]

Mr. Ingram: I have been asked to reply.

The Army do not run young offender institutions for the Home Office. They do, however, operate the Military Corrective Training Centre (MCTC) in Colchester. The MCTC is a detention facility for men and women of the armed forces who have been sentenced to undergo a period of corrective training in accordance with the provisions of the Imprisonment and Detention (Army) Rules 1979.

MCTC also provides rehabilitation training for those personnel that are to be discharged from the service, on completion of sentence, so that they develop their potential for self-sufficiency and responsible citizenship.

British Summer Time

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received in the past four years in respect of British summer time being retained throughout the year. [21501]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

To date, I have received two representations calling for British summer time to be extended throughout the year.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce GMT plus one hour in England and Wales throughout the year. [21500]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have no current plans to introduce GMT plus one hour in England and Wales throughout the year.

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations the UK has made to the USA in respect of bringing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty into force before the end of this year. [20508]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

In order for the CTBT to enter into force, it requires the signature and ratification of 44 named states. At present, 31 of these countries, including the UK, have done so. The UK has consistently urged all states that have not yet done so to sign and/or ratify the Treaty. We continue to make our support for the Treaty clear to the US and others, most recently on 11 November in New York when the Foreign Secretary addressed the Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

HEALTH

Extra-contractual Referrals

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistics his Department has collected on the operation of the extra contractual referrals system. [21006]

Mr. Hutton: The extra contractual referral system ended on 1 April 1999. Extra contractual referral income and expenditure information was collected in the financial monitoring returns of national health service trusts and health authorities. A table has been placed in the Library covering the years 1995–96 to 1998–99.

Parliamentary Questions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by his Department were the subject of a holding answer in the last three sessions of Parliament. [22016]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table.

Year	*Number of named day parliamentary questions*	*Percentage receiving holding answers*
1998–99	1,271	25
1999–2000	1,441	35
2000–01	1,825	47

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the question of the hon. Member for Maidenhead on bed blocking tabled for answer on 2 November (No. 12240). [21724]

Jacqui Smith: I replied to the hon. Member today.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was *(a)* the total expenditure on the NHS and *(b)* the total expenditure on counter-fraud work within the NHS in the last year for which figures are available. [21733]

Mr. Hutton: The total net expenditure on the national health service in the year 2000–01 was £44.6 billion. The total expenditure of the NHS Counter Fraud Service during the same period was £4.45 million.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the latest estimate for EU countries' expenditure on health in 2005 in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* as a percentage of the relevant GDP. [21939]

Mr. Hutton: The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is the most reliable source of data for making comparisons of international health expenditure. The latest full set of figures published by the OECD is for 1998. The OECD figures do not include forecasts. The table shows the latest available figures.

1998

	Total health spend (US$ million, PPP[1])	*Total health spend as a percentage of gross domestic product*
Austria	15,299	8.0
Belgium	20,920	8.6
Denmark	11,300	8.3
Finland	7,782	6.9
France	118,776	9.3
Germany	193,697	10.3
Greece	12,594	8.4
Ireland	5,682	6.8
Italy	98,806	7.7
Luxembourg	958	6.0
Netherlands	33,768	8.7
Portugal	11,996	7.7
Spain	46,798	7.0
Sweden	15,328	7.9
United Kingdom	89,432	6.8

[1] Purchasing Power Parity

Source:

OECD Health Data 2001

Correspondence

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of 16 October from the hon. Member for Aylesbury (ref. POH (4) 5009/18). [21716]

Jacqui Smith: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 6 December 2001.

Care Homes (Inspections)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each local authority *(a)* the sum spent on regulation of inspection of care homes in 2000–01, *(b)* the sum budgeted for regulation of inspection of care homes in 2001–02 and *(c)* the sum top-sliced for regulation of inspection of care homes in 2002–03. [21731]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested for the sum spent and the sum budgeted for regulation of inspection of care homes is not available centrally. Total expenditure on registration and inspection by each local authority in England in 1999–2000 is available at http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/pss—stat.htm, but this includes expenditure on the regulatory function for children under eight transferred to OFSTED.

£87 million has been transferred from the personal social services standard spending assessments for the National Care Standards Commission to reflect the transfer of the remaining registration and inspection function. This is shown for each authority in a table which has been placed in the Library.

Occupational Therapy

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what figures his Department collates on waiting times for NHS occupational therapy treatment; and if he will list these for each of the last five years. [21701]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not routinely collect data on waiting times for national health service occupational therapy treatment.

Wheelchairs

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next plans to review the wheelchair voucher scheme; and if he will make a statement. [R] [21792]

Jacqui Smith: There are currently no plans to review the wheelchair voucher scheme introduced in 1996.

Early Intervention Teams

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when and in what manner he intends to announce the outcome of the comprehensive review of progress on the development of plans for early intervention teams. [11527]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 31 October 2001]:* Local implementation teams have completed their comprehensive reviews of services including early intervention mental health teams in readiness to deliver the new services required in the NHS Plan. The reviews have been instigated to support local planning, the outcome of which will be detailed in the local implementation plans.

There is no intention to publish these local reviews on a national basis.

Bed Blocking

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent the additional funding to be provided to local authorities to tackle bed blocking will be ring-fenced; and what categories of expenditure will be permitted for the funding. [12240]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 2 November 2001]:* All of the additional funding will be ring-fenced. Further information can be found in the grant determination under section 93 of the Local Government Act 2000 of the Building Care Capacity Grant for 2001–02 which was published in November and placed on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/jointunit/delayeddischarge.

Coronary Heart Care (London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been made available to improving coronary heart services in hospitals within the Greater London area in each of the last three years. [14731]

Mr. Hutton: Over the last three years, over £27 million has been made available specifically for improving coronary heart disease (CHD) services in London. The information is in the table.

£000

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Capital	[1]—	10,802	[2]2,027
Revenue	[1]—	8,519	5,888
Total		19,321	7,915

[1] No specific allocations

[2] Estimated allocation to national health service trusts

Capital funds shown are based on allocations to NHS trusts in London and revenue funds based on allocations to London health authorities.

The £27 million is to support the delivery of priority areas identified in the National Service Framework for CHD that was published in March 2000.

Health authorities will also have used their overall unified allocation to invest in coronary heart services. In addition to the above, over £2 million capital has been allocated specifically for primary care developments.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the performance indicators to be used for the measurement of the appraisals by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence in pursuit of its public service agreement with his Department. [14903]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) on 5 November 2001, *Official Report,* columns 118–20W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the public service agreement target for the production of appraisals by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence by 31 March. [14904]

Mr. Hutton: The public service agreement which formed part of the 1998 comprehensive spending review settlement included a target of establishing the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) by 1 April 1999 with a view to it producing at least 30 appraisals of new or existing technologies and guidance per annum from 2000–01. NICE was established and in 2000–01 published 21 appraisals, many of which covered more than one technology.

The public service agreement incorporated in the 2000 spending review settlement does not contain specific targets for the production of NICE guidance.

Smallpox

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what strategy is in place to meet an epidemic of smallpox caused by terrorist action. [15466]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has contingency planning in place to mitigate the effects of a bioterrorist act and to ensure response and recovery in conjunction with other Government Departments, the national health service and key public health agencies.

Guidance has been issued to senior managers in the NHS on procedures to be followed in the event of a release of a biological agent, including smallpox.

There are strategic stocks of vaccine which would be rapidly deployed for use as appropriate to the incident to contain any outbreak.

Lymphoedema

Ann Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to improve the level of health care administered by local health authorities to sufferers of lymphoedema. [16683]

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what system is used in the funding of lymphoedema clinics; if he will take steps to encourage a uniform service; and if he will make a statement. [18303]

Jacqui Smith: It is the role of health authorities, in partnership with primary care groups and trusts, to decide what services to provide for their populations including those with lymphoedema. They are best placed to understand local health needs and commission services to meet them.

We are currently developing a National Service Framework (NSF) for long-term conditions. The precise scope of the NSF has not yet been decided. Although it may not address lymphoedema directly, the NSF is likely to set general standards which will improve the quality of treatment and care for all people living with long-term conditions. It will help overcome problems of patchy provision of services. The Department is consulting the Long Term Medical Conditions Alliance, of which the Lymphoedema Support Network is a member, on the development of the NSF.

Performance Assessment System

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the measures of cost efficiency developed by his Department as part of the performance assessment system. [16943]

Mr. Hutton: The performance indicators were published in July 2000 on the Department's website: www.doh.gov.uk/nhsperformanceindicators. This includes a number of efficiency indicators:

day case rate;

average length of stay;

maternity unit costs;

mental health unit costs; and

percentage of prescribing on generic drugs.

Since the indicators were published, the Department has carried out a wide ranging consultation exercise with a view to improving the quality and range of the indicators. An updated set of indicators is now being developed for publication before the end of the year.

In addition, a new public service agreement target for value for money was agreed as part of spending review 2000:

> The cost of care commissioned from trusts which perform well against indicators of fair access, quality and responsiveness, will become the benchmark for the NHS. Everyone will be expected to reach the level of the best over the next five years, with agreed milestones for 2003–04.

The aim of this new target is to ensure that cost-savings are not at the expense of service quality. The year 2001–02 is the first year covered by this new public service agreement target. We will be monitoring progress against this new target as data become available.

Medical Devices Agency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the costs in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 of the Medical Devices Agency. [16936]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

£

	2000–01	*2001–02*[1]
Gross Expenditure	9,020,000	9,682,000
Income	352,000	305,000
Net Expenditure	8,668,000	9,377,000

[1] Estimated

Diabetes

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the advice available to diabetics on the safe disposal of their used needles; and if he will make a statement. [17458]

Jacqui Smith: We would expect a person with diabetes who injects insulin to be advised by their doctor or pharmacist about the safe disposal of their used syringes and needles. Because of the potential hazards to refuse collectors, used syringes and needles should not be disposed of in the domestic waste. Local authorities have a duty to collect clinical waste on request, although they may levy a reasonable charge for doing so. Some general practitioner practices, hospitals and pharmacists also provide a collection service for clinical waste. GPs may prescribe the 1 litre "Sharpsbin" for the disposal of needles and contaminated waste.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the Diabetes National Framework Standards by the end of November. [R] [19552]

Jacqui Smith: We will be publishing the Diabetes National Service Framework Standards this year.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what expenditure on diabetes was in each year since 1997 in the Tees health authority. [20939]

Jacqui Smith [holding answer 6 December 2001]: Information is not collected on disease based costs in the format requested. It is not possible, therefore, to identify total health authority diabetes related costs.

In the particular instance of diabetes a whole range of services are involved in the treatment of patients where the condition is a result of diabetes, for example ophthalmic services, renal services, general surgical services, primary care treatment and prescribing costs.

The table shows the general medical services non-discretionary expenditure on the chronic disease management programme for diabetes, that was incurred by Tees health authority in each financial year since 1997–98.

GMS non-discretionary expenditure on CDM Diabetes 1997–98 to 2000–01—Tees health authority

	£
1997–98	115,711
1998–99	113,665
1999–2000	121,508
2000–01	125,096

Note:

2000–01 data are provisional

Source:

Annual financial returns for health authorities

Cardiac Surgery

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account was taken of the complexity of cases referred to Hammersmith hospital for cardiac surgery in producing the performance tables. [17372]

Mr. Hutton: The Department recently produced comparative data on mortality following a coronary artery bypass graft which were published by Dr. Foster alongside their own version of the same indicator. The Department's data are adjusted to take account of variation between trusts in the age and sex of patients treated and whether the patient is admitted to hospital as an emergency case or for a planned operation.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to *(a)* alter the remit and *(b)* review the framework of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence; and if NICE includes the therapeutic requirements of specific diseases in its assessments of the efficacy of individual drugs. [17433]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on 22 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 416W.

The precise methodology used in appraisals of individual therapies is for the National Institute for Clinical Excellence itself, but the institute's recommendations always take account of the specific features of the conditions in which the therapies are to be applied.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been diagnosed with tuberculosis in Arundel and South Downs in each year since 1990. [18323]

Ms Blears: Information on statutory notifications of tuberculosis (excluding chemoprophylaxis) is available from the Public Health Laboratory Service.

The Department collects information on tuberculosis as part of the hospital episodes statistics (HES) system, which contains details of patients admitted to and treated in national health service hospitals in England.

The nearest available data for Arundel and South Downs are for local authority district, Arun. The numbers of patients treated in Arun is shown in the table.

Finished consultant episodes (FCES)[1] by main diagnosis NHS hospitals England 1990–91 to 2000–01 Arun (local authority district—area of residence)

Tuberculosis

	Number
1990–91	[2]—
1991–92	9
1992–93	[2]—
1993–94	[2]—
1994–95	[2]—
1995–96	10
1996–97	10
1997–98	[2]—
1998–99	[2]—
1999–2000	9
2000–01	[2]—

[1] An FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within a year.

[2] Means a figure between 1 and 5.

Notes:

The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.

The table uses ICD9 codes: O10-O18 (1990–91 to 1994–95) and ICD10 codes A15-A19 (1995–96 to 2000–01).

Source:

Hospital Episodes Statistics (HES) Department of Health

Nursing and Residential Care Beds

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing and residential care *(a)* homes and *(b)* beds have closed in Arundel and South Downs in each year since 1997. [18324]

Ms Blears: The number of residential and nursing care establishment closures in 1999 and 2000, together with the number of new registrations, are presented in the table. Information is not available centrally on the number of beds associated with closures or new registrations.

Number of care home establishment closures and new home registrations in West Sussex

Year ending 31 March

	Residential[1]	*Nursing*[2]
Number of establishment closures		
1999	38	10
2000	45	23
Number of new registrations		
1999	41	10
2000	15	17

[1] Information presented for West Sussex county council.

[2] Information presented for West Sussex health authorities.

Source:

Registration and Inspection Survey

Hospital Beds

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in each quarter in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001, how many hospital beds were unavailable in Arundel and South Downs to incoming patients as a result of their occupation by (i) delayed discharge patients who were awaiting social services funding and (ii) delayed discharge patients who had fully funded social services packages arranged. [18321]

Ms Blears: Information is not collected centrally in the format requested.

Quarterly information for West Sussex health authority, for patients aged 75 and over, has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations have been cancelled in Arundel and South Downs, in each quarter in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001, as a result of hospital beds being occupied by (i) delayed discharge patients who are awaiting social services funding or assessment and (ii) delayed discharge patients who had fully funded social services packages arranged. [18320]

Ms Blears: Information is not collected centrally in the format requested.

Statistics on the number of operations cancelled for non-medical reasons in each health authority are collected on a quarterly basis. Copies are available in the Library. The latest figures are for quarter 1 (April-June) of the 2001–02 financial year.

Hospital-acquired Infections

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients contracted hospital-acquired infections in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001 in Arundel and South Downs. [18318]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Comprehensive information about bacteraemias, including MRSA, has been collected from all acute trusts since 1 April 2001 and this will be published showing individual trust data from 1 April 2002.

Haemoglobinopathies

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will assess the effectiveness of the neonatal screening programme for haemoglobinopathies to be introduced next year; and what criteria he will use. [19103]

Jacqui Smith: The NHS plan sets out our commitment to introduce by 2004 a new and effective screening programme for women and children including a new national linked antenatal and neonatal programme for haemoglobinopathies.

The effectiveness of the programme will be assessed by factors such as the uptake of screening, the effect of follow up treatment and experiences of the people using the service.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many bone marrow transplants were carried out in the United Kingdom during the past five years in relation to *(a)* sickle cell, *(b)* thalassaemia and *(c)* other haemoglobinopathies; and with what success rate. [18902]

Jacqui Smith: The latest figures at April 2001 show that 99 transplants for haemoglobinopathy have been reported to the United Kingdom Children's Bone Marrow Transplant Registry since 1993. 17 children have received transplants for sickle cell disease, 16 are alive (94 per cent.) and 15 (88 per cent.) are cured. 77 children with thalassaemia have been transplanted and have undergone 82 procedures. 69 are alive (90 per cent.) and 62 (81 per cent.) are cured.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Standing Medical Advisory Committee has to issue a further report on sickle cell, thalassaemia and other haemoglobinopathies. [18892]

Jacqui Smith: The Standing Medical Advisory Committee has no plans to issue a further report on sickle cell, thalassaemia and other haemoglobinopathies.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what Government expenditure on directly commissioned research into *(a)* sickle cell, *(b)* thalassaemia and *(c)* other haemoglobinopathies was in (i) 1999 and (ii) 2000. [18901]

Jacqui Smith: The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC), which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. In 1999–2000, the MRC expenditure on all haemoglobinopathies was £815,000. In 2000–01, the MRC expenditure was £823,000.

The Department funds research to support policy development and the delivery of effective practice in the national health service. Research programme and project details can be found on relevant websites, especially that of the National Research Register (NRR), all of which can be accessed through www.doh.gov.uk/research.

The Department core funds the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination and 22 Cochrane Review Groups, one of which, on cystic fibrosis and genetic disorders, covers this area. Details of reviews can be found on the National Research Register and outputs can be found on the research findings register and/or the Cochrane Database.

The financial information requested for Department of Health funded projects could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Management of much of the research supported by NHS research and development programmes is devolved. Expenditure at project level is not held centrally at this level of detail.

Consultants

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many more hours per week newly qualified consultants will be required to work in the NHS during their first seven years than before. [19181]

Mr. Hutton: Our proposals for the new consultant contract, published in February, envisage that for an initial period, perhaps seven years, the terms of the contract would prevent those newly appointed consultants engaging in similar work outside the national health service.

These proposals, alongside the British Medical Association's own proposals, form the basis of continuing negotiations.

Departmental Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to spend the £510 million that was allocated to his Department for 2000–01 but not spent. [19522]

Mr. Hutton: All underspends from 2000–01 are planned to be spent in the current financial year.

Strategic Health Authorities

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the viability of a West Mercia Strategic Health Authority based on Shropshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. [19577]

Mr. Hutton: The consultation on proposals detailed within the "Shifting the Balance of Power" consultation document ended on 30 November.

In considering the responses to consultation, Ministers will take account of views for and against the original options proposed, as well as other alternatives proposed during the consultation process.

Unallocated Funds

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the total unallocated funds within his departmental expenditure limit *(a)* at the start of the financial year and *(b)* to date; and what was the month seven forecast on outturn underspend against his departmental expenditure limit in (i) real and (ii) percentage terms. [19447]

Mr. Hutton: The Department's Departmental Annual Report for 2001–02 contains the departmental unallocated provision (DUP), set for the present financial year in Annex A3 (current) and annex A4 (capital). Draw down of part of this DUP has been reported to Parliament at winter supplementary estimates.

The amounts still left for the Department to draw down are £51.9 million capital and £4.8 million current provision.

Outturn against six-month forecast for each request for resources will be published in the winter supplementary estimates summary request for supply as usual.

Digital Hearing Aids

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what interim measures he plans to take to ensure continuity of service for those who have benefited from digital hearing aids in the 20 trial hospitals while awaiting the evaluation report from the Institute of Hearing Research. [19536]

Jacqui Smith: Patients who have been fitted with digital hearing aids as part of the pilot project will be followed up. This is an important part of the modernised service specification. Decisions about funding for a continued digital hearing aid service in these sites will be made in enough time to enable providers to plan services effectively for the next financial year.

Ambulance Trusts

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice his Department issues to ambulance trusts on the need to ensure interoperability of radio systems with other emergency services. [19703]

Ms Blears: It is our intention to nationally procure a digital radio network for all national health service ambulance trusts in England. A fundamental requirement of the new radio network will be the fullest possible operational interoperability between the emergency services.

Overseas NHS Workers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will rank in terms of *(a)* numbers and *(b)* as a percentage of the total those countries whose citizens are employed by the NHS as (i) nurses, (ii) doctors and (iii) other professional clinical staff in the most recent years for which figures are available. [19601]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested for nurses and other professional clinical staff is not collected centrally. Validated information for doctors is available only for United Kingdom/European Economic Area/other. This is shown in the table.

All doctors—England

	1996		*1997*		*1998*		*1999*		*2000*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
All doctors										
All countries of qualification	86,580	100	89,620	100	91,840	100	93,980	100	96,320	100
United Kingdom	61,240	70.7	62,00	70.2	64,470	70.2	65,810	70.0	67,150	69.7
Rest of EEA	4,590	5.3	4,700	5.2	4,690	5.1	4,890	5.2	4,790	4.97
Elsewhere	20,760	24.0	22,010	24.6	22,670	24.7	23,290	24.8	24,380	25.3
of which:										
General practitioners (excluding GP Retainers)[1,2]										
All countries of qualification	29,120	100	29,390	100	29,700	100	29,990	100	30,250	100
United Kingdom	23,410	80.4	23,560	80.2	23,860	80.3	24,110	80.4	24,330	80.4
Rest of EEA	930	3.2	1,000	3.4	1,020	3.4	1,100	3.7	1,170	3.9
Elsewhere	4,770	16.4	4,830	16.4	4,820	16.2	4,770	15.9	4,760	15.7
HCHS medical and dental staff										
All countries of qualification	57,470	100	60,230	100	62,140	100	63,990	100	66,070	100
United Kingdom	37,830	65.8	39,350	65.3	40,610	65.4	41,690	65.2	42,820	64.8
Rest of EEA	3,660	6.4	3,700	6.1	3,670	5.9	3,780	5.9	3,620	5.5
Elsewhere	15,980	27.8	17,180	28.5	17,860	28.7	18,520	28.9	19,620	29.7

[1] All practitioners (excluding GP Retainers) includes GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contract GPs, PMS Salaried GPs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (Para. 52 SFA), and PMS Others. GP Retainers were collected for the first time in the 1999 census; for comparability purposes they have been excluded.

[2] The 1996 figures include estimates for 179 Assistants whose first country of qualification is unknown.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10
2. Percentages are calculated using unrounded figures

Sources:

Department of Health medical and dental work force census as at 30 September

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics as at 30 September 2000 and 1 October in previous years

National Specialist Commissioning Advisory Group

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the *(a)* membership and *(b)* remit of the National Specialist Commissioning Advisory Group. [19923]

Mr. Hutton: The National Specialist Commissioning Advisory Group (NSCAG) is chaired by Dr. Mike Gill, the Regional Director of Public Health for South East Region.

The current membership of the National Specialist Commissioning Advisory Group is as follows:

Dr. Mike Gill, NSCAG Chairman and Regional Director of Public Health, South East RO

Dr. Chris Bayliss, Consultant Radiologist, Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital

Professor Carol Black, Clinical Vice President, Royal College of Physicians

Ms Jenny Brown, Director Nursing, Hull and East Yorkshire Health Authority

Professor John Cox, President, Royal College of Psychiatrists

Dr. Bernard Crump, Director of Public Health, Leicester Health Authority

Dr. Keith Dodd, Consultant Paediatrician, Derbyshire Children's Hospital

Professor George Elder, Pathologist, College of Medicine, Cardiff

Mr. David Flory, Chief Executive, Newcastle and North Tyneside Health Authority

Ms Linda Hamlyn, Chief Executive, West Hertfordshire Health Authority

Mr. James Johnson, Chairman of the Joint Consultants Committee

Mr. Eamonn Kelly, Director of Health Policy and Strategy, Coventry Health Authority

Sir Peter Morris, President, Royal College of Surgeons

Mr. Nick Relph, Chief Executive, Berkshire Health Authority

Professor Stephen Tomlinson, Faculty of Medicine, Manchester Royal Infirmary

Professor Kent Woods, Director of HTA, Leicester.

NSCAG was established in 1996 to advise Ministers on the identification and funding of services where central intervention into local commissioning of patient services is necessary for reasons of clinical effectiveness, equity of access and/or economic viability. It superseded the Supra Regional Services Advisory Group (SRSAG).

The terms of reference of NSCAG are as follows:

To advise Secretary of State on:

(a) the identification and funding of services under the Supra Regional Services arrangements;

(b) the identification and funding of specialised services not qualifying for Supra Regional Service designation, but where there is an economic and/or clinical justification for contracting centrally for their delivery.

(c) the commissioning of purchaser guidelines for specialised services where purchasing is best arranged through local purchasers by means of lead purchaser or purchaser consortium arrangements; and

(d) funding the service costs of new developments, in those services for which it is likely to become the purchaser, to enable full evaluation to take place.

Psycho-Geriatricians

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how may psycho-geriatricians there were in England and Wales at the last date for which figures are available. [19924]

Mr. Hutton: The data collected for England are shown in the table. The information relating to Wales is a matter for the devolved Administration.

Hospital medical staff within the old age psychiatry specialty

England at 30 September 2000	*Number*
All staff	860
of which:	
Consultant	330

Note:

Figures rounded to the nearest 10.

Source:

Department of Health 2000 medical and dental workforce census.

Hospitals

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the 10 largest hospitals in the United Kingdom, by number of beds. [20245]

Mr. Hutton: The 10 largest hospitals in the United Kingdom, by bed numbers are:

Hospital	*Actual beds*
Queen's Medical Centre UHN NHS Trust, Nottingham	1,366
Leicester Royal Infirmary	1,172
St. James's University Hospital, Leeds	1,157
Leeds General Infirmary	1,135
Northern General Hospital, Sheffield	1,100
Southampton General Hospital	1,088
Nottingham City Hospital NHS Trust	1,050
The Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust, London	1,008
Derriford Hospital, Plymouth	975
University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff	960

NHS Morale

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on morale in the national health service. [20268]

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on morale in the health service. [19968]

Mr. Hutton: We recognise that staff work hard for the national health service, often in challenging environments, and we are committed to ensuring that staff feel properly valued. We have initiated a wide range of initiatives to improve the working lives of all staff in the NHS which are outlined in the NHS Plan.

GPs

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners are due to retire in the next 10 years; and if he will make a statement on the effect on the health service of these retirements. [20263]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect information about retirement intentions of general practitioners. All unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs) have to retire as a principal by the age of 70. Around 2,200 UPEs will reach 70 by 2011.

In addition there are a further 8,880 doctors who are currently aged between 48 and 58. We might expect a proportion of these doctors to also leave by 2011. A number of doctors continue to work in the national health service after they have claimed their NHS pension until they retire fully.

The target increase in the NHS Plan for GPs is at least 2,000 more by 2004. The increases are based on an assessment of what is deliverable given the numbers expected to come out of training, and what is achievable through action on recruitment and retention. This assessment is set against the number of staff we expect to leave the NHS (leavers and retirements).

Linear Accelerator (Royal Shrewsbury Hospital)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the need for a second new linear accelerator at the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital. [20238]

Mr. Hutton: The provision of a second linear accelerator service to replace the existing cobalt unit was approved in 2000. The new linear accelerator is expected to begin treating patients in spring 2002, forming part of the trust's plan to improve cancer services.

Future decisions on service provision will be made through the North West Midlands Cancer Network, of which the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital National Health Service Trust plays a key part. Each trust has been asked to prepare a cancer service delivery plan that will become part of the network wide facilities strategy.

NHS Dentists

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in South Tyneside were registered with an NHS dentist in each of the years 1998 to 2001. [20357]

Jacqui Smith: The number of patients registered with a dentist in the general dental service (GDS) in Gateshead and South Tyneside health authority at 30 September for each of the years 1998 to 2001 is shown in the table.

GDS: Number of registrations in Gateshead and South Tyneside HA, 1998 to 2001 (as at September each year)

	Children	Adults	Total
1998	50,553	138,018	188,571
1999	51,604	139,808	191,412
2000	50,905	139,565	190,470
2001	50,618	142,949	193,567

New Hospital, Worcester

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for funding the provision of the extra beds for the new hospital in Worcester. [20524]

Mr. Hutton: Significant investment has been made available nationally to accommodate the required increase in National Health Service capacity to ensure improvements in waiting times for elective surgery and the rapid treatment of emergency inpatients. This has recently been quantified in the national beds inquiry work.

I am advised that in Worcestershire it has been agreed that 86 additional beds will be required in April 2002 over previous plans. This will be financed by additional resources earmarked to meet NHS planned targets. Local health groups are looking at the extent to which these could be replaced in the longer term with alternative facilities in the community. In the meantime, three wards in the Aconbury (East) Unit on the Newtown site of the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust have been designated as medical beds.

Worcestershire Health Authority

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health and if he will make a statement on the claim by Worcestershire Health Authority of a loss in value of its fixed assets in its 2000–01 Annual Accounts before the proposed sale of land and demolition of buildings. [20525]

Mr. Hutton: The recognised accountancy bodies have a financial reporting standard (FRS11) that requires that an annual review of the buildings, plant and equipment of an organisation be undertaken where a change has occurred or is expected to occur in the use, and therefore the value of, the asset. These financial reporting standards issued by the recognised accountancy bodies are expected to be applied by all commercial organisations in the United Kingdom in the preparation of their annual accounts.

This is known as impairment of fixed assets. FRS11 requires that the accounts should recognise the change in the value immediately.

During the period 2000–01, the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals National Health Service Trust declared that there had been an impairment in the value of the Kidderminster Hospital Bewdley Road site due to the planned reconfiguration of service provision to develop the new diagnostic and treatment centre. The impairment was deemed to have been incurred when the trust's balance sheet was drawn up in June 2001 as there is 'a commitment by the trust's management to undertake significant reorganisation'.

Gutkha

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that Gutkha style products carry a health warning as required by the Tobacco Products Labelling (Safety) Amendment Regulations 1993. [19991]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* Oral tobacco products such as Gutkha are all required to comply with United Kingdom regulations and carry health warnings.

However, we wish to ensure that people have full information and we are, therefore, seeking to develop greater awareness of the health risks associated with oral tobacco as part of our tobacco information strategy. Our Asian tobacco campaign launched in August, focused on high risk ethnic minority populations, to address the health risks of smoking and the use of oral tobacco in order to decrease demand for these products. It is envisaged that an important element of this campaign will be the close involvement of local community organisations and many of these groups are already involved in the planning process. We have funded a training pack for trading standards officers on oral tobacco.

Gynaecological Cancer Services

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what procedures are available to *(a)* contest and *(b)* appeal the decision by the Mid Anglia Cancer Network NHS to move gynaecological cancer surgery for women in Mid-Essex from St. John's hospital, Chelmsford, to Ipswich hospital, Suffolk; [20205]

(2) if he will make a statement on the reasons underlying the decision *(a)* not to enhance gynaecological cancer surgery at St. John's hospital Chelmsford and *(b)* to transfer the service to Ipswich hospital. [20290]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* The decision to centralise specialist gynaecological cancer surgery is in line with national guidance which specifies that specialised surgery for gynaecological cancers should be in a single centre of excellence serving a population of 1 million.

The Mid Anglia Cancer Network currently carries out such work in Ipswich, Colchester and Chelmsford. The recommendation to establish the centre in Ipswich is based on Ipswich hospital having the facilities and capacity for development whereas Chelmsford or Colchester, the other sites serving the network, would have to wait for approximately five years for the completion of major capital schemes.

Public consultation on setting up the Mid Anglia Cancer Network has already taken place. A main feature of this was that specialist services would be centralised and this was accepted and supported by the local community health councils, and others, after wide consultation.

Further local public consultation, via the CHCs, will take place from January 2002 on the implementation of centralising gynaecology as the first of the rarer cancers and hon. Members' views would be welcomed.

Care/Support Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to improve the management and training of care and support workers following the King's Fund report 'Future Imperfect'; [20345]

(2) what action he intends to take to improve care and support services provision in accordance with the recent report of the King's Fund 'Future Imperfect'; [20347]

(3) if he will take steps to change the titles of care and support services staff to personal care assistants or community care workers; and if he will make a statement on the promotion of their role. [20348]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* We welcome the publication of the King's Fund report "Future Imperfect" which contributes to the important debate about how to improve social services. We are already working with local councils and other agencies to raise standards across care. For example, on 9 October we published "Building Capacity and Partnership in Care" which encourages the development of a wide range of services to meet the diverse needs of communities.

As part of the National Training Strategy for Social Care in England, the National Training Organisation for Social Care (TOPSS) are working on the development of a comprehensive framework of national occupational standards for the social care workforce. These standards describe the tasks that a worker undertakes and determines their position in the career structure that is being developed with the qualifications framework. At present there are numerous different titles given to care and support services staff. However, by relating the work that they undertake to the relevant national occupational standards there will be a national understanding of the tasks that they are undertaking.

On 19 October 2001, we announced a £1.5 million recruitment campaign, which is designed to increase the number of people interested in careers in social work and social care work. As well as tackling recruitment problems, this campaign is designed to raise public awareness of the work that is undertaken by staff in the social care workforce.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 11 December 2001

HEALTH

Dementia

12. **Vernon Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of recent research into the causes and treatment of dementia. [19666]

Jacqui Smith: The National Service Framework for Older People, launched in March this year, drew on available evidence, and existing research on the causes and treatment of dementia was comprehensively assessed. A research strategy for older people is being drawn up as a result of the National Service Framework and mental health services for older people will be a high priority in shaping it.

Private Care Homes

13. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the state of the private care home sector. [19667]

Jacqui Smith: On 9 October, we announced an extra £300 million investment over this year and next year for local councils to spend on community care services. This major cash investment will be used to reduce bed blocking and will help to stabilise the care home sector, giving them greater confidence in the future.

We also launched a new agreement, 'Building Capacity and Partnership in Care', on 9 October. The agreement focuses on councils and the independent sector working together as partners throughout the commissioning process. This should promote a more strategic, inclusive and consistent approach to capacity planning at local level.

Cancer Care

14. **Mr. Havard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in the improvement of care for cancer patients. [19668]

Ms Blears: Enormous progress is being made in improving cancer services thanks to the efforts of frontline staff. Details are given in the first annual progress report "The NHS Cancer Plan—Making Progress" which was launched on 3 December. Copies are available in the Library.

17. **Helen Southworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent progress has been made on speeding up diagnosis and treatment of cancer for patients. [19672]

Ms Blears: Between July to September 2001 91.3 per cent. of all urgent general practitioner referrals for suspected cancer were seen within two weeks. A programme of investment and reform is in place to support the rollout of new cancer waiting times targets to 2005.

19. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress towards achieving the Government's target for the percentage of referred cancer patients seen within 14 days. [19674]

Ms Blears: Between July to September this year 91.3 per cent. of all urgent general practitioner referrals for suspected cancer were seen within two weeks. Over the period January to September 2001 over 233,500 people urgently referred with suspected cancer were seen by a specialist within two weeks.

Children's Hospices

15. **Margaret Moran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase funding to children's hospices. [19669]

Jacqui Smith: Children's hospices have access to national health service funding, the level of which may increase by agreement with health authorities and primary care trusts following assessment of local options available to support children with life threatening illnesses, and their families. The New Opportunities Fund will also be available from next year and has a budget of £48 million to support projects for children with life threatening illness.

Diabetes

16. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the timing of the *(a)* publication and *(b)* implementation of the National Service Framework for diabetes. [19670]

Jacqui Smith: I announced on 15 October that the Diabetes National Service Framework standards would be published this year and the delivery strategy in summer 2002. This will enable the national health service to prepare to plan for the 10-year implementation programme which will start in April 2003.

General Practitioner Consultations

18. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recommendations his Department makes to general practitioners regarding the amount of time that should be made available for consultation per patient; and if he will make a statement. [19673]

Mr. Hutton: Patients' needs vary from one to another and it is best left to the clinical judgment of each general practitioner to decide how long to spend on a consultation. Accordingly, the Department has issued no guidance on this.

NHS Expenditure

20. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent NHS spending has been *(a)* over and *(b)* under planned levels in the (i) financial year 2000–01 and (ii) first half of this financial year. [19675]

Mr. Hutton: The resource underspend for the Department of Health (which includes national health service spending) in 2000–01 was £712 million. The Department plans to spend all resources in the current financial year. To ensure that best use is made of resources in year, end-year flexibility arrangements allow expenditure to be carried forward into the next financial year.

Falls (Older People)

21. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of progress with respect to the *(a)* prevention of falls and *(b)* treatment of older people who suffer injury through falls. [19676]

Jacqui Smith: The National Service Framework for Older People recognises the importance of preventing falls and providing effective treatment and rehabilitation to those who have fallen. It sets a standard and milestones for the introduction of integrated falls services. No formal assessment has yet been undertaken of progress towards the NSF falls milestones which are set annually from April 2003.

Hospital Star Ratings

22. **Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made following the publication of hospital star ratings. [19677]

Mr. Hutton: For national health service trusts who were awarded no stars, action plans are being drawn up and implemented. These will improve the areas of significant under-performance and bring them up to the standard the public and patients have the right to expect.

Smallpox

23. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the WHO on the guarding of smallpox virus stocks. [19678]

Mr. Hutton: The Department is represented on an ad hoc Committee set up by the World Health Organisation to review scientific and technical aspects relating to smallpox. A report of this work is due to be considered by the World Health Assembly in May 2002.

These matters are kept under continuous review.

Barnsley Health Authority

24. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the projected deficit of Barnsley area health authority for 2001–02. [19679]

Jacqui Smith: For 2001–02, Barnsley health authority submitted a balanced financial plan, but with only limited contingency funding set aside to address in year pressures. As at the end of October 2001, against their allocation of £198 million, Barnsley HA is forecasting a deficit of £2 million (or 1 per cent.). This is attributable to higher than expected community prescribing costs. In response to the current position, the health community is collectively working on a recovery plan to ensure delivery of a balanced financial position in 2001–02 without adversely affecting the delivery of agreed service targets.

HIV

25. **Mr. Russell Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on how HIV prevention work will be commissioned after 1 April 2002. [19680]

Jacqui Smith: From 1 April 2002, local HIV prevention will be commissioned by Primary Care Trusts. In addition, the Department of Health will continue to fund national HIV prevention work. Both national and local work will be undertaken in accordance with the priorities set out in the National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV. Implementation of the Strategy will be underpinned by robust performance management, for example using information collected under the AIDS (Control) Act 1987.

26. **Andy King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on how specialist commissioning for HIV prevention and treatment will be carried out after 1 April 2002. [19681]

Jacqui Smith: Both HIV/AIDS treatment and care and local HIV prevention will be commissioned by Primary Care Trusts. For the year ahead, Primary Care Trusts must honour existing agreements—both financial and otherwise—negotiated by Regional Specialised Commissioning Groups and current specialised service commissioners.

Both national and local work will be undertaken in accordance with the priorities set out in the National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV. Implementation of the Strategy will be underpinned by robust performance management, for example using information collected under the AIDS (Control) Act 1987.

Delayed Discharges

27. **Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to tackle delayed discharges from hospitals. [19682]

Jacqui Smith: We are investing an additional £300 million over this year and the next as part of a radical 'cash for change' programme. This is aimed at reducing delayed discharges and targeted on the worst performing areas. This investment and reform will help to free up beds in hospitals, reduce waiting times for treatment and ensure patients, particularly older people, are cared for in the most appropriate place.

Redbridge council has received £369,000 from the £100 million announced on 9 October to fund reductions in delayed discharges in 2001–02.

35. **Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on reducing delayed discharges from hospital. [19690]

Jacqui Smith: We are investing an additional £300 million over this year and the next as part of a radical 'cash for change' programme. This is aimed at reducing delayed discharges and targeted on the worst performing areas. This investment and reform will help to free up beds in hospitals, reduce waiting times for treatment and ensure patients, particularly older people, are cared for in the most appropriate place.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the level of delayed discharges. [19848]

Jacqui Smith: Figures for September 2001, the latest available, show some 6.6 per cent. of discharges involved a delay. We have allocated an extra £100 million this year to reduce the number of delayed discharges by at least 1,000 by the end of the financial year.

Health Authority Funding Criteria

28. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors other than population are taken into account in calculating the payment made annually to each health authority. [19683]

Mr. Hutton: A weighted capitation formula is used to inform revenue allocations to health authorities. The formula weights each health authority's population according to their relative need for health care and the unavoidable geographical differences in the cost of providing health care.

Waiting Times

29. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received about waiting times for NHS treatment. [19684]

Mr. Hutton: The Department regularly receives correspondence from patients and hon. Members about waiting times for both inpatients and outpatients.

Bed Blocking (East Sussex)

30. **Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on bed blocking in East Sussex. [19685]

Ms Blears: The Government are aware that delayed discharges remains a particular problem in East Sussex. A Performance Improvement Plan was developed by East Sussex, Brighton and Hove health authority and the East Sussex and Hove social services departments to address the issue. The number of delayed discharges has been falling steadily since September 2001.

Delayed discharges is a problem common to many parts of the country. To address this the Secretary of State, on 9 October, announced an additional £300 million over this year and next to tackle delayed discharges. East Sussex county council was recognised as a local authority in need of extra help and was allocated £1,255,000 this year from that money.

Deep Vein Thrombosis

31. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he issues to air travellers concerning the risk of deep vein thrombosis. [19686]

Jacqui Smith: The Department's "Advice on Travel Related Deep Vein Thrombosis" was published on 30 November. It has been sent to airlines and will be made available to the public through the health services, the internet, the airlines and NHS Direct.

The advice provides information about deep vein thrombosis and gives practical advice about how air passengers on long haul flights may reduce the risk of getting a blood clotting condition. In particular it describes simple in-seat exercises which should be recommended to all air passengers.

Health Statistics

33. **Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to collect and publish regular statistical information on the general state of health of the population. [19688]

Jacqui Smith: The Department commissions a range of surveys designed to provide regular information on various aspects of the nation's health which cannot be obtained from other sources. It is our normal practice to publish the results of all such surveys. These will be available in the Library and on the departmental website.

Anti-impotence Drugs

34. **Sandra Gidley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the prescribing of anti-impotence drugs on the NHS. [19689]

Jacqui Smith: Earlier this year we held a public consultation about the arrangements governing eligibility for impotence treatments on the national health service. Expenditure on impotence treatments, at £25 million a year, is above what we expected and continues to increase. We concluded that the extra cost of allowing unrestricted prescribing might involve diversion of funds from other NHS priorities. Therefore we decided to maintain the restrictions introduced on 1 July 1999. To maintain a consistent approach the new drug treatment, Uprima, has been subject to the same restrictions since 1 November 2001.

Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust

36. **Mr. Michael Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received regarding the chairman of Worcestershire acute hospital trust. [19691]

Mr. Hutton: Two parliamentary questions regarding the chairman of the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals National Health Service Trust were raised recently by the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff).

The National Health Service Appointments Commission was established on 1 April 2001 to take over from Ministers the responsibility for appointing, training and appraising chairs and non-executives to the boards of national health service trusts, health authorities and primary care trusts. This includes responsibility for matters relating to resignation of individuals from board positions.

Care Home Beds

37. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many care home beds there were in *(a)* December 2000 and *(b)* December 2001. [19692]

Jacqui Smith: The main statistical collections on care home beds relate to 31 March each year. There were 539,200 care home beds at 31 March 2000 and 528,000 at 31 March 2001. The Department is currently collecting information on the number of care beds at 30 November 2001. Data on care home beds are requested by local capacity planning groups (that is aggregated at health authority level) as part of work to plan winter capacity. Details including proformas, can be found on the internet at http://www.doh.cov.uk/capacityplanning/capplan.htm

CT and MRI Scanners

38. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria will be used to distribute the next 50 CT and MRI scanners. [19693]

Jacqui Smith: Criteria for the distribution of the 50 CT and 50 MRI scanners announced in the NHS Cancer Plan have yet to be decided.

However, databases of current equipment and regional provision as well as local information, such as the cancer networks facilities and equipment strategies, will be used to help formulate criteria for allocation.

York Health NHS Trust

39. **Hugh Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many York Health NHS Trust beds were occupied on average on each day of the last month for which figures are available by patients awaiting discharge to a nursing or residential care home. [19694]

Jacqui Smith: Data are not collected in the format requested. The table shows the number of York Health National Health Service Trust beds occupied by patients awaiting discharge to a nursing home or residential care home at the end of each seven day period during November 2001.

Seven days ending	*Awaiting public funding or residential/nursing home placement*
4 November 2001	35
11 November 2001	33
18 November 2001	31
25 November 2001	28

Edgware Hospital

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about progress on services at the new hospital at Edgware. [19687]

Mr. Hutton: Clearing the site of the new hospital has been completed. Invitations to tender for the building of the new hospital have been invited by 21 December.

NHS Staff

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the National Health Service spent on hiring agency nursing staff in the last 12 months. [20735]

Mr. Hutton: The expenditure on non-National Health Service nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff, in England, for the financial year 2000–01 was £447,248,470. The non-NHS staff figures include all nurses, midwives and health visiting staff not directly employed by the NHS. We are unable to disaggregate agency nurses. The 2000–01 figure is the latest available and is provisional.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent estimates he has made of the impact of staff shortages on NHS capacity. [20625]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan, published in July 2000, acknowledges that the shortage of human resources is the biggest constraint faced by the national health service today. The plan sets targets for recruiting 20,000 more nurses, 7,500 more consultants, 6,500 more therapists and other health professionals and 2,000 more general practitioners by 2004 over the 1999 baseline. The Government's manifesto carried these commitments forward.

The NHS Plan also contains targets for increasing the number of students in training. There will be: 5,500 more nurses and midwives entering training each year by 2004 than there were in 1999, 4,450 more therapists and other key professional staff being trained by 2004, 1,000 more specialist registrars and 450 (since raised to 550) more doctors training for general practice by 2004.

Taken together, these targets will address current shortages and provide for growth required to improve services in line with National Service Frameworks, the Cancer Plan and waiting time commitments.

Adult Stem Cell Research

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the progress and effectiveness of adult stem cell research in treating health disorders. [19671]

Ms Blears: Adult sources of stem cells along with those from cord blood, foetal and now embryonic sources are being studied by researchers around the world. However, with the exception of the well established use of bone marrow derived cells in transplantation and some very early clinical trials using foetal cells in Huntington's and Parkinson's disease, this research has not yet reached the stage of treatment for any health disorders where assessments of this kind can be made.

PRIME MINISTER

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his policy on *(a)* sanctions against and *(b)* bombing of Iraq. [22199]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) on 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 965–66.

Civil Service

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will make a statement on his discussions with the civil service commissioners about the terms of appointment of the next head of the civil service; [19948]

(2) what proposals he has to look outside the civil service for the appointment of the next Cabinet Secretary; what plans he has to fuse the Cabinet Office with the office in 10 Downing street; and what new conditions an applicant will be required to agree to before appointment as *(a)* head of the civil service and *(b)* Cabinet Secretary. [19949]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 626W.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister what action he instituted on and before 9 December into reports of a campaign by persons in Government to undermine the reputation of the Parliamentary Standards Commissioner. [22726]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the oral answers I gave the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 323–24.

DEFENCE

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are employed by the Department under the new deal for young people; and at what cost to public funds. [21311]

Dr. Moonie: Information follows on the number of people employed by my Department and its agencies under the new deal for young people. New deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot be readily identified.

On 30 September 2001, the latest date for which information is available, 19 people between the ages of 18 and 24 were employed by the Ministry of Defence and its agencies under the new deal for young people. It is not, however, possible without disproportionate cost to identify the number serving who are now over age 24 but originally appointed through the young people's scheme.

RAF Finningley

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Manchester Airport submitted an expression of interest in acquiring the RAF Finningley site for development as a civil passenger airport; what meetings with his Department were held; and if he will publish the documents relating to the expression of interest. [21436]

Dr. Moonie: Expressions of interest from potential bidders for the former RAF Finningley were invited on 28 July 1996 in the Estates Gazette, as part of the first attempt to sell the site.

Manchester Airport (consortium) was interviewed on 10 October 1996 along with a number of other parties.

When the site was re-marketed in 1997, Manchester Airport did not apply.

The release of documents relating to the expression of interest is a matter for Manchester Airport.

Defence Employment (Glasgow)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people in Glasgow are employed in defence work. [21620]

Dr. Moonie: The number of directly employed Ministry of Defence jobs in the city of Glasgow local authority area as at 1 July 2000 is as follows.

	Number
Military	1,204
Civilian	1,832
Civilian casual	7
Total	3,043

In addition to this direct employment, the MOD supports a significant number of defence related jobs throughout the UK. The Defence Analytical Services Agency (DASA) is currently unable to provide data relating to the number of jobs created or sustained directly or indirectly as a result of MOD expenditure at a national or regional level. DASA is currently reviewing their methodology on the estimation of employment figures dependent on UK defence expenditure.

Type 45 Destroyers

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Type 45 destroyers will be constructed in Scotland. [21619]

Dr. Moonie: Under the shipbuilding procurement strategy for the Royal Navy announced in the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 10 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 675–85, the first Type 45 destroyer will be assembled and launched at Scotstoun on Clydeside. It is planned that the remainder of the class, of up to 12 ships, will be assembled and launched at Barrow in Furness. However, significant sections of each ship will be manufactured by Vosper Thornycroft at Portsmouth and BAE Systems Marine at Barrow and on the Clyde.

Gibraltar

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many training exercises have been carried out by the armed forces *(a)* in and *(b)* from Gibraltar during the last three years; and how many of these were (i) Royal Navy (ii) RAF (iii) Army and (iv) all services. [22125]

Mr. Ingram: About 300 training exercises have been carried out by the UK armed forces in and from Gibraltar during the last three years. Of these, five exercises each year are conducted off Rock by Gibraltar-based forces. Around 30 each year were maritime based including maritime/air and amphibious exercises, 50 predominantly Army and the remainder joint exercises.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy ships have docked in Gibraltar in the last three years. [22126]

Mr. Ingram: 149 Royal Navy ships have docked in Gibraltar since April 1998.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British troops are based in Gibraltar. [22127]

Mr. Ingram: The Army presence on Gibraltar comprises 400 regular and reservist members of the Gibraltar Regiment plus around 60 UK-based Army personnel in a range of other posts.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the effect in military activity in and around Gibraltar as a result of the Brussels process. [22128]

Mr. Ingram: Military activity on and around Gibraltar has not been affected by the recent Brussels process discussions.

Terms of Service

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what respects the terms of service of *(a)* regular servicemen and *(b)* reservists, including members of the Territorial Army, on full-time service differ. [22109]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Regulations

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many regulations his Department has proposed to Parliament since June; what regulatory impact assessments have been made for those regulations his Department has implemented in 2001; and what plans his Department has to reduce the number of regulations affecting small businesses. [21973]

Dr. Moonie: As a non-regulatory Department, the Ministry of Defence has not proposed any regulations to Parliament since June and no regulatory impact assessments have been made.

RAF Menwith Hill

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his Department's policy to draw up a specific memorandum of understanding governing the presence of the USVF at RAF Menwith Hill. [22149]

Mr. Ingram: The presence of the United States Visiting Forces at all bases made available to them in the UK is governed by the NATO Status of Forces Agreement of 1951 and additional confidential arrangements. A separate memorandum of understanding governing the presence of the USVF at RAF Menwith Hill is not required.

Promotions

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether *(a)* executive and *(b)* administrative officers in his Department may be promoted at the age of 58 years or over. [22335]

Dr. Moonie: Executive and administrative officers aged 58 years or over in the Ministry of Defence may apply and be selected for promotion opportunities.

Age Equality

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the compulsory retirement age is for *(a)* executives and *(b)* administrative officers in his Department, if the MOD's policy on retirement of (i) executive officers and (ii) administrative officers, complies with (A) the Government's Code of Practice on Age Diversity in employment and (B) the EU Employment Directive on Equality; if his policy is the same as other Government Departments; and if he will make a statement. [22336]

Dr. Moonie: The normal retirement age in the Ministry of Defence (MOD) is 60 for executives and 65 for administrative support staff. Like other Government Departments, the MOD has delegated authority to frame its retirement polity to meet its business needs, compliant with the Code of Practice, and there are differences between Departments.

The MOD is reviewing its retirement policy in light of the Code, and the Performance and Innovation Unit's report on "Winning the Generation Game". This review will also take into account the implementation in the UK of the EU Equal Treatment Directive.

Departmental Staff (Home Working)

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department is taking to encourage staff to work from home; and how many staff do so on a regular basis. [21833]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is committed to the work/life balance of its civilian staff. A range of flexible working patterns, including part-time working, flexible working hours, job sharing and homeworking, is available to staff by agreement with their managers. The MOD publicises its policy on flexible working and encourages managers to respond positively to requests as part of its commitment to diversity.

97 staff are formally registered as homeworkers and many others have the opportunity to work at home occasionally. Funding is available to provide equipment to enable staff to work from home on a full or part-time basis. A pilot scheme has been established to explore more formally the practical issues of working from home, and the lessons learned will be used to publicise and promote homeworking.

Defence Sites, Corsham

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are employed in the Basil Hill and Copenacre sites in Corsham by *(a)* the Defence Communication Services Agency and *(b)* other units; how he expects the totals to change in the next five years; and if he will make a statement. [21933]

Dr. Moonie: The number of Ministry of Defence (MOD) directly employed military and civilian staff employed at the Basil Hill and Copenacre sites is:

(a) Defence Communication Services Agency (DCSA): 527

(b) Other MOD Units: 219.

In addition, the Rudloe site, which forms an integral part of the Corsham estate, is home to the Joint Support Unit (JSU) Corsham with a strength of 240. The JSU is a sub unit of the DCSA.

There are also 130 staff of business partners working with the DCSA employed in these locations.

The total number of MOD staff on the Corsham estate is therefore 1,116.

As a result of work carried out for the Corsham Development Project, it is expected that the present on-site numbers will change in the next five years as follows:

(a) DCSA inclusive of the JSU: 1,380

(b) Other MOD Units: 194

(c) Business Partners: 280.

Cruise Missiles

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cruise missiles have been used in the conflict in Afghanistan by *(a)* Britain and *(b)* the United States. [21652]

Mr. Hoon: UK submarines have launched a small number of Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles. I am withholding details of the precise number launched in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. The number of cruise missiles fired by the United States is a matter for them.

Far East Prisoners of War

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason the definition of "British" as it applies to civilian former prisoners of the Japanese was clarified; when the need for clarification was identified; and when and how the new criteria were first made public. [22308]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Army Cadet Force

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reinstate the use of barrack trousers as part of the Army Cadet Force standard uniform; and if he will make a statement. [20980]

Dr. Moonie: There are no plans to issue barrack dress trousers to members of the Army Cadet Force.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures there are to increase cadet participation in Regular and Territorial Army exercises. [20979]

Dr. Moonie: Generally, cadets do not participate in Regular and Territorial Army exercises. If, however, there is activity that is deemed appropriate by the County Commandant—such as acting as casualties during first aid training—the cadets may participate. My hon. Friend may like to note that any such participation must be properly supervised and carried out in accordance with the rules laid down for cadet activities.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cadets in the Army Cadet Force there have been in each year since 1997; and how many Army Cadet Force units have been *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed since 1997. [20981]

Dr. Moonie: The numbers of cadets in the Army Cadet Force in each year since 1997 are shown in the table. These figures represent average numbers across each year.

Year	*Strength*
1997	40,047
1998	40,707
1999	42,550
2000	42,491
2001	40,573

Between 1 January 1997 and 1 November this year a total of 45 ACF detachments have closed and 66 have opened.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the procedure that is to be taken when promoting an army cadet within the Army Cadet Force; and what qualifications a cadet must have to achieve a higher rank in the organisation. [20982]

Dr. Moonie: Promotions in the cadets are granted in accordance with regulations contained in the Army Cadet Force manual; they depend entirely on merit and are achieved usually when cadets have qualified for the appropriate stars. The achievement of stars is linked to the successful completion of certain skills tests at various levels (such as fieldcraft, drill and skill at arms).

To achieve promotion to Cadet Lance Corporal the cadet must have passed 1 star, for Cadet Corporal he or she must have passed 2 star, for Cadet Sergeant he or she must have passed 3 star and for Cadet Warrant Officer he or she must have passed 4 star.

Cadets with exceptional or outstanding service may also be appointed as a Master Cadet or a Lord Lieutenant Cadet. Both appointments are made on the recommendation of the County Commandant.

Army (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers from ethnic minorities there are in each of the Guards regiments; how many soldiers from ethnic minorities there are in the British Army not including the Gurkhas; and if he will make a statement. [20983]

Mr. Ingram: The number of soldiers from ethnic minorities, not including Gurkhas, in each of the Guard regiments and in the British Army as a whole is set out in the tables:

Strength of Army soldiers in Guards regiments by ethnicity as at 1 November 2001

	White[1]	*Non-white*[1]	*Unspecified*	*Total*
Grenadier Guards	713	22	5	740
Coldstream Guards	816	7	5	828
Scots Guards	719	10	7	736
Irish Guards	614	22	10	646
Welsh Guards	660	9	3	672

Strength of all Army soldiers by ethnicity as at 1 November 2001

	Number
White[1]	88,974
Non-white[1]	2,309
Unspecified	4,546
Total	95,829

[1] Provisional

Notes:

1. The ethnic origin marker is currently being re-surveyed to align with the codes used in the 2001 Census. During this process all current intake is being recorded as being of unspecified origin. Strength figures are therefore shown as provisional.
2. The figures provided are based on UK Trained Army Personnel (UKTAP) only; this does not include Full Time Reserve Service, Royal Irish Home Service or Gurkhas.
3. Figures provided include Commonwealth personnel.

The Army remains firmly committed to its long-term aim of achieving levels of ethnic minority representation which more closely reflect the population it serves. This was recognised earlier this year in a report following the Business in the Community's Race for Opportunity campaign, which rated the Army as Britain's top public sector organisation for race equality.

HMS Glorious

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent revisions he has made to the account of the sinking of HMS Glorious. [22103]

Dr. Moonie: There has been no revision to the account of the tragic sinking of HMS Glorious placed in the Library of the House in February 2000.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Bushmeat

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact the trade in bushmeat has on the environment in West and Central Africa. [20562]

Clare Short: We have not made any specific assessments of the impact the bushmeat trade per se has had on the environment in West and Central Africa. However, we are conscious that the unsustainable escalation in the commercial bushmeat trade is a growing problem that is in large part a result of poverty and is facilitated by the expansion of the forestry and mining industries into natural forest areas.

We are aware of the dangers posed to eco-systems by the unregulated expansion of these industries in west and central africa and are concerned to ensure that the long-term interests of poor people in sustainable natural resource management are addressed. DFID is currently working closely with DEFRA and other international, National and Civil Society bodies to address this issue. To this end we are involved in various initiatives that contribute to the conservation of wild animals and their habitats (see Annex 1).

Annex 1: Examples of DFID-supported bilateral projects, and research and studies, that have a strong focus on wildlife/bushmeat species

Name of project	*Country*	*Period of support*	*£000*
Mbomipa Community Wildlife Project	Tanzania	1997–2001	1,973
Wildlife Intensification for Livelihood Development (WILD)	Namibia	1999–2002	1,040
Madikwe Community Wildlife Management	South Africa	1997–1999	622
Amboro Rural Development	Bolivia	1996–2000	3,200
Mount Cameroon Project	Cameroon	1995–2002	10,602
Community Forest Development Project	Cameroon	1999–2002	1,049
Indonesian Multi-Stakeholder	Indonesia	1998–2005	25,150
Cross River State Community Forestry Project	Nigeria	1996–2001	2,000
Forest Sector Development Project Phase II	Ghana	2000–04	11,963
Joint-funding scheme with WWF			
Gashaka-Gumpti/Kupe	Nigeria/Cameroon	1991–2001	6,289
Coastal forests/Bogoria/Udzungwa	Kenya/Tanzania	1990–2001	
Kunene/Caprivi	Namibia	1998–2001	
Mamiraua/Varzea	Brazil	1991–2000	
Studies and research:			
Livestock-wildlife interactions	Africa	1997–2001	575
Illegal hunting in Serengeti NP	Tanzania	1997–2000	
Bushmeat in rural livelihoods of west Africa	Ghana/Cameroon	2000–01	

China

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what investigation she has made into the funding provided by *(a)* the United Nations Population Fund and *(b)* the International Planned Parenthood Federation to China's population control authorities: and if she will make a statement. [22102]

Clare Short: The United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) programme in China is one of the most scrutinised of their global portfolio. UNFPA Executive Board members including the United Kingdom, United States, European Union and developing countries, have reviewed the programme with the UNFPA representatives in Beijing and visited programme counties on five occasions since December 1997. My Department, including the DFID Health Adviser in Beijing, closely monitors the development of the programme.

My Department also receives periodic reports from the International Planned Parenthood Federation on its work to promote awareness and implementation of international standards in reproductive health and greater respect for reproductive rights through its affiliate the China Family Planning Association (CFPA). The work of the CFPA was the subject of an independent review in 1996 led by Professor John Hobcraft of the London School of Economics who concluded that the IPPF was playing an effective and valuable role in influencing the work of the CFPA.

British Council Scholarships

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many British Council scholarships have been awarded to students from Southern Sudan in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [21521]

Clare Short: There were no British Council scholarships awarded to Sudanese students during this period.

However, there were *(a)* 22 students from Sudan managed by the British Council in calendar year 2000; and *(b)* 22 in 2001. These 44 were funded either by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Chevening Scholarships) or the United Nations.

The British Council figures do not identify which Sudanese students are from the south.

War Against Terrorism

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how she expects her Department's development policy to be affected by the war against terrorism. [21872]

Clare Short: Tackling the poverty and ignorance which feed extremism and violence is vital to ending global terrorism. It has never been more evident that ending world poverty is in all of our self-interests. The 1997 and 2000 White Papers on international development set our policies for eliminating poverty and making globalisation work for the world's poor. The need to tackle terrorism provides additional impetus to my Department's efforts to implement these policies.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the work of her Department in Sierra Leone. [21871]

Clare Short: In Sierra Leone, my Department is engaged primarily in promoting security and good governance. We are providing long-term support to the police, strengthening the Ministry of Defence to ensure the armed forces are more democratically accountable, and helping reintegrate ex-combatants wishing to return to civilian life. We are supporting the Anti-Corruption Commission, helping to reform the judiciary, training the media, assisting the Government to prepare for elections next year, and providing budgetary support to help meet the running costs of government. We also provide substantial support to meet the ongoing humanitarian needs of those displaced by the conflict.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the oral answer from the Minister for Sport on 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 14, who *(a)* attends and *(b)* chairs the ministerial meetings on sports issues. [21598]

Mr. Caborn: The meetings are attended by ministerial representatives from: the Department for Education and Skills; the Department of Health; the Home Office; the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. In addition senior representatives from Sport England, and the New Opportunities Fund attend. Sue Campbell, the joint adviser for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Education and Skills, and Ben Chapman MP also attend. As Minister for Sport I chair the monthly meetings.

Ministerial Duties

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which *(a)* museums, *(b)* theatres, *(c)* art galleries and *(d)* sporting events (i) she and (ii) other Ministers in her Department have visited in an official capacity since 8 June; and what was the (1) purpose and (2) date of each visit. [21377]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The information requested is shown in the following table. Visits to such events allow Ministers to see developments in their sector at first hand and demonstrate our support for such projects and initiatives. These are, of course, in addition to visits made in a private capacity or for party reasons.

Date	*Minister*	*Event*	*Event type*
12 June 2001	Secretary of State	"Boris Gudunov" at the Riverside Studios	Theatre
13 June 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of Hideo Furuta's Sculpture in the Park Exhibition	Art Gallery
18 June 2001	Secretary of State and Minister of State for the Arts	Vermeer Exhibition at the National Gallery	Art Gallery
19 June 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Pakistan *v* Australia One Day Cricket International	Sporting Event
19 June 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	BP Portrait awards at National Portrait Gallery	Art Gallery
21 June 2001	Secretary of State	"My Fair Lady" at the Royal National Theatre	Theatre
25 June 2001	Secretary of State	Tour of Brooklands Museum	Museum
25 June 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Tate Britain—tour of the new galleries (work in progress)	Art Gallery
26 June 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of Ingres to Matisse: Masterpieces of French Painting Exhibition at Royal Academy	Art Gallery
30 June 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Lawn Tennis Championships, Wimbledon	Sporting Event
5 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Rachel Whiteread Exhibition at Serpentine Gallery	Art Gallery
5 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	"Lady Macbeth" at English National Opera	Theatre
7 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Lawn Tennis Championships, Wimbledon	Sporting Event
8 July 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Lawn Tennis Championships, Wimbledon	Sporting Event
10 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Reception to celebrate the completion of the Everyman Millennium Commission Library at British Museum	Museum
11 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Royal Ballet School Performance at the Linbury Studio Theatre, Royal Opera House	Theatre
12 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Launch of the Theatre 2001 conference report at Prince of Wales Theatre	Theatre
12 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	"Un Giorno di Regno" at Buxton Festival Opening Night	Theatre
12 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Tour of Somerset House	Art Gallery
15 July 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Formula One Grand Prix	Sporting Event
17 July 2001	Secretary of State	Predators Exhibition at Natural History Museum	Museum
17 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	"Wabi-Sabi" Exhibition of Japanese jewellery, metal and textiles at Contemporary Applied Arts	Art Gallery
17 July 2001	Minister of State for Sport	European Cadet Boxing Championships	Sporting Event
22 July 2001	Minister of State for Sport	130 Open Golf Championships	Sporting Event

Date	*Minister*	*Event*	*Event type*
31 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Tour of National Maritime Museum, Greenwich	Museum
31 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Launch of "Priestley—Making Time and Space for Theatre" at Criterion Theatre	Theatre
31 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	BBC Proms 14 at the Royal Albert Hall	Theatre
1 August 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	"The Shape of Things" at the Almeida Theatre, Kings Cross	Theatre
3–7 August 2001	Minister of State for Sport	World Athletics Championships	Sporting Event
7 August 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Visit to Howard Hodgkin Exhibition at the Dulwich Picture Gallery	Art Gallery
8 August 2001	Secretary of State	"The Winter's Tale" at Royal National Theatre	Theatre
9 August 2001	Secretary of State	"Twelfth Night" at Royal Shakespeare Theatre	Theatre
15 August 2001	Secretary of State	Howard Hodgkin Exhibition at Dulwich Picture Gallery	Art Gallery
16 August 2001	Secretary of State	BBC Proms—Beethoven Fidelio at Royal Albert Hall	Theatre
19 August 2001	Secretary of State	BBC Proms—Dvorak Cello Concerto at the Royal Albert Hall	Theatre
28 August 2001	Secretary of State	"Hamlet" at Young Vic	Theatre
28 August 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Theatre's Kids Week—Playhouse Theatre	Theatre
28 August 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	"The Tragedy of Hamlet" at the Young Vic	Theatre
29 August 2001	Minister of State for Sport	British Amputee Open Golf Championships 2001	Sporting Event
1 September 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Germany *v* England World Cup Qualifier	Sporting Event
5 September 2001	Minister of State for Sport	England *v* Albania World Cup Qualifier	Sporting Event
5 September 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	"Swan Lake" at Sadler's Wells	Theatre
9 September 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Tour of the exhibition at Jewish Museum, Berlin	Museum
9 September 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Concert by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at the Philharmonic Hall, Berlin-Tiergarten	Theatre
10 September 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Tour of Volksbuhne Theatre, Berlin	Theatre
11 September 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	"All My Sons" at the Lyttelton Theatre	Theatre
12 September 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Jerwood Applied Arts Prize at Crafts Council Gallery	Art Gallery
13 September 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of Julian Stair Exhibition at Contemporary Applied Arts	Art Gallery
14 September 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	BBC Proms 72, at the Royal Albert Hall	Theatre
15 September 2001	Secretary of State	Last Night of the BBC Proms at Royal Albert Hall	Theatre
15 September 2001	Minister of State for Sport	St. Leger Horserace	Sporting Event
18 September 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Stockport County *v* Sheffield United	Sporting Event
19 September 2001	Secretary of State	Rembrandt's Women at Royal Academy of Arts	Art Gallery
25 September 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of new Collections Centre, Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester	Museum
25 September 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Visit to the People's History Museum (part of the National Museum of Labour History)	Museum
28 September 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Visit to the Rose Theatre excavation exhibition site	Theatre
4 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of the Japan 2001 "Facts of Life" exhibition at the Hayward Gallery	Art Gallery
5 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	"Rigoletto" at the Royal Opera House	Theatre
6 October 2001	Minister of State for Sport	England *v* Greece Word Cup Qualifier	Sporting Event
8 October 2001	Secretary of State	Opening of Robin Howard Dance Theatre	Theatre
8 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of the Paul Robeson Exhibition at the Theatre Museum, Covent Garden	Museum
9 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	"Leonore" at Sadler's Wells	Theatre
10 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Tour of Crafts Council	Art Gallery
10 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of Exhibition of early Indian photography at Brunei Gallery, London School of Oriental and African Studies	Art Gallery
12 October 2001	Secretary of State	"Leonore" at Sadler's Wells Theatre	Theatre
13 October 2001	Secretary of State	"Julius Caesar" at Royal Shakespeare Theatre	Theatre
13 October 2001	Secretary of State	Pisanello: Painter to the Renaissance Court Exhibition at National Gallery	Art Gallery
16 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of the "Radical Fashion" Exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum	Museum
17 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Design Conference at Imperial War Museum	Museum
17 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of "Art on The Line" Exhibition at Courtauld Institute Gallery	Art Gallery
22 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Visit to "The Dig" project at the Museum of London.	Museum
23 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Pisanello: Painter to the Renaissance Court Exhibition at the National Gallery	Art Gallery
24 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Visit to the Conservation Centre at National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	Museum
25 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Visit to the Science Museum	Museum
25 October 2001	Secretary of State	Exposed: The Victorian Nude Exhibition at Tate Britain	Art Gallery
25 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Preview of Linbury Galleries at Tate Britain and the inaugural exhibition 'Exposed: The Victorian Nude'	Art Gallery
30 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Paris/Barcelone: de Gaudi a Miro Exhibition at Grand Palais, Paris	Art Gallery
31 October 2001	Secretary of State	Opening of London Transport Museum Learning Centre	Museum
1 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Visit to ENO London Colliseum	Theatre
4 November 2001	Minister of State for Sport	BT Swimming National Short Course Championships 2001	Sporting Event
5 November 2001	Secretary of State	Music for Youth Schools Prom at Royal Albert Hall	Theatre
7 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Schools Prom, Royal Albert Hall	Theatre
8 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Concert at the Royal College of Music	Theatre
9 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Linbury Biennial Prizes for Stage Design at National Theatre	Theatre

Date	*Minister*	*Event*	*Event type*
10 November 2001	Minister of State for Sport	England *v* Sweden	Sporting Event
13 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Visit to Wakefield Museum	Museum
13 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Visit to Magna Centre	Museum
13 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	"Boy Gets Girl" at the Royal Court Theatre	Theatre
15 November 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	National Film Theatre	Theatre
16 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Tour of Millennium Point	Museum
19 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of British Galleries 1500–1900 at Victoria and Albert Museum	Museum
20 November 2001	Secretary of State	Opening of British Galleries 1500–1900 at Victoria and Albert Museum	Museum
22 November 2001	Secretary of State	"Switzerland Lights Up Tate Modern" at Tate Modern	Art Gallery
25 November 2001	Secretary of State	Shakespeare Schools Drama Festival Showcase at Duke of York's Theatre	Theatre
26 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Tour of the British Museum	Museum
30 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Visit to the National Gallery.	Art Gallery
5 December 2001	Minister of State for Sport	West Ham United *v* Aston Villa	Sporting Event

Football (Safe Standing Areas)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will place in the Library a copy of the Football Licensing Authority report of 5 March relating to safe standing areas at football stadia. [22361]

Mr. Caborn: The Football Licensing Authority's report of 5 March, entitled Report on the "Kombi" seating, Volksparkstadion, Hamburg, 23 and 24 February 2001 concerned the technical merits of one of a number of convertible seating systems which are in use at certain football stadia in Germany. I am arranging for copies of the report to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Tourism (Euro)

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the impact on the UK tourism industry of Britain not being part of the Eurozone in January 2002. [20127]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

In his October 1997 statement to the House, the Chancellor of the Exchequer set out five economic tests which will define whether a clear and unambiguous case for UK membership of the single currency can be made. An assessment of the five economic tests will be produced within two years of the start of this Parliament. The assessment will be comprehensive and rigorous; all relevant economic issues will be dealt with as part of the assessment.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Superintendent Ali Dizaei

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Solicitor-General (1) when the Crown Prosecution Service received the file from the Metropolitan police investigating Superintendent Ali Dizaei; [21608]

(2) what action she has taken to ensure that the Crown Prosecution Service has maintained its independence from the police and acted fairly and with impartiality when considering the case against Superintendent Ali Dizaei; [21610]

(3) when Crown Prosecutors advised the officers investigating Superintendent Ali Dizaei; [21609]

(4) what the reasons were for the delay by the Crown Prosecution Service in deciding whether there is sufficient evidence to bring criminal charges against Superintendent Ali Dizaei. [21607]

The Solicitor-General: A full file of evidence was submitted on 12 October 2001 and additional information is still being submitted.

Since 31 May 2000, the police have been submitting information and requests for advice to the Crown Prosecution Service. The CPS has been advising the police on an ongoing basis. This advice has covered matters of admissibility and the sufficiency of evidence upon a number of discrete criminal allegations.

The Crown Prosecution Service has not delayed and has dealt with this case expeditiously. This police investigation has encompassed a number of separate criminal allegations and has resulted in the submission of a large volume of evidence. In the light of the complexity and sensitivity of the issues raised advice has been obtained from Senior Treasury Counsel. The review of the large volume of evidence and proper consideration of all the issues involved has necessarily required adequate time to complete.

The Crown Prosecution Service works very closely with the police but makes decisions about cases through careful, independent and impartial consideration of all the evidence and application of the Code for Crown Prosecutors, which states that a prosecution will only be brought if there is sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction and a prosecution is required in the public interest. The decision to start a prosecution is taken independently of the police and in this particular case will have the benefit of advice of independent Counsel.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Terrorists

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by what process suspected terrorists who are wanted for alleged crimes are having prosecutions against them stopped; and if he will list their names, giving in each case the details of the charges that are being dropped and the known paramilitary affiliations. [12932]

Jane Kennedy: Decisions on ending prosecutions are a matter for the independent prosecuting authorities based on a strict application of evidential and public interest tests. Separately, in relation to terrorist prisoners on the run, the Government announced in September 2000 that they were dropping extraditions against those who would have had little or no time left to serve if they returned to Northern Ireland. This has no bearing on cases where there remains an outstanding need to prosecute but relates specifically to cases where the individual concerned has escaped from custody before the completion of their sentence. The Government have dealt with these individuals in a way that is consistent with the Sentences Act 1998, which provides for the accelerated release of prisoners. For the most part this has meant allowing the individuals back into the jurisdiction in order to allow them to make an application for early release to the Sentence Review Commissioners. In a handful of cases, individuals had served the same or longer periods in custody than those already released under the Sentences Act but fell outside the strict application of that legislation, either because time in custody had been served outside Northern Ireland or because their offences had not been scheduled at the time they were committed. In these cases the Secretary of State uses his powers under the Northern Ireland Prison Act 1953 to release life sentence prisoners on licence or to recommend use of the Royal Prerogative of Mercy to remit outstanding portions of determinate sentences.

To date these arrangements have been made in 19 cases. This arrangements does not represent an amnesty. The actions taken by the Government involve decisions on whether these individuals should be allowed to return to Northern Ireland without serving further time in custody because they have met the principles of the early release scheme. The early release scheme is an integral part of the Good Friday Agreement.

Following the proposal made at the Weston Park talks, the Government have agreed to such steps as are necessary as soon as possible, and in any event by March 2002, to resolve the issue about supporters of organisations now on cease-fire against whom there are outstanding prosecutions, and in some cases extradition proceedings, for offences committed before 10 April 1998, who would, if convicted, stand to benefit from the early release scheme. We are currently considering the options for delivering this.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Wireless Telegraphy Regulations

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what communications she has received from the European Commission concerning the draft Wireless Telegraphy (Control of Interference from Material Substances Forming Part of the Telecommunications System) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement. [18472]

Mr. Alexander: The Government received a detailed opinion from the Commission on 29 November and I will be responding, after receiving comments from the Radiocommunications Agency.

Home Working

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what representations she has received on the financial and other costs of fraudulent homeworking schemes on *(a)* the legitimate homeworking industry and *(b)* victims of such schemes; [21254]

(2) what assessment she has made of the provisions of the Outworking Bill introduced in the last Parliament by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield; and if she will incorporate similar provisions in the forthcoming Enterprise Bill; [21252]

(3) what assessment she has made of the impact of fraudulent homeworking schemes on people with low incomes. [21256]

(4) what plans she has to introduce legislation to safeguard consumers from fraudulent homeworking schemes; [21251]

(5) what estimates she has made of the number of fraudulent homeworking schemes in operation. [21255]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Since January 2001:

(a) No representations have been received from the legitimate homeworking industry.

(b) Eight representations have been received from, or on behalf of, victims of fraudulent homeworking schemes.

In the Regulatory Impact Assessment published with the Outworking Bill we assessed there could be up to one million victims of all the 300 schemes that are estimated to exist at any one time. The initial outlay by the victim is typically between £10 and £60, with some schemes eliciting supplementary payments. These schemes tend to attract vulnerable and low paid people.

Due to the difficulty of monitoring the scam operatives' activities it is difficult accurately to gauge the size of the problem in financial terms.

When the Outworking Bill was introduced we supported it as a way of further clamping down on homeworking scams although we recognised there was some scope to tackle these under existing legislation such as the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 and the Control of Misleading Advertisements Regulations 1988 (CMARS). Since then we have strengthened the powers of Trading Standards officers by introducing Stop Now Orders. These enable trading standards authorities and the Office of Fair Trading to seek an injunction against anyone who is in breach of consumer protection legislation in a number of relevant areas, in particular misleading advertising. We plan to strengthen consumer protection by extending the injunctive regime through the Enterprise Bill. The Stop Now regime will cover all consumer protection legislation, and include Trading Standards as well as the OFT as enforcement bodies. This will further strengthen the ability of Trading Standards to shut down scams including homeworking scams.

In 1999, 869 alleged scams were reported to the National Group on Homeworking. Based on their figures the Regulatory Impact Assessment, which accompanied the Outworking Bill, worked on the assumption that 300 schemes were operating at any one time.

Small Businesses

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 306W, on small businesses, if she will identify the title of the Government response and the date it was issued; and if she will place a copy in the Library. [[illegible]2364]

Nigel Griffiths: The "Government Response to the Better Regulation Task Force Shopkeepers Report" was issued on 17 October. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House. It is available on the Cabinet Office website at the following address: http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/TaskForce/2001/response localshops.htm

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what structures exist to facilitate communication between her Department and small businesses. [21807]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service provides a focal point within Government for small business issues. SBS has a wide variety of contacts with small firms themselves, their representative bodies, and the various other organisations, such as regional development agencies, with an interest in helping small firms. The Small Business Service also has a programme of research to identify the needs and concerns of small businesses.

The Small Business Council, made up primarily of small business owners, was appointed to advise the chief executive of the Small Business Service and report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on issues affecting small businesses.

The council organised 12 town hall meetings in spring 2001, meeting small businesses owners across the country to hear their views on issues affecting small businesses. These findings were incorporated in the council's first annual report 2001 outlining 22 recommendations to Government to help SMEs operate more successfully.

The Ethnic Minority Business Forum (EMPF) was set up to strengthen the dialogue between Government and the ethnic minority business communities to ensure that the Government are addressing the needs of all businesses.

Manufacturing Summit (Birmingham)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* Government officers, *(c)* Members of Parliament and *(d)* delegates attending the Manufacturing Summit in Birmingham on 5 December; what criteria were used to select them; and what the terms of reference were for the event. [20542]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The full list of delegates is as follows:

Patricia Hewitt—Secretary of State for Trade and Industry
Nick Brown—Minister for Work
Andrew Smith—Chief Secretary, HM Treasury
Sir Ken Jackson—General Secretary, AEEU
Chris Liddell—General Secretary, Transport and General Workers
Eddie Lynch—General Secretary, Iron and Steel Trade Conference
Paul Gates—General Secretary, KFAT
Roger Lyons—General Secretary, MSF
John Monks—General Secretary, TUC
Estelle Morris—Secretary of State for Education and Skills
Alan Johnson—Minister for Employment Relations and the Regions
Tony Burke—Deputy General Secretary, Graphic Paper and Media Union
Martin Temple—Director General, Engineering Employers Federation
John Weston—Chief Executive, BAE Systems
Paul Barron—President, Alstom UK
Sir Ian Gibson—Innovation and Growth Team
Ken Poulter—Small Business Service
James McAdam—Chairman, Textile and Clothing Strategy Group
John Edmonds—General Secretary, GMB
Christine Wood—Regional Secretary, TUC Midlands Region
Ray Griffiths—AEEU
Kevin Curran—GMB
Bill Holmes—MSF
Bob Dover—Chief Executive, LandRover
Graham Speechley—Managing Director, Benteler Automotive UK Ltd.
David Warren—Director Business Group, British Trade International
Graham Garbutt—Regional Director, Government Office for the West Midlands
Mike Warnock—Director, Strategic Planning, Northern Ireland Industrial Development Board
Greg McConnell—Deputy Secretary DETI, Northern Ireland
Charlie Woods—Senior Director Knowledge Management, Scottish Enterprise
John Wilson—Director General, British Apparel and Textile Confederation
Sue Battle—British Chamber of Commerce
Mike Baunton—Perkins Engines
Michael Stark—Learning and Skills Council
Digby Jones—Director General, Confederation of British Industry
Dr. Julie Madigan—Chief Executive, The Manufacturing Institute
Professor Kumar Bhattacharyya—Chief Executive, Warwick Manufacturing
John Cushnaghan—Managing Director, Nissan UK
George Barlow—Chairman, London Development Agency
Graham Hall—Chairman, Yorkshire Forward
Alex Stephenson—Chairman, Advantage West Midlands
Lord Thomas of Macclesfield—Chairman, North West Development Agency
Derek Mapp—Chairman, East Midlands Development Agency
Chris Farrow—Welsh Development Agency
Rita Donaghy—Chair, ACAS
Adrian Hill—HEFCE
Vincent Watts—Chairman, East of England Development Agency

Sir Michael Lickiss—Chairman, South West Regional Development Agency

John Bridge—Chairman, One North East.

In addition, there were 31 observers from Government Departments and from the other organisations represented at the summit.

Delegates were selected on the basis that there should be a good, representative spread of manufacturing interests around the table, which would lead to a manageable and informed discussion.

There were no specific terms of reference for the event. Its purpose was to provide an opportunity for government and its partners to come together and share views on what the key issues are, and to focus on the practical steps for dealing with them.

Broadband Services

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to encourage the wholesale market for broadband capacity in areas with no current broadband infrastructure. [20648]

Mr. Alexander: On 3 December I set out a range of actions in the Government response to the broadband stakeholder group to further intensify competition, drive up demand, stimulate the production of new broadband content and facilitate broadband rollout in rural areas. We have also provided £30 million for regional projects to extend broadband networks, while challenging the industry to market and price broadband services effectively. Oftel has additionally required the provision by BT of wholesale ADSL on non-discriminatory terms.

Consignia

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with Consignia about proposed changes to the delivery of the mail. [20355]

Mr. Alexander: The Department has regular discussions with Consignia about a range of strategic issues facing the company. Consignia's proposals in relation to the delivery of mail are operational issues for the company provided that it remains within the terms of the licence issued to it by the Postal Services Commission.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the financial position of Consignia for the current financial year; what resulting action she has asked the chairman to take; and what action she plans to take in respect of the chairman. [18921]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* As shareholder we are obviously disappointed at the losses made by Consignia for the current financial year. It is clear that the company urgently needs to improve its performance. The company has been given the greater commercial freedom that the management and the unions had long wanted and its challenge is now to improve its performance.

The Government as owner of Consignia are actively taking steps to strengthen the company's management. Earlier this year a new Finance Director (Marisa Cassoni) joined the Board; this was followed by the appointment of Allan Leighton to the non-executive team to take a special interest in the post office network; a Chief Executive of the new Post Office Ltd. (Consignia's network subsidiary) is currently being recruited. The appointee will be on the main Consignia Board.

Regional Development Agencies

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what decisions she has made about the future membership of the boards of the eight regional development agencies outside London; and if she will make a statement. [22727]

Alan Johnson: I am pleased to announce 39 new appointments to the Regional Development Agency boards; their names are as listed. These appointments begin on 14 December 2001 and are for three years, expiring on 13 December 2004. 50 per cent. of board members now have current or recent business experience. 35 per cent. of the new appointments are women and 18 per cent. are from ethnic minorities. I have placed further details of the new appointees in the Libraries of the Houses.

Decisions on appointments have been made following fair and open competition and following consultation with key national and regional players.

One NorthEast

Christopher Edwards

Jackie Fisher

Geoffrey Hodgson

Tim Cantle Jones

Jane Nolan

David Walsh

NWDA

Neville Chamberlain

Sir Martin Harris

Pauleen Lane

Anil Ruia

Brenda Smith

Michael Storey

Yorkshire Forward

Eileen Bosomworth

Dr. Christopher King

Kathryn Pinnock

EMDA

Kashmir Bilgan

Samantha Gemmell

Jonathan McLeod

Rita Patel

Peter Ramsden

Andrew Scarborough

Advantage West Midlands

Isabella Moore

Tony Sealey

Paul Tilsley

EEDA

Roger Ali
Ruth Bagnall
Sal Brinton
Marco Cereste
Leo Murray
Chris Paveley
Yasmin Shariff

SEEDA

James Brathwaite
Elizabeth Brighouse
Robert Douglas
Ken Thornber

SW RDA

Nicholas Buckland
Brian Kemp
Robin Nicoll
Colin Skellett.

Atlantic Telecom

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had regarding the collapse of Atlantic Telecom; and if she will make a statement. [18279]

Mr. Alexander: I met with my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran) on 19 November and with my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith on 21 November. From these meetings, and those which the Scottish Executive Minister held at the same time, we were clear about the difficulties facing Atlantic's business customers in particular.

I then had discussions with the Director General of Telecommunications on 20 November expressing my resolve that everything possible should be done to smooth the transfer of customers from Atlantic to other operators. I then met the Chief Executive of BT, Sir Peter Bonfield, and the Group Commercial Director, Colin Green, on 22 November where I sought BT's assistance to ensure that they would expedite the connection of ex-Atlantic customers. BT assured me it would do all it could to help facilitate a quick transfer of customers.

As a result of further intensive discussions, we therefore announced on 24 November, along with the Scottish Executive Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, a £0.5 million joint rescue package, extending the operation of fixed wireless telephone services to allow customers to switch to an alternative telecoms supplier. The extended operation will end on 2 January 2002 at the latest.

Miners' Pensions

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the pension rights of miners dismissed during the 1984–85 strikes. [22728]

Mr. Wilson: Following the consultation process last year, I am persuaded that a number of miners dismissed in connection with the 1984–85 strike, and not subsequently re-employed by British Coal, were harshly treated.

I have concluded that the most appropriate way forward would be to enhance the pensions of these miners in recognition of the years of further service they lost as a result of British Coal's decision not to re-employ them. The costs of this will be met from the residual assets of British Coal. I would emphasise that those whose offences involved serious acts of violence or intimidation or actions which jeopardised the safety of others will not qualify for this enhancement of pension.

I will shortly be writing to interested parties with details of how this will be put into effect.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much the Government received from mining pension fund surpluses in 2000–01; and if she will make a statement. [18719]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* In 2000–01 the Government received £425.3 million from the mining pension fund surpluses. This included £114.4 million that was held over from the previous year.

TREASURY

Ren[illegible]o

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date the Treasury *(a)* provided new information to the Office for National Statistics on the structure of RenewCo; and *(b)* subsequently requested confirmation of the classification of RenewCo. [22070]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mrs. Theresa May, dated 10 December 2001:

> As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on what date the Treasury provided new information to the Office for National Statistics on the structure of Renewco and subsequently requested confirmation of the classification of Renewco (22070).
>
> On 14 September 2001 the Treasury provided new information on Rewnewco to the Office for National Statistics and requested advice on its classification within National Accounts. The Office for National Statistics requested further detailed information, which arrived on 24 September 2001.

Railtrack

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice the Treasury has received from the office for national statistics on the treatment of Government loans to Railtrack while in administration in the national accounts. [22065]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mrs. Theresa May, dated 10 December 2001:

> As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on what advice the Treasury has received from the Office for National Statistics on the treatment of government loans to Railtrack while in administration in the national accounts (22065).

The Treasury did not seek advice on the national accounts treatment of these loans and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) did not provide any. Once ONS had decided on the national accounts classification of Railtrack while in administration, the classification of government loans to it is straightforward. These are classified as central government loans to the private non-financial corporations sector. This treatment has been reflected in the National Statistics public sector finances release, which is based on national accounts definitions and jointly published by ONS and the Treasury.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment has been made of the effect on risk premium which will have to be budgeted for in future partnerships with the private sector, following the events surrounding Railtrack going into administration. [8445]

Mr. Andrew Smith: We do not anticipate that there will be any long-term impact on the risk premium for PPPs as a result of Railtrack administration. In its report of 23 October, credit rating agency Standard and Poors said:

> "the Railtrack situation has no direct credit implications for rated PFI projects".

PPPs are fundamentally different from the regime under which Railtrack operated. Whereas PPPs involve output focused bilateral contracts which provide a clear allocation of risks, Railtrack was privatised under a broadly standard utility-style regulatory structure; although, unlike any other privatised utility, some two thirds of its revenue came from Government.

Public Sector Net Investment

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the level of public sector net investment was as a share of GDP in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000, *(c)* 2000–01 and *(d)* 2001–02; what estimates were made by his Department in the Budgets of (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999 and (iv) 2000; and if he will make a statement. [20342]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The table sets out public sector net investment (PSNI) as a proportion of GDP in the years requested, together with the projections made in the Budgets between 1997 and 2000.

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Pre-Budget report 2001	0.7	0.5	0.7	1.3
Budget 2000	0.6	0.6	0.9	1.2
Budget 1999	0.4	0.6	0.8	1.0
Budget 1998	0.8	n/a	n/a	n/a
Budget 1997	0.9	n/a	n/a	n/a

PSNI figures are regularly revised by the Office for National Statistics, and can be affected by revisions to depreciation, as well as actual public sector capital spend. In particular, the Office for National Statistics made very significant revisions in the summer of 1998, which makes the figures before and after Budget 1998 difficult to compare.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the level of public sector investment as a share of gross domestic product in each year from 1978–79 to 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [20214]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The level of public sector net investment, as a proportion of GDP, between 1978–79 and 2000–01 is set out in table B23 of the pre-Budget report. Projections for this year, and future years, are set out in table B6 of the same report.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the growth of current expenditure in the total departmental expenditure limit, in real terms, for the period 1998–99 to 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [20303]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The annual average real growth in current expenditure within departmental expenditure limits between 1998–99 and 2003–04 is 4.1 per cent.

Savings Gateway and Child Trust Fund

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what has been the cost of consultation on the *(a)* Savings Gateway and *(b)* Child Trust Fund; [21022]

(2) what he expects to be the cost of *(a)* the Savings Gateway pilot projects and *(b)* the follow-up report, "Delivering Saving and Assets"; and when he expects each of them to be completed; [21023]

(3) what his current target date is for the introduction of *(a)* the Savings Gateway and *(b)* the Child Trust Fund. [20995]

Ruth Kelly: Consultation on proposals for the Savings Gateway and Child Trust Fund, including publishing the follow-up consultation document "Delivering Saving and Assets", has been conducted at negligible cost and within Departmental Expenditure Limits.

The costs of the Savings Gateway pilot schemes and further consultation on the Savings Gateway and Child Trust Fund will also be contained within existing spending plans. Detailed proposals of the pilot schemes remain to be decided, but based on the proposed size and scope of the pilot projects it is anticipated that the costs of operating them might be up to about £1.5 million. Proposals for both the Savings Gateway and the Child Trust Fund will continue to be developed through the process of consultation, as well as being considered as part of Spending Review 2002. It will be important to get the design of these new proposals right and no fixed deadline has been set for the introduction of either initiative.

Savings Ratio

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his forecast is of the savings ratio for the next two quarters. [20997]

Ruth Kelly: The household saving ratio can be very volatile from quarter to quarter, so the Government do not publish quarterly forecasts. Annual forecasts can be found in the pre-Budget report (Cm 5318).

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are employed by the Department under the new deal for young people; and at what cost to public funds. [21328]

Ruth Kelly: Specific information is not available in the form requested for HM Treasury and Customs and Excise.

The available information on the number of people specially recruited under the new deal for young people is as follows. As at 1 April 2001 Inland Revenue employed 19 people and the Office for National Statistics employed one person. These recruits took up existing vacancies so extra costs are limited to the subsidy, where appropriate, and any additional training and development which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot be readily identified.

Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many days were lost due to sickness absence in the Department in each of the last four years. [21338]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (David Maclean) on 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 563W.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the saving to public funds in 2000–01 from achievement of the Public Service Agreement target for the reduction of surplus buildings on the Government Estate. [21273]

Mr. Andrew Smith: £23.8 million.

Productivity Growth

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the level of productivity growth in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* other members of the G7 and the OECD over the last three years. [22036]

Ruth Kelly: The Government make regular assessments of trends in productivity growth both within the UK and compared to other G7 member countries. The most recent assessment was published in the pre-Budget report 2001.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 66W, on the climate change levy, if the CCL will lead to additional VAT receipts of about £30 million per annum; and if this VAT revenue will be recycled via a reduction in employees national insurance. [22201]

Mr. Boateng: The CCL is estimated to generate additional VAT receipts of, at the most, £30 million per annum. This represents the portion of VAT on fuel inputs which cannot be reclaimed. All revenues resulting from the introduction of the CCL, including VAT receipts, are recycled via a reduction in employers national insurance contributions and funding of energy efficiency measures.

Unemployment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown for each of the last two Parliaments of the change in the number of 18 to 24-year-olds unemployed for over six months. [20462]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Bercow, dated 11 December 2001:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking for a breakdown for each of the last two parliaments of the change in the number of 18 to 24 year olds unemployed for over six months (20462).

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) compiles statistics for unemployment from surveys following the internationally standard International Labour Organisation definition.

ONS also compiles statistics of claimants of unemployment-related benefits. The claimant count consists of all people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or National Insurance credits at Employment Service local offices. They must declare that they are out of work, capable of, available for and actively seeking work during the week in which the claim is made.

The table provides a breakdown of the available figures.

United Kingdom: changes over the last two parliaments for 18–24 year olds (a) ILO unemployed for 6 months or more; (b) claiming unemployment benefit for 6 months or more

	Number
ILO unemployment[1] 6 months or more duration	
LFS reference period[2]	
March to May 1992	364,000
April to June 1997	189,000
May to July 2001	104,000
Change March to May 1992 to April to June 1997	–175,000
Percentage	–48.1
Change April to June 1997 to May to July 2001	–85,000
Percentage	–45.0
Claimant count[3,4] claiming for 6 months or more	
Claimant count reference month[5]	
April 1992	358,114
May 1997	169,498
June 2001	40,089
Change April 1992 to May 1997	–188,616
Percentage	52.7
Change May 1997 to June 2001	–129,409
Percentage	–76.3

[1] Seasonally adjusted

[2] As asked for in the question, the periods shown are centred around the General Election dates. It would be more useful to make comparisons are made between consecutive 3 month periods.

[3] Not seasonally adjusted

[4] Monthly claimant count data by age and duration are on the basis of all claims for April 1992 and computerised claims only for later years.

[5] For data that is not seasonally adjusted comparisons should normally be made between data for the same month each year. For this reason, comparisons between different months should be used with caution.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of people over the age of 16 in rural areas had been unemployed for over 12 months in June of each of the last four years. [22034]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Bercow, dated 11 December 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about unemployment in rural areas (22034).

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of unemployment, based on the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition. However, it does not currently provide estimates of unemployment on an urban/rural basis.

The ONS is aware of the growing need for statistics and information to be available for rural and urban geographies. To this end, we are playing an active role in a cross-government group, led by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, which is developing guidance on common definitions of rural and urban areas. These definitions will then form the basis of developing statistics for those geographies.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of people between 16 and 60-years-old in rural areas had been unemployed for *(a)* six, *(b)* 12 and *(c)* 18 months in (i) 1996, (ii) 1997, (iii) 1998, (iv) 1999, (v) 2000 and (vi) 2001. [20910]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Malcolm Bruce, dated 11 December 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about unemployment in rural areas (20910).

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of unemployment based on the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition. However, it does not currently provide estimates of unemployment on an urban/rural basis.

The ONS is aware of the growing need for statistics and information to be available for rural and urban geographies. To this end, we are playing an active role in a cross-government group, led by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, which is developing guidance on common definitions of rural and urban areas. These definitions will then form the basis of developing statistics for those geographies.

Capital Assets

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 270W, on capital assets, what his estimate is of the contribution to public sector net investment made by PPPs in each financial year from 1997–98 to 2003–04. [19187]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Public Private Partnerships (PPP) cover a wide range of projects. They have been set up in most central Government Departments and local authorities, and in some public corporations. No information is held centrally on their total value.

In many cases the private sector owns the capital assets used in PPPs. In most of these cases the capital expenditure would not count as public sector net investment because it is private sector expenditure. The exceptions are when a PPP involves a lease of an asset by the public sector, and the accountants classify it as a finance lease. In those circumstances the capital expenditure, and the depreciation of the asset, would be part of the calculation of public sector net investment.

Although private sector investment does not usually count within public sector net investment, it is included as part of the total investment in our public services. This year, it is estimated that private sector investment through PFI will be £4.4 billion out of total investment of £34.2 billion.

Figures for estimated private sector investment through PFI can be found in tables c17 and estimated payments by Departments in table C18 of Budget 2001. Private sector investment in off-balance sheet PPPs does not score as public sector net investment.

The vast majority of total investment in public services is funded by the public sector—this year over 85 per cent. of total investment in public services will be funded in this way.

Special Advisers

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 741–42W, on records kept under Clause 9 of the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers, if he will list the internal purposes to which he referred. [20383]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* These are set out in Clause 9 of the Code to which the hon. Member refers.

Crown Estate

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the Crown Estate has spent on corporate hospitality in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [18535]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* The Crown Estate spent the following on corporate hospitality:

Year	*£*
(a) 1998–99	9,198
(b) 1999–2000	12,173
(c) 2000–01	135,415

This figure includes costs for special receptions to mark the millennium, held for Crown Estate tenants. These comprised a garden party in the Windsor Estate for some 1,500 guests, and a dinner in Stirling Castle for some 200 guests.

(d) 2001–02: Projected to be £16,610.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the Crown Estate spent on corporate sponsorship in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [20549]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The Crown Estate contributes to activities related to land and property management and figures for these contributions are supplied:

Year	*£*
(a) 1998–99	26,450
(b) 1999–2000	45,896
(c) 2000–01	72,730
(d) 2001–02[1]	37,431

[1] Predicted to date

These activities include items such as contributions to the cost to the Marine Conservation Society's Beachwatch scheme, the Marine Education Centre in Kimmeridge, Dorset and the Moray Firth Partnership (coastal forum) newsletter. The Crown Estate does not, as a general rule, provide corporate sponsorship for cultural or sporting events.

In addition, in Regent street where the Crown Estate owns all the property between Piccadilly circus and Oxford circus (an estate valued at £742.5 million) the Crown Estate contributed £193,836 (1999–2000) and £200,000 (2000–01) to the Regent street Christmas lights and £61,796 (2000–01) to the Regent street festival, as part of its management strategy to maintain and enhance Regent street's reputation and position as one of London's premier shopping destinations.

Royal Finances

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what steps he has taken to distinguish, for the purpose of treatment of royal finances, between the private wealth of the sovereign and that held in trust by the sovereign in her capacity as head of state; and if he will make a statement; [21535]

(2) if he will list the taxation provisions where the treatment of the sovereign in her private capacity differs from that applied to the rest of the population; [21533]

(3) if he will take steps to make mandatory the arrangement under which Her Majesty the Queen pays tax on her private income. [21532]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answers 10 December 2001]:* The taxation arrangements for Her Majesty are set out in the Memorandum of Understanding in the Royal Trustees Report (HC 464) published on 11 February 1993. Assets held by Her Majesty as Head of State, i.e. on behalf of the nation, include the Royal Collection, the assets of the Crown Estate, the occupied and Historic Royal Palaces, and the Royal Parks. These are distinct from private assets, whose tax treatment is covered in the Memorandum of Understanding. We have no plans to change these arrangements.

National Income

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of national income is spent on *(a)* work and pensions, *(b)* health, *(c)* national debt, *(d)* defence, *(e)* education and skills, *(f)* trade and industry, *(g)* environment, food and rural affairs, *(h)* transport, local government and the regions, *(i)* international development, *(j)* law and order, *(k)* asylum and immigration and *(l)* culture, media and sport. [21231]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Government spending by function, as a percentage of national income, is detailed in Table 3.4 of "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2001–02", published in April 2001, as Command Paper 5101.

Public-Private Venture Capital

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to achieve his target of £1 billion of public-private venture capital funding; and what proportion of this target he expects to be *(a)* public and *(b)* private. [20482]

Mr. Boateng: The target will be achieved over several years. The split between public and private funding will depend on commercial considerations.

Benefits (Portsmouth, South)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people received *(a)* tax credits and *(b)* means-tested benefits in the constituency of Portsmouth, South in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [21218]

Dawn Primarolo: The latest available information for Portsmouth, South is in the following table:

Recipients of (a) tax credits and (b) certain income related benefits in the Portsmouth, South constituency—May 2001

	Number
Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC)	2,100
Disabled Person's Tax Credit (DPTC)	24
Income Support (IS)	7,600
Jobseeker's Allowance (income based)(JSA)	1,300
Total	11,000

Notes:

1. Apart from DPTC, the figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample. They are subject to sampling error and therefore shown to the nearest hundred.
2. Recipients of WFTC or DPTC who also receive IS or JSA are included only in the first two columns. This eliminates doubling counting in the total.
3. DPTC figure is for April.

Sources:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiries May 2001
Jobseeker's Allowance Quarterly Statistical Enquiries May 2001
Working Families Tax Credit Quarterly Statistical Enquiry May 2001
Disabled Person's Tax Credit Quarterly Statistical Enquiry April 2001

Housing benefit and council tax benefit figures are not available for the Portsmouth, South constituency but are available for the Portsmouth local authority:

Recipients of housing benefit and council tax benefit in Portsmouth—May 2001

	Number
Housing benefit	15,900
Council tax benefit	13,710

Notes:

1. The data refer to benefit units, which can be single persons or couples.
2. The figures have been rounded to the nearest ten.
3. Housing benefit figures exclude any Extended Payment cases.
4. Council tax benefit totals exclude any Second Adult Rebate cases.

Source:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System Quarterly 100 per cent. caseload stock

Tax Credits (Glasgow)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in Glasgow have received *(a)* the working families tax credit, *(b)* the child care tax credit and *(c)* the disabled persons tax credit. [21664]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of the numbers receiving the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) and the Disabled Person's Tax Credit (DPTC) in each local authority and parliamentary constituency are published in the WFTC and DPTC Quarterly Enquiries, copies of which are in the Library. It is estimated that about 2.6 thousand families in Glasgow City were receiving the child care tax credit within WFTC or DPTC at May 2001.

The estimates for WFTC and for the child care tax credit are however based on 5 per cent. samples of awards, and are therefore subject to sampling error.

Public Services Productivity

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to publish the paper on public services productivity mentioned in paragraph 1.13 of 'Productivity in the UK: The evidence and the Government's approach'; and if he will make a statement. [21417]

Mr. Boateng: Work on the paper is well under way, and the paper will be published in due course.

Employment Tax Credit

James Purnell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of how the employment tax credit could be combined with training to increase the earnings potential of the low paid. [21625]

Dawn Primarolo: Recent work by CBI-TUC and the Performance and Innovation Unit has underlined the importance of workforce development and skill acquisition in the UK. Their reports identify significant market failures that restrict training opportunities for lower skilled employees. To tackle these market failures and deliver a long-term improvement in workplace training the Government are considering a range of options for a new policy framework to reform the UK training system and encourage more training among people with low skills. In the PBR, the Government said they would examine an approach based on four complementary, linked elements which would require commitments by stakeholders—the Government, employers and individuals. These are: financial support for employers whose staff take time off; free learning provision for employees; and entitlement to take-up training and extended guidance and support.

James Purnell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment the Government have made of the relationship between incentives to work for a second earner and the introduction of the employment tax credit. [21626]

Dawn Primarolo: The working tax credit aims to make work pay and tackle poverty. The working tax credit will improve work incentives for second earners by:

assessing against gross income, enabling the second earner in the household to take advantage of national insurance contributions thresholds, income tax allowances and rate bands. In this way, gross tapers should lessen the unemployment trap for tax credit recipients by reducing the average deduction rate;

allowing couples with children with joint working hours of over 30 hours to qualify for an extra credit, even if neither of them individually works 30 hours or more.

Capital Modernisation Fund

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason the Capital Modernisation Fund made no allocations in 2001. [22196]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Over £1 billion was allocated from the Capital Modernisation Fund in March 2001 to support 55 new projects.

ECOFIN

Mr. Hood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held in Brussels on 4 December; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [22057]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I attended ECOFIN on 4 December.

ECOFIN agreed reports to the Laeken European Council on pensions and on structural performance indicators (to measure progress on economic reform). The report on pensions respects the position of the Government and other member states that decisions on pensions are primarily for member states. I reminded ECOFIN colleagues of the importance of economic reform and it was agreed that ECOFIN should closely monitor progress.

There was a discussion of the tax package, including the directive on taxation of savings. I made it clear, along with 11 other Finance Ministers, that the substantial content of this directive had been agreed by ECOFIN in November 2000, reflecting the principles agreed at the Feira European Council, and that this should now be reopened. The Commission noted that it would shortly commence formal negotiations with third countries on the adoption of equivalent measures. I reported on the Government's discussions with United Kingdom dependent territories, noting that every jurisdiction recognised and fully supported the need for greater co-operation in the fight against tax abuse and evasion.

ECOFIN received a written report from the Code of Conduct working group, which the Paymaster General chairs. There was no discussion of the report.

The Commission provided a progress report on its negotiations with the European Parliament on the Lamfalussy procedure to fast-track financial services legislation. During a short discussion of the draft prospectus directive, I emphasised that it must meet its objective of reducing the cost of capital, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises.

The Court of Auditor's annual report was presented to Ministers.

The Commission noted that, since not all member states had yet ratified the new Own Resources Decision, the 2002 Community budget would in the meantime need to be based on the old Own Resources Decision. The UK has already ratified this Decision.

Along with six other Finance Ministers—a majority of those speaking—I called for further analysis of the Galileo satellite navigation project before additional funds are committed.

Most member states could accept a March 2002 cut-off date for ending Government guarantees for airline insurance. The Government recently extended their scheme—Troika—until 22 January 2002.

In a discussion of the forthcoming UN Financing for Development (FfD) conference, I emphasised that EU aid should be reformed to make it more effective and that untying was an important way to meet aid targets. I also advocated the international development trust fund as a way to lever in more resources to reach the $50 billion target in the Zedillo report.

The Commission agreed to examine an Austrian proposal to tackle VAT fraud.

It was agreed that concrete proposals would be brought forward on gender mainstreaming the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines.

Agreement was not reached on EIB loans to EFTA countries. This will be discussed again on 13 December.

ECOFIN was followed by a dialogue with the Finance Ministers of the 13 candidate countries and the European central bank, which focused on the need for structural reforms in the candidate countries and real convergence with the EU. A joint communiqué was agreed.

No votes were taken at the meeting.

Pension Tax Credit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the cost to public funds of the pension tax credit in each of the next three years. [22037]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested can be found in "Table B4: Estimated costs of the pre-Budget report measures and other measures announced since Budget 2001" in the pre-Budget report, November 2001 (Cm 5318).

Contingent Risks

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the reference to contingent risks as set out in Treasury guidance document: "Appraisal and evaluation in central Government", paragraph 4.42 includes political risks; and if he will make a statement. [22254]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The paragraph specified refers to contingent liabilities which are commitments to future expenditure if certain events occur, such as premature termination of contract. A wide range of factors must be taken into account when appraising the likelihood of their occurrence, including where appropriate regulation and legislation risks.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason Ulgham was not included in the list of disadvantaged wards in Northumberland eligible for stamp duty relief; and whether it was his policy to include in that list any ward which met the Objective 2 measure of deprivation. [21746]

Mr. Boateng: For England, the exemption is available for the 15 per cent. most deprived wards as identified by the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000. The ward of Ulgham, in the Castle Morpeth district, does not fall within this category. The qualifying areas were identified by reference to each country's most recent index of deprivation.

Small Businesses

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what structures exist to facilitate communication between his Department and small businesses. [21806]

Mr. Boateng: Treasury Ministers and officials have a wide range of contact with small businesses and the organisations that represent them. HM Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue are also both committed to understanding and fulfilling the expectations of their customers better. Both Departments offer specific support to small businesses to help them understand and comply with their obligations.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the air passenger duty has been since 1997. [21787]

Mr. Boateng: The information is as follows:

£

	Passengers to: European economic area (EEA) destinations	*Other destinations*
Up to 31 October 1997	[1]5	10
From 1 November 1997	[1]10	20
From 1 April 2001		
Lowest class of travel	[2]5	20
Other than lowest class	[2]10	40

[1] Nil on passengers travelling on the return leg of a round trip within the UK.

[2] Nil on passengers travelling on flights leaving airports in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

Tax and Excise Duty

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the average proportion of the purchase price of a bottle of whisky that is accounted for by tax and excise duty. [22161]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is contained in the HM Customs and Excise "Spirits Factsheet", a copy of which can be found in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the average proportion of the purchase price of a litre of unleaded petrol that is accounted for by tax and excise duty. [22159]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is contained in the HM Customs and Excise "Hydrocarbon Oils Factsheet", a copy of which can be found in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the revenue to the Exchequer was in each of the last four years from tax and excise duty on *(a)* alcohol, *(b)* tobacco and *(c)* fuel. [22160]

Mr. Boateng: Receipts of excise duty on alcohol, tobacco and fuel for the financial years 1997–98 to 1999–2000 are published in Table A1 of the tables and Statistics accompanying the Customs and Excise Annual Report for 2000, available on the Customs and Excise website. (Address: www.hmce.gov.uk/general/about/index.htm—scroll down to 'Annual Report 2000', click on 'Tables and Statistics'.)

Details for the year 2000–01 can be found in the National Statistics Publication "Financial Statistics" Table 2.1D.

No official figures exist for receipts of VAT on alcohol, tobacco and fuel.

X-ray Equipment

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance is issued to officers of HM Customs and Excise on the use of bulk X-ray equipment. [22039]

Mr. Boateng: Under the Ionising Radiation Regulations 1999 a risk assessment is required before any X-ray source is used. The Defence Science Technology Laboratories Radiation Protection Service is Customs' Radiation Protection Advisor for the freight X-ray scanner project and they prepare each risk assessment. Each risk assessment is site and machine specific and includes local rules for setting up the scanner, operating practices and safety procedures. The risk assessment is kept with the scanner for production, as required, to any Health and Safety Executive Inspector or any other person.

Alcohol Smuggling

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people entering the UK were questioned by HM Customs and Excise in each of the last five years on suspicion of alcohol smuggling; how many were carrying more alcohol than the suggested guidelines for imports for personal use; and how many of these were allowed to enter the country on the grounds that the alcohol was for personal use. [22041]

Mr. Boateng: This information is not available in the format requested.

Customs carefully target their anti-smuggling activity on those thought likely to be smuggling, and have no interest in legitimate cross-border shoppers. Accordingly only a very small proportion of the 90 million travellers who enter the UK each year are stopped by customs officers. Indeed, in 2000–01 less than 0.2 per cent. of the estimated 14 million travellers through the channel ports had goods seized by customs. The majority of people entering the UK with goods in excess of the minimum indicative levels were able to satisfy customs that the goods were for their own personal use.

Amateur Sports Clubs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will announce his policy on charitable status for community amateur sports clubs. [22032]

Mr. Boateng: On 30 November 2001 the Charity Commission announced its decision to recognise as charitable:

> "the promotion of community participation in healthy recreation"

which now enables community amateur sports clubs (CASCs) to apply to become charities.

Trader Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost to public funds of value-added tax missing trader fraud in each of the last four years. [22038]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Gentleman to page 19 of the Customs and Excise paper "Measuring Indirect Tax Fraud" that was published on 27 November 2001 and a copy of which is in the Library of the House. This gives fraud estimates for 1999–2000 and 2000–01. There are no estimates for any earlier years.

Trade Balance

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the balance of trade in *(a)* food products and *(b)* meat products for the last 12 months for which figures are available. [20774]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

The table shows the value of UK trade in total food, feed and drink (including meat and meat preparations) between October 2000 and September 2001.

£ million

	Imports	*Exports*
Meat and meat preparations	2,727	491
Dairy products and eggs	1,282	620
Fish and fish preparations	1,404	747
Cereals and cereal preparations	1,216	1,214
Fruit and vegetables	4,230	413
Sugar, sugar preparations and honey	779	362
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	1,103	605
Feedingstuffs for animals	775	298
Miscellaneous edible products	838	604
Alcoholic drinks	2,845	3,218
Oil seeds, oleaginous fruits, oils, fats and waxes	836	153
Total	18,034	8,724

Note:

Figures are given on the 'Overseas Trade' basis. Exports are valued 'free on board' and imports are valued 'cost insurance freight'. Thus for imports into the UK, the cost of transportation between the port or place of despatch and the port of entry into the UK is included and as a result of the value of imports are overstated relative to exports by about 5 per cent.

Source:

HM Customs and Excise

WORK AND PENSIONS

Disability Living Allowance

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 539W, on winter fuel allowance, (1) by what factors and measures the *(a)* care and *(b)* mobility components of disability living allowance (i) were first and (ii) are calculated; [19918]

(2) what calculations have been made to ensure that *(a)* nursing, *(b)* dressing, *(c)* essential provision purchasing, *(d)* domestic cleaning, *(e)* personal hygiene and *(f)* heating costs are properly reflected in the amounts claimable for those receiving lower, middle and higher rates of disability living allowance. [19919]

Mr. McCartney: Disability living allowance provides a contribution towards the generality of extra costs faced by severely disabled people as a result of their disabilities. The amounts payable are not based on calculations of the costs of specific items, and recipients are free to spend the benefit according to their own priorities and requirements.

When the allowance was introduced in 1992, the highest and middle care components were set at the same weekly amounts as the higher and lower rates of attendance allowance, and the higher mobility component was set at the same weekly amount as the mobility allowance which it replaced. This was because the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys' major surveys of disabled people in Great Britain in the 1980s had found that those allowances were well directed towards the most common costly disabilities, and were more than sufficient to cover disability-related expenditure in most cases. For less severely disabled people, the lowest care component and the lower mobility component were set above the average weekly amount of disability-related expenditure found by the disability surveys. Since 1992, all components have been uprated annually in line with the movement in prices.

Parliamentary Ombudsman

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much has been paid in compensation in each year since 1997 as a result of cases related to his Department decided by the Parliamentary Ombudsman. [19506]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Comprehensive details of financial redress paid in cases where the Ombudsman has completed an investigation and issued a formal report are not held centrally. However, the following information has been extracted from such records as are available. Details for previous years are for the then DSS.

These figures exclude cases where a statutory resolution has been found.

Year	*Amount paid*
1997–98	[1]—
1998–99	442,363
1999–2000	173,896
2000–01	191,060
2001–02	[2]66,435

[1] No figures are available

[2] Payments authorised between 1 April and 31 October 2001

The sums quoted are the total sums paid in cases investigated by the Ombudsman. Some of those payments were made prior to the Ombudsman's intervention under the Department's standing scheme for financial redress.

Random Assignment Evaluation

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how he intends to ensure informed consent to participation in random assignment for those with *(a)* learning disabilities and *(b)* mental health problems; [19497]

(2) for what reasons the random assignment evaluation was delayed until six months into the national extension of New Deal for Disabled People; and for what reasons this evaluation was not conducted during the pilot programmes; [19498]

(3) what advice he has given to job brokers about recruitment to the New Deal for Disabled People during the random assignment evaluation period; how job brokers' presentation of the random assignment research will be monitored; and how long volunteers to the New Deal for Disabled People will have to wait before they are told whether they are part of the control group for the random assignment evaluation; [19500]

(4) what responses were received from *(a)* job brokers and *(b)* other interested parties about the random assignment evaluation. [19501]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The new Jobcentre Plus service pathfinder offices opened in October and will be rolled out nationally from April 2002. As a result of the decision that this service would include mandatory work-focused meetings for new customers making claims to incapacity benefit, which would be a gateway for NDDP, it is no longer appropriate for random assignment to be used as one of the evaluation tools. We have therefore abandoned plans for its use. We are now reviewing options for alternative approaches.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the study "A Review of the Use of Random Assignment" will be completed; and if he will place it in the Library. [19502]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: It is currently anticipated that the study called "A review of the use of social experiments" will be published in February 2002. This study covers random assignment methods. A copy will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Pension Service

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement about the siting of the Phase 2 Pension Service locations. [22478]

Mr. McCartney: In my written answer on 4 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 195W, I announced plans for the new Pension Service and explained that it will offer a local service working in partnership with local authorities and voluntary organisations. To support the local service network, we will bring together the backroom processing in 26 locations rather than over 400 at present, allowing frontline staff to concentrate on dealing with customers.

At that time I also announced 19 of the first phase pension centre locations.

I am now pleased to announce that six additional new centres for the Pension Service have been secured in the Dearne Valley, Derby, Motherwell, Seaham, Stockport and York. In addition one of our existing social security offices in Norwich will become a pension centre.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will make a statement on the Jobcentre Plus computer system; and when he expects it to be fully operational in the new offices; [14034]

(2) what plans he has to ensure that Jobcentre Plus staff have access to a single computer system that will allow the linking of data from Benefits Agency and Employment Service sources; and if he will make a statement. [14299]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answers 12 and 13 November 2001]:* The information technology systems being used in the Jobcentre Plus pathfinders are based on the systems currently in use in the Benefits Agency and

Employment Service, with enhancements to enable the Jobcentre Plus process to be carried out. All of these systems are currently operational.

We are investing in order to upgrade and replace the Department's outdated computer systems. We want to ensure that all people, including those who use Jobcentre Plus, can receive a modern service. The new and improved IT we are developing will allow us to capture the necessary information from people face-to-face or over the telephone, instead of getting them to fill in multiple benefit claim forms. And we will be able to offer on-the-spot calculations of by how much a person would be better off if they took a particular job. We will be replacing the main income support and jobseeker's allowance benefit processing systems and modernising the payment system so as to improve the efficiency of the service we provide.

Public Service Agreement Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will make a statement on the public service and service delivery agreements developed in the corporate serving directorate of his Department in 2000–01; [19265]

(2) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for access to funded second pensions; [19044]

(3) if he will make a statement on progress since the publication of the Departmental report 2001 towards the public service agreement target for the payment by the Department for goods and services; [19005]

(4) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the completion of a new assessment of liability to pay child support maintenance; [19017]

(5) if he will make a statement on the public service agreement target for the ratio of in-work income from earnings and benefits to out-of-work benefits in 2001–02; [19033]

(6) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the delivery of the new deals for the unemployed lone parents and disabled people; [19037]

(7) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the level of compliance by absent parents with agreed child support arrangements; [19048]

(8) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for investment in modernisation; [19013]

(9) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for minimising the regulatory burden on employers in respect of pension and child support arrangements; [19021]

(10) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the provision of an electronic claiming facility for benefit claimants; [19029]

(11) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target of achieving an accuracy rate for assessments and reviews in child support cases of not less than 90 per cent; [19046]

(12) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the achievement of an annual efficiency gain; [19011]

(13) if he will make a statement on performance in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 against the public service agreement target for average pensioner income as a percentage of average earnings; [19019]

(14) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for reducing the average cost of processing retirement pension claims; [19027]

(15) if he will make a statement on progress towards meeting the public service agreement target for reducing losses from fraud and error; [19035]

(16) if he will make a statement on the progress towards meeting the public service agreement target for the percentage of Benefits Agency customers whose benefits are paid into their bank accounts; [19031]

(17) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the reduction of the number of children in households with no-one in work; [19042]

(18) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for reducing the number of children in poverty by at least a quarter by 2004; [19078]

(19) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the reduction of sickness absence rates by 2003; [19003]

(20) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the development of better measures of efficiency; [19023]

(21) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for access for disabled people with broken work records to second pensions; [19045]

(22) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the reduction by March 2002 of benefit losses from fraud and error; [19010]

(23) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for increasing the collection of maintenance from non-resident parents who pay the CSA's collection service; [19018]

(24) if he will make a statement on progress towards meeting the public service agreement target for the reduction of the average cost of processing minimum income guarantee claims and the maintenance of the caseload; [19026]

(25) if he will make a statement on progress towards meeting the public service agreement target for value for money; [19034]

(26) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the percentage of departmental business transactions to be carried out electronically; [19014]

(27) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the provision of pension forecasts by employers and pension providers; [19022]

(28) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the establishment of payment arrangements in child support cases; [19047]

(29) if the Benefits Agency met its target to contribute to the reduction in public sector sickness by reducing absences by 10 per cent. from 1998 public service agreement baseline levels; [18993]

(30) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the control of central costs and overheads; [19012]

(31) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for changing the ratio of public expenditure to private expenditure on pensions; [19020]

(32) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the roll-out of new IT equipment to staff of the Benefits Agency and the Child Support Agency; [19028]

(33) if he will make a statement on progress towards meeting the public service agreement target for reducing by 2002 the number of lone parents dependent on income support; [19036]

(34) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the reduction of the amount of money that is incorrectly paid in minimum income guarantee; [19024]

(35) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the modernisation of service delivery; [19032]

(36) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for increasing employment rates of disadvantaged areas and groups; [19043]

(37) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the speed and extent of access to occupational health and rehabilitation services; [19004]

(38) if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the transition into work and reduction of dependence on benefits of people with disabilities. [19016]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The 2001 departmental report, Cm 5115, sets out our progress against the public service targets. The 2002 report will set out our progress in the current financial year.

Housing Benefit Help Team

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) in which local authorities the housing benefit help team has intervened since its creation; and when; [19507]

(2) how many repeat visits the housing benefit help team has made to individual local authorities; and to which ones; [19508]

(3) how long the housing benefit help team has spent with each local authority housing benefit office. [19509]

Malcolm Wicks: The help team initiative is a voluntary partnership between central and local government. The team only visits local authorities which request its assistance, and works with these authorities to identify ways of improving their housing benefit administration.

The help team's visits started on 12 March 2001 and to date the team has visited Hull during March and April; Bristol during May and June; Lambeth during July and August; Northampton during August; Derwentside during September and October; and East Ayrshire during October and November. The team spent around four to five weeks at each local authority, apart from Northampton, where the visit lasted around two weeks.

At the conclusion of an initial visit, arrangements can be made for the help team to remain in contact by telephone and give informal advice, or for members of the team to undertake short return visits. Such return visits have taken place at Hull, Bristol and Lambeth, and one is planned for Northampton in mid-December.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the cost in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 of the Expert Help Team set up to assist in the improvement of housing benefit delivery. [19008]

Malcolm Wicks: Separate figures are not available for 2000–01 as the help team visits did not start until March 2001. The total forecast costs for the project until March 2002 are £970,000.

Integrated Inquiry Service

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place the report he has received from Affinity on the Integrated Inquiry Service in the Library. [19510]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Reports provided to the Department by Affinity are restricted by a statement of confidentiality. Affinity have not consented to their reports on the Integrated Inquiry Service being placed in the Library.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will answer *(a)* questions 10435 and 10434, on the Child Support Agency, tabled by the hon. Member for Northavon on 23 October, *(b)* questions 14034 and 14299, on the Jobcentre Plus computer systems, tabled by the hon. Member for Northavon on 7 and 8 November, and *(c)* question 14298, on post-11 September security measures in benefit offices, tabled by the hon. Member for Northavon on 8 November. [22310]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Questions 10435 and 10434 were answered on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 610-11W and questions 14034, 14299 and 14298 were answered today, *Official Report*, columns 776-77W.

State Pension (Hospital Stays)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to review the practice of docking state pensions as a result of a hospital stay of more than six weeks; what representations he has received on the issue; and if he will make a statement. [14386]

Mr. McCartney: The Department in conjunction with the Department of Health, is looking at issues affecting hospital in-patients, including the rules governing the downrating of benefits.

Child Support Agency

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many complaints his Department has received in each of the last five years from members of the public in respect of the work of the Child Support Agency. [17950]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Norman Lamb, dated 7 December 2001:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from me.

You asked how many complaints the Department has received in each of the last five years from members of the public in respect of the work of the Child Support Agency.

My records show that the following number of complaints were received about our work—for completeness I also show our caseload as at the end of each year.

Year	*Number of complaints*	*Caseload*
1996–97	23,588	579,200
1997–98	27,875	758,580
1998–99	28,073	923,960
1999–2000	21,159	1,030,100
2000–01	19,634	1,048,920

I hope this is helpful.

Pension Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how he will identify eligible recipients for the pension credit who are above state pension age; and if he will make a statement. [22373]

Mr. McCartney: Pensioners who already receive the minimum income guarantee (MIG) will not have to make an application. They will automatically receive pension credit. For other pensioners who become eligible for pension credit as a result of the more generous rules, we are building on lessons learned from other recent initiatives. We will ensure our communications to pensioners are closely targeted and designed to help them to understand their entitlements.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Housebuilding (Floodplains)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he has taken to ensure that local planning authorities follow Government guidelines regarding housebuilding on floodplains; and if he will make a statement. [13889]

Ms Keeble: The Government are continuing to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the new Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 25 through the high-level targets published by the then Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in November 1999. The reports for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 provide a baseline for the situation before PPG 25 was published. We are also looking with the Environment Agency at monitoring PPG 25 through data on planning applications and land-use change statistics. We are committed to a general review of the guidance three years after publication in the light of emerging experience of its use and of developing information on climate change.

Should there be substantive evidence that the guidance is not being followed, we would consider the introduction of a flooding Direction requiring local planning authorities to refer to the Secretary of State applications they are minded to permit in the face of sustained objections from the Environment Agency.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the amount of brownfield land available for development which is located in areas susceptible to flooding. [14255]

Ms Keeble: Information on previously developed land in England in areas susceptible to flooding was included in the Supplementary memorandum by the Minister for Housing and Planning to the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, published in Volume II of their Second Report for Session 2000–01, "Development on, or affecting the floodplain".

Based on sites reported by responding local authorities, the estimated total area of previously developed land suitable for housing in England was at least 22,210Ha, of which 2,960Ha (13 per cent.) were within areas of flood risk identified on the 1999 indicative floodplain maps produced by the Environment Agency.

Railtrack

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which advisers were present at the meeting convened by his Department on 13 September to discuss Railtrack. [18223]

Mr. Byers: Details are contained in the documents placed in the Library on 23 October.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how much money the administrator of Railtrack has said will be required for renewals, maintenance and operating expenses for Control Period 2 of 2001 to 2006; [18945]

(2) how much was the Railtrack administrator's most recent estimate of the network's infrastructure investment needs in Control Period 2 of 2001 to 2006; [18957]

Mr. Jamieson: The administrator is currently reviewing Railtrack's expenditure needs.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many contracts for *(a)* lawyers, *(b)* accountants, and *(c)* consultants have been

(i) let and (ii) advertised since 5 October on matters related to (A) Railtrack and (B) railway policy by (1) his Department, (2) the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) and (3) Railtrack in Administration. [19429]

Mr. Spellar: My Department is in the process of letting three contracts since 5 October, to provide financial, legal and technical advice to the team being assembled to develop proposals for a company limited by guarantee. The SRA let or advertised none. Railtrack's contracts are a matter for them.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the Railtrack pension fund was in surplus or deficit and by how much immediately prior to Railtrack administration. [20090]

Mr. Jamieson: The Railtrack Shared Cost Section is a section of the Railways Pension Scheme. The most recent valuation for funding purposes was carried out by the actuary as at 31 December 1998. The results of the valuation showed that at 31 December 1998 the actuarial value of the assets of the Railtrack section was £867.2 million, liabilities and reserves totalled £804.3 million, leaving a surplus of £62.9 million. The funding level of the Railtrack section was 108 per cent. After a package of benefit improvements the section funding was 102 per cent. The next valuation is due as at 31 December 2001, with the results expected at the end of 2002.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment he has made of the morale of Railtrack employees. [20749]

Mr. Jamieson: There are many dedicated, efficient and effective people at Railtrack committed to the rail network. Both we and the Administrator attach great importance to maintaining staff morale. We support the work being done by the Administrator with Railtrack's management to achieve this.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what representations he has received from *(a)* individuals, *(b)* non-governmental organisations and *(c)* companies regarding the feasibility of Railtrack plc operating as a company limited by guarantee (i) prior to and (ii) after Railtrack plc was placed into administration; and if he will place copies of the documentation in the Library; [21042]

(2) what assessments have been conducted *(a)* by his Department, *(b)* by other Departments and *(c)* by other organisations for his Department to study the feasibility of Railtrack plc operating as a company limited by guarantee (i) prior to and (ii) after Railtrack plc was placed into administration; and if he will place copies of the documentation in the Library; [21041]

(3) if he will list the documents on which he consulted *(a)* prior to and *(b)* after Railtrack plc was placed into administration when considering which alternative model for Railtrack plc to put forward to the Railway Administrator; and if he will place the documents in the Library. [21043]

Mr. Jamieson: The outline of a proposal for a company limited by guarantee (CLG) has been developed by Government and their advisers. The proposal is soundly based and reflects lessons learned as a result of the failures of the existing regime. The CLG model is tried and tested elsewhere. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not consulted on the CLG proposal either prior to or since Railtrack plc was placed into administration. It will be for the CLG bid team, currently being established under the leadership of Ian McAllister, to develop a robust proposal and to consult as it sees fit. The views of rail industry stakeholders and others will be important in developing the bid.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the *(a)* length and *(b)* proportion of track not meeting the minimum required standard for each month between January 2000 and November 2001 (i) in total, (ii) subdivided by zonal area and (iii) subdivided by train operating company area. [21037]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack advise that they do not hold information to this level of detail.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had regarding the possible safety implications of *(a)* the Administration and *(b)* a possible successor organisation to Railtrack with (i) the Health and Safety Executive, (ii) the Health and Safety Commission, (iii) HMRI, (iv) Lord Cullen and (v) others. [21031]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department and the Administrators have consulted fully with the Health and Safety Executive on all safety matters.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what requests he has received for funding additional to those detailed in section 2 of the commercial loan agreement with the Railtrack administrator, as provided for in those clauses. [21481]

Mr. Jamieson: No additional monies have been requested beyond the initial amount of the loan agreement.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what benchmarks are used to assess budget variations in section 8.1.6 *(a)* of the commercial loan agreement with the Railtrack administrator. [21485]

Mr. Jamieson: The management accounts required under section 8.1.6 *(a)* of the commercial loan agreement, are prepared by Railtrack plc and represent actual results. These are compared to the budgeted results for the same period. Railtrack plc provides a commentary explaining the major variances between the budget and actual results.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what management accounts have been supplied by the Railtrack administrator under section 8.1.6 *(a)* of the commercial loan agreement. [21487]

Mr. Jamieson: Two sets of management accounts have been received.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what financial forecasts have been made by the Railtrack administrator under the terms of section 8.1.6 (f) of the commercial loan agreement. [21484]

Mr. Jamieson: There is no such requirement on the administrator.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what rate of interest is being received by the Government under section 4.2 of the commercial loan agreement with the Railtrack administrator. [21479]

Mr. Jamieson: The rate of interest will be calculated by the Secretary of State in accordance with section 4.2 of the loan agreement and will be paid to him, and at a date determined by him, in accordance with the said agreement.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money has been made available as *(a)* cash, *(b)* loan and *(c)* guarantee to Railtrack in administration. [22117]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* £1,222,734,244 under the trust facility outlined in sections 2.1 and 2.2 of the commercial loan agreement.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action has been taken to ensure high safety standards by Railtrack in administration. [22122]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The Health and Safety Executive is working closely with both Railtrack plc and the administrator to ensure that safety in the railways is maintained. The administrator has recruited the HSE's former Deputy Chief Inspector of Railways to ensure technical issues are properly considered.

On 8 October, the HSE issued a formal Direction to Railtrack plc, as holders of an accepted railway safety case, to prepare and submit a revision to the safety case in the light of the changed organisational and administrative arrangements. The HSE also summarised for Railtrack plc, and brought to the attention of the administrator, the key continuing responsibilities of Railtrack plc's management under its safety case. HSE recently confirmed acceptance of Railtrack's revised safety case.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what reports he receives from Railtrack in administration concerning *(a)* finance and *(b)* safety; and how often he receives reports. [22121]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* To date the Secretary of State has received nine weekly reports and two four-weekly management reports. Safety regulation is a matter for the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many miles of track are subject to speed restrictions pending repair or renewal; and how many speed restrictions are in place on the network. [22120]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* Railtrack reports that the number of temporary speed restrictions in place across its network in Great Britain as at Monday 3 December 2001 were 650.315 miles of track subject to speed restrictions pending repair or renewal.

London Underground

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the turnover of London Underground staff has been in each of the past six years. [20113]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for LUL who have provided the following advice:

Year	*Percentage turnover*
1997	7
1998	6.7
1999	6.4
2000	6.4
2001	7

Notes:

1. Figures are by calendar year.
2. Reliable data are not available pre 1997.
3. Turnover excludes those who retired, left on TUPE grounds, left on voluntary redundancy/severance terms or reached the end of contract.
4. Figures for 2001 are to the end of November and exclude the infrastructure companies.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how frequently London Underground carries out detailed surveys of its track; and if he will make a statement on the most recent survey. [20771]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 561W.

London Underground acknowledges that its track needs major investment. The age and quality of the track requires intensive maintenance and/or the imposition of speed restrictions to enable services to run safely. With limited resources for investment, London Underground has had to prioritise the level of track renewals to ensure that the overall conditions do not deteriorate further. However, once London Underground's tube modernisation plans are in place, the investment backlog will be tackled and the standard and condition of the track will be improved significantly.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the register of assets held by London Underground. [20768]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 560W.

Rents (Barnet)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many properties in Barnet will not reach the formula rent cap level for the unit size for *(a)* registered social landlords and *(b)* council tenants by 2011. [20838]

Ms Keeble: The information is not available. I refer my hon. Friend to the answers I gave him on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 562W.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many households in Barnet in *(a)* registered social landlord and *(b)* local authority accommodation will have formula rents at the appropriate cap level for their size in 2011. [20820]

Ms Keeble: The information is currently not available. In particular, the rate of increase of actual registered social landlord and local authority rents over the next 10 years will depend, among other things, on the outcome of future Spending Reviews (for local authority rents) and periodic reviews by the Housing Corporation (for registered social landlord rents). Moreover, individual landlords retain responsibility for rent-setting.

Polling Booths (Disabled Access)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to ensure that all polling booths are accessible to people with physical disabilities. [20828]

Dr. Whitehead: The SCOPE report 'Polls Apart' on the June general election concluded that there had been some improvements on polling station accessibility, but that more needs to be done. In the light of this we will continue to work, with the Electoral Commission, to secure further improvements on polling station accessibility.

Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many days were lost due to sickness absence in the Department in each of the last four years. [21330]

Dr. Whitehead: As the Department has only existed since 8 June 2001 it is not possible to reply in the form requested.

Train Operating Companies

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent research his Department has *(a)* conducted, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* made reference to with regard to the future financial viability of train operating companies. [21047]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department conducted a study of the financial needs of all parts of the railway industry to inform the development of the 10 Year Plan and the last Spending Review. Two recent research studies were commissioned by the Department to assess Eurostar's passenger number and revenue forecasts and Freightliner's application for Track Access Grant. The Department has had regard to advice from the Strategic Rail Authority which receives monthly financial reports from train operating companies and monitors the financial position of their parent companies on a regular basis. When awarding new franchises, the SRA makes assessments of bidders' financial standing.

Railway Inspectorate

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff worked within his Department's Railway Inspectorate in each month since June 1997; and what changes in the number of staff within the inspectorate are planned. [21025]

Mr. Jamieson: The Railway Inspectorate is part of the Health and Safety Executive. Monthly staffing figures for the Railway Inspectorate are not available. Yearly staffing figures for the Railway Inspectorate since 1997 are:

Total number of staff (administrative and inspectors)[1]

Date	*Number*
31 March 1997	85
31 March 1998	88
31 March 1999	98
31 March 2000	10[illegible]
31 March 2001	145
30 November 2001	161

[1] The above figures represent staff in post on the given date. They do not include additional staff employed to fill posts on an ad hoc basis (currently 20 staff).

The staff allocation for the Railway Inspectorate to March 2002 is 210.

Signal Failures

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many reported signal failures there were on the railway infrastructure controlled by Railtrack for each month from January 2000 to November 2001. [21029]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack compile figures for four-week periods rather than monthly. The reported signal failures on the railway infrastructure controlled by Railtrack for each four-week period from January 2000 to the latest date for which figures are available show:

Year/period	*Period*	*Number of signal failures causing delays of more than 10 minutes*
2000–01		
1		1,747
2	2	1,958
3	3	2,077
4	4	1,810
5	5	1,760
6	6	1,829
7	7	1,764
8	8	1,788
9	9	1,970
10	10	2,213
11	11	1,959
12	12	2,098
13	13	2,006
2001–02		
1		1,910
2	2	2,614
3	3	2,089
4	4	2,559
5	5	2,339
6	6	1,855
7	7	1,999
8	8	2,260

Railway Management

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received regarding *(a)* the merger of and *(b)* closer co-operation between the Strategic Rail Authority and the Rail Regulator. [21055]

Mr. Jamieson: We are considering how the regulatory framework can be streamlined, and my officials have had informal discussions with some industry players. A number of suggestions have been put forward.

Rail Safety

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will give details of the progress made in respect of each recommendation made by the Health and Safety Commission in its agreed action plan of August 2000 since its further progress report of February. [16992]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Commission published progress reports on its action plan to implement the recommendations of the Southall Rail Accident Inquiry Report in August 2000 and February 2001. No further reports are required from rail industry stakeholders until the end of the implementation period in February 2002.

Housing (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* private rented units, *(b)* social rented units and *(c)* owner-occupied units there were in the Greater Portsmouth area in (i) 1990, (ii) 1995 and (iii) 2000. [21216]

Ms Keeble: The available information provided by Portsmouth city council on their annual Housing Investment Programme returns is as follows:

Stock of dwellings as at 1 April

	1990	*1995*	*2000*
Social rented dwellings	16,625	16,550	16,491
Private sector dwellings	59,565	61,500	64,006
Total dwellings	76,190	78,050	80,497

Rail Regulator

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to meet the Rail Regulator. [21495]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend maintains regular contact with the Rail Regulator.

Road Safety

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what road safety awareness schemes he plans in the next 12 months; and if he will estimate their cost. [21499]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department's major effort in the area of raising the awareness of road safety is the "Think!" publicity campaign. My Department launched this campaign in June 2000, with the aim of encouraging all road users to think about their own and others' safety. The generic "Think!" message enables us to link the promotion of a range of specific road safety messages that can help to make our roads safer for all. The campaign also links the promotion of road safety messages by a range of supporters in the public, private and voluntary sectors. The long-term campaign is a key commitment in the 10 year strategy, launched by the Prime Minister in March 2000, for reducing road deaths and serious injuries by 40 per cent. (and 50 per cent. for children) by the year 2010.

In the campaign to date we have given priority to addressing those behaviours that are most likely to put road users at risk, eg driving too fast, driving after drinking, driving while tired, passenger seat belt wearing, unsafe child pedestrian behaviour. Over the coming year we shall continue to address safety in these areas, particularly the safety of children. But in addition we shall be preparing a major effort to address the growing number of powered two wheeler casualties (almost one in six of the deaths on our roads last year were riders of these vehicles). The outline programme of forward activity is available on the "Think!" website at www.think.dtlr.gov.uk.

The estimate of expenditure for the next 12 months is £13 million.

A1

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has to upgrade the A1. [21605]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from David York to John Mann, dated 11 December 2001:

The Transport Minister, David Jamieson, asked Tim Matthews to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the A1. I am replying in Tim's absence on official business.

Current policy is to target improvement schemes at particular problem areas, rather than have a large programme of schemes which are unlikely to be financed within a reasonable timescale.

For the A1, this means a series of improvement schemes at specific locations aimed at increasing safety and tackling congestion. The lengths between Ferrybridge and Hook Moor, in South and West Yorkshire and Wetherby and Walshford, in North Yorkshire are due to be upgraded to motorway standard as part of a Design, Build, Finance and Operate contract which is currently at tender stage.

In the East Midlands, the Highways Agency has identified, as part of its Ten Year Plan, a number of major improvements to existing junctions on the A1 between Peterborough and Blyth, in Nottinghamshire. These include the replacement of roundabouts with flyover junctions at Carpenter's Lodge near Stamford, Colsterworth, Gonerby Moor near Grantham, Markham Moor (junction with A57), Apleyhead (A57/A614 junction) and Blyth.

This project is at an early stage, having only recently entered the Government's Targeted Programme of Improvements for trunk roads and it is too early to give a detailed timetable. However, public consultation on options for providing a two level junction at the existing Blyth roundabout is expected to start in the spring of next year, with consultation on options for the other five roundabouts starting later in the summer. Progress thereafter will depend on how quickly the proposals can be taken through the necessary statutory procedures, which involve the publication of Orders and the opportunity for objection. Subject to that, construction of a new junction at Blyth could begin in 2004/05, with the other improvements phased to minimise traffic disruption.

In addition, three other initiatives have implications for the A1. The length between London and the South Midlands is included as part of a wider ranging "multi modal" study which is examining all transport needs within that corridor. The section between Peterborough and Blyth has been selected for a new approach to the future management of trunk routes.

Consultants are preparing a 10 year Route Management Strategy for this length which will look at all aspects of its operation, including junctions, laybys, accesses and cross-over gaps. Further assessment work is being undertaken as a result of a safety study on the section between Bramham, West Yorkshire, and Barton, North Yorkshire.

We shall be writing to you again in more detail as part of the consultation process for the Peterborough to Blyth roundabout scheme but if you would like further information, please contact the Project Sponsor for the scheme, Neil Owen, at the Agency's Birmingham office. He can be contacted at Broadway, Broad Street, Birmingham, B15 1BL or by telephone on 0121 678 8223.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what further plans he has to improve the A1 motorway. [21758]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from David York to John Mann, dated 11 December 2001

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Unitary Authorities

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what was the average cost associated with *(a)* job losses, *(b)* removal costs, *(c)* informing the resident population of the change, *(d)* changes to records, *(e)* administration costs and *(f)* election costs incurred by the establishment of the new unitary authorities in 1996; [21634]

(2) what responsibility *(a)* local and *(b)* central Government have for the costs associated with changes in (i) finance structure and (ii) administration structure when setting up a new unitary authority. [21635]

Dr. Whitehead: These costs were met by the local authorities concerned and this information is not held centrally. The Government expected local authorities being reorganised to take the opportunity to cut costs and improve efficiency. So supplementary credit approvals (SCAs) were given for authorities to borrow money to meet the one-off indirect costs of reorganisation until the savings and receipts arising from the process were realised. The SCAs provide a rough proxy for the transitional cost of reorganisation, though they do not necessarily capture all local authorities' expenditure. The total for the 1995–96 authorities was £143.8 million.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many unitary authorities are buying in services from neighbouring authorities; and what the net effect is on expenditure for each authority of this action; [21411]

(2) what research has been commissioned investigating the cost saving benefits of unitary authorities buying in essential services from neighbouring authorities; and if he will publish the results. [21410]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government do not collect any local authority trading information centrally.

However, we recently commissioned research for the Byatt Review of Local Government procurement which showed that 42 per cent. of authorities overall have joint contract arrangements with other authorities, that is 98 authorities. 17 of the 30 unitary authorities responding to this question have joint arrangements with other local authorities. Many of these joint arrangements are facilitated through buying consortia.

We believe that a truly mixed economy of service provision is the best way to ensure genuine innovation and true competition. We want to see partnerships that are public-public, public-voluntary and public-private. This could involve the best in-house providers using their expertise in wider markets within the public service.

We envisage laying orders before Parliament in the new year to allow local authorities to be able to use the new trading powers proposed in the consultation paper "Working With Others To Achieve Best Value".

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the total amount of Government funding to the unitary authority of Torbay since its creation. [21697]

Dr. Whitehead: Torbay unitary authority has reported the following government funding:

Revenue grants paid into general fund revenue account (GFRA) and capital grants

£000

	1998–99 Outturn	*1999–2000 Outturn*	*2000–01 Outturn*	*2001–02 Budget*
Specific grants inside AEF	4,215	3,880	[1]11,597	10,664
Revenue support grant	45,489	46,700	46,209	48,886
Redistributed non-domestic rates	29.087	31,366	35,416	34,910
Revenue grants paid into GFRA	78,791	81,946	93,222	94,460
Capital grants	1,159	1,670	[1]5,798	1,682
Total	79,950	83,616	99,020	96,142

[1] Includes extra funds to support a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) project.

Local Government Commission

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the members of the Local Government Commission from its inception to the present date. [21508]

Dr. Whitehead: The current members are:

Professor Malcolm Grant (Chairman)

Professor Michael Clarke CBE (Deputy Chairman)

Peter Brokenshire

Kru Desai

Pamela Gordon

Robin Gray

Robert Hughes CBE.

The past members are:

David Ansbro

Sir John Banham (Chairman)

Professor Michael Chisholm

Christopher Chope, MP OBE

Sir David Cooksey (Chairman)

Sir Kenneth Couzens KCB

Ken Ennals CB

Brian Hill CBE DL

Margaret Hodge, MP MBE

Howell Harris Hughes

Mary Leigh

Ann Levick

Bob Scruton

Dame Helena Shovelton

David Thomas OBE

Lord Norman Warner

Lady Judith Wilcox

Clive Wilkinson.

Note:

Margaret Hodge and Christopher Chope were not MPs when serving on the Commission.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list the factors taken into consideration by the Local Government Commission when conducting a structural review of an existing unitary authority; [21510]

(2) what procedures are followed when he directs the Local Government Commission to undertake a structural review into an existing unitary authority. [21511]

Dr. Whitehead: The factors and procedures to be considered in a structure review are those specified in Part II of the Local Government Act 1992. Under that Act, a structural review is a review as to whether unitary local government should be created, and hence such a review of an existing unitary authority is not possible.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what basis he will ask the Local Government Commission to undertake a structural review of an existing local authority. [21630]

Dr. Whitehead: We have no plans to ask the Local Government Commission to undertake a structural review of an existing local authority. The functions of the LGC are to be transferred to the Electoral Commission on 1 April 2002.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the research supporting the decision to amalgamate the Local Government Commission into the Electoral Commission; and what the effect of this change will be in terms of *(a)* change-over cost, *(b)* administration costs, *(c)* employment and *(d)* responsibilities for structural and electoral reform. [21515]

Dr. Whitehead: The White Paper "The Funding of Political Parties in the United Kingdom. The Government's proposals for legislation in response to the Fifth Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life" (Cm4413) proposed the amalgamation, building on the Financial Management and Policy Review of the Local Government Commission which was placed in the Library of the House on 1 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 192W.

All the staff, with the exception of the Chief Executive, are to be transferred to the Electoral Commission under their existing terms and conditions. The principal transitional cost is that of securing accommodation for all staff on a single site—to achieve long term operational efficiency—for which provision of up to £700,000 has been made available.

The responsibility for implementing structural reform (on the advice of the Electoral Commission) remains with the Secretary of State. The responsibility for implementing electoral arrangements—the number and boundaries of electoral areas and the number of councillors—will become the responsibility of the Electoral Commission with effect from 1 April 2002. Other electoral reform issues remain with the Secretary of State but the Electoral Commission has a remit to keep under review electoral law and practice and to promote public awareness of the electoral process.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list *(a)* biographical details, *(b)* professional qualifications, *(c)* political affiliations and *(d)* salary, pensions and benefits of the members of the Local Government Commission. [21514]

Dr. Whitehead: The Chairman is Professor Malcolm Grant LLD, Professor of Land Economy at Cambridge University and a Professorial Fellow of Clare College. He is the Editor of the Encyclopaedia of Planning Law and Practice, the Joint Editor of the Encyclopaedia of Environmental Law, and the author of several books on planning law, environmental protection and local government finance law. He is chairman of the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission and the Independent Member of the Greater London Authority's Standards Committee. Salary £20,775.

The Deputy Chairman is Professor Michael Clarke CBE, Pro Vice Chancellor of Birmingham University, and Professor and Head of the School of Public Policy. He served as Chief Executive of the Local Government Management Board and prior to that Director of the Local Government Training Board and has published a number of books and articles on local government. Salary £5,805.

Peter Brokenshire is currently Chairman of Redbridge and Waltham Forest Family Health Services Authority. He has also served as a Director and latterly Acting Controller of the Audit Commission. His main career has been in local government, where his experience has included being Chief Executive of the London Borough of Greenwich and of Epping Forest District Council. Salary £5,805.

Robin Gray is a former civil servant who has spent most of his career in the Department for the Environment. He was seconded to West Sussex County Council in the 1980s and also served as Secretary to the London and Metropolitan Government Staff Commission. He is a member of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England. He has been a freelance management consultant since 1992. Salary £5,805.

Pamela Gordon has spent 40 years in local government service. She was an Assistant Director-General with the Greater London Council before becoming Chief Executive of the London Borough of Hackney and then, for nearly eight years, Chief Executive of Sheffield City Council. She was President of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives in 1996–97. She is Governor of Sheffield Hallam University. She was Special Adviser to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Local Government (Organisations and Standards) Bill 1999. She has recently been appointed as an Electoral Commissioner. Salary £5,805.

Robert Hughes CBE, FCIS was, until his retirement, Chief Executive of Kirklees Metropolitan Council. Before that he was Chief Executive of Great Grimsby Borough Council. He was President of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers during 1997–98. He was formerly an adviser to both the Local Government Association and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities. He is Chairman of the Horserace Betting Levy Board. Salary £5,805.

Kru Desai is a Principal Consultant at KPMG. Before moving to KPMG in November 1993 she worked for Westminster City Council in a number of policy development and implementation roles, in particular the development and co-ordination of Westminster's outsourcing programme. She is also a governor of Malory School in Lewisham. Salary £5,805.

None of the Commissioners has any political affiliations, given the nature of their role.

Pensions will be based on final pensionable salary and the length of pensionable service. Full details are included in the Annual Report and Accounts of the Local Government Commission which has been laid before Parliament and is available in the Library.

Local Government Structure

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers he has to change the local government structure in England and Wales; and on what basis he will exercise these powers. [21631]

Dr. Whitehead: The powers in relation to England are in Part II of the Local Government Act 1992 which provides for the basis on which these powers must be exercised. Matters relating to local government structure in Wales are a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent research the Government have commissioned on the financing of changes in local government structure; and if he will publish the results. [21512]

Dr. Whitehead: No such research has been commissioned.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the next round of periodic structural reviews for local authorities in England and Wales will take place. [21509]

Dr. Whitehead: There are no plans for any periodic structural reviews for local authorities in England. The position in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Government will publish plans to change the local government structure. [21633]

Dr. Whitehead: As previously announced by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, we intend to publish a Regional Governance White Paper, and this will set out how we plan to take forward our manifesto commitment that provision should be made for directly elected regional government to go ahead in regions where people decided in a referendum to support it and where predominantly unitary local government is established.

Physical Agents Directive

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the outcome was of the meeting of Coreper on 16 November on the Physical Agents Directive in respect of vibrations. [21502]

Dr. Whitehead: At the Coreper meeting on 16 November member states confirmed their support for the Council's common position on the Physical Agents (Vibration) Directive and noted that there would be problems in accepting all the amendments proposed by the European Parliament.

Departmental Staff (Home Working)

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his Department is taking to encourage staff to work from home; and how many staff do so on a regular basis. [21829]

Dr. Whitehead: Following a study of flexible working, a number of pilot implementations, presentations to staff and positive feedback from a staff survey, the DTLR Board gave approval to a project to implement flexible working in DTLR(C) on 22 November 2001. Working at or from home is one option for working flexibly which the Department will support with appropriate furniture and equipment and due regard to compliance with health and safety requirements.

At present 766 members of staff regularly use the Remote Access Service to dial in DTLR's office automation system when working away from their normal workstation. About 37 per cent. of staff work at home on an informal basis at some point during the course of a year.

Rough Sleepers

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the figures for rough sleeping for each local authority area in England that are available, with the relevant HiP estimates, for each year since 1996 for which figures are available. [22054]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The first national estimate of rough sleeping in England, combining information from local authority Housing Investment Programme (HIP) estimates and the results of head counts of people sleeping rough was reported in a written answer to a parliamentary question from my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) on 19 May 1999, *Official Report,* column 357W. It provided a national estimate of the number of people sleeping rough on a single night as at June 1998.

Tables showing the local authority HIP estimates and results of street counts for 1998, 1999, 2000 and the latest figures for 2001 have been placed in the Library. Local authorities not listed in the tables for those years submitted either an estimate of 0–10 or no estimate in their HIP returns.

Tables showing HIP figures submitted by all local authorities in 1996 and 1997 have also been placed in the Library.

Homeless People

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact central Government action has had on reducing the number of *(a)* priority homeless and *(b)* homeless in bed and breakfast accommodation in England since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [22050]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The figures for households accepted by local authorities as unintentionally homeless and in priority need of accommodation and for those housed in bed and breakfast are as follows:

Quarter ending	*Priority need acceptances*	*Households in bed and breakfast*
30 June 1997	24,290	4,500
30 June 2001	29,110	11,340

The increase in these figures is not acceptable. These problems are partly the result of inadequate investment in affordable housing before this Government took office. We are taking steps to tackle this, but problems of this scale cannot be turned around overnight.

We have reversed the last Government's cuts, with this year's capital investment in housing more than double the 1997 level. And, as an on-going part of our commitment to public investment, we are nearly doubling the Housing Corporation's programme for new affordable housing between now and 2003–04.

These are very substantial measures, and reflect our commitment to tackling homelessness and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent home. But these measures take time to come to fruition. We have to recognise that they will not solve the current problems at a stroke.

In response to the growing number of homeless households in bed and breakfast accommodation the Government established a new Bed and Breakfast Unit. Working with local authorities and other stakeholders, the unit is reviewing both central and local policy and practice in order to reduce the use of B&B accommodation. The unit has already held a national conference to discuss targets. The targets will be announced in the new year. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning has also announced that new Action Advice Teams will be available to support LAs in tackling B&B.

We are also taking through Parliament new homelessness legislation, which will strengthen the safety net for homeless households and place a new duty on local authorities to take a strategic approach to tackling and preventing all forms of homelessness.

The Government's strategy on rough sleeping has been shown to be successful and, from January, we are establishing a new Homelessness Directorate to bring together and invigorate this existing work to help homeless people as well as develop new work to prevent homelessness and investigate its underlying causes. Any strategy will also continue to help vulnerable people sleeping on the nation's streets, and help people to rebuild their lives.

The new Directorate will be responsible for taking forward the Government's strategic framework for homelessness in the new year.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average annual increase was in *(a)* parish and *(b)* town council precepts in (i) each of the five years before and (ii) each year since the introduction of the uniform business rate. [21449]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The available information is given in the following table. Separate figures for parish and town councils are not available.

Financial year	Parish and town council precepts, England (£ million)	Increase over previous year	
		(£ million)	(Percentage)
Before the introduction of the national non-domestic rate			
1985–86	52	5	11
1986–87	57	5	10
1987–88	62	5	9
1988–89	70	8	13
1989–90	80	10	14
After the introduction of the national non-domestic rate			
1990–91	86	6	8
1991–92	87	1	1
1992–93	98	11	13
1993–94	108	10	10
1994–95	115	7	7
1995–96	122	7	6
1996–97	133	11	9
1997–98	144	11	8
1998–99	154	10	7
1999–2000	165	11	7
2000–01	181	16	10
2001–02	193	12	7

Railways

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the prospects for a greater regionalisation of the railways. [21735]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* This is an issue we keep under review.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with European Transport Ministers on greater co-operation between the different national railways; and what form such co-operation will take. [21713]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The form of co-operation between different companies in the European railway industry is essentially a matter for those companies, subject to the provisions of domestic and European law. The only recent specific discussions my Department has had on this issue have been in the context of an official-level Commission Committee established under Directive 2001/14/EC on the allocation of railway infrastructure capacity. These discussions have concerned the implementation of the particular requirements in that Directive for co-operation between infrastructure managers to achieve the efficient operation of train services across more than one network.

Gibraltar

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will bring forward legislation to give the people of Gibraltar the right to vote in the 2004 European parliamentary elections. [21529]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* Our aim is to bring forward this legislation at an appropriate opportunity to secure giving the people of Gibraltar the right to vote in the 2004 European Parliamentary elections.

Enron

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received about the deaths of employees at Enron power station, Teesside; and what recent measures he has taken to improve safety at power stations in the United Kingdom. [21950]

Dr. Whitehead: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has received one representation from my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird). The electricity industry made and continues to make representations.

To help improve health and safety at gas turbine power stations HSE published specific guidance last year and have periodic meetings with gas turbine manufacturers and users to discuss national health and safety issues.

In response to the Government's Revitalising Health and Safety Strategy the electricity industry has agreed national targets for improving health and safety over the next 10 years and developed an action plan that will include health and safety at power stations.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what annual data in respect of *(a)* population and *(b)* council tax base he has based his calculations of standard spending assessment and revenue support grant for the financial year 2002–03. [21879]

Dr. Whitehead: The provisional calculation of Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs) for 2002–03 use the Registrar General's estimates of mid-2000 population as provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

For the council tax base, the figures used in the provisional calculation are based on Valuation Office Agency valuation lists as at 16 October 2001, taking account of information on council tax discounts and exemptions as at 1 November 2000, based on CTB1 returns for November 2000. For the calculation for the final settlement for 2002–03, we expect to use figures based on Valuation Office Agency valuation lists as at

16 October 2001, taking account of information on discounts and exemptions as at 1 November 2001, based on CTB1 returns for November 2001.

A table showing population (rounded to the nearest 100 persons) and council tax base for all English local authorities has been placed in the House of Commons Library. All the data used in the provisional calculations are now on the Local Government Finance website at: www.local.dtlr.gov.uk/finance/ssa/ssa0203.htm

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the effect will be on *(a)* the standard spending assessment and *(b)* the revenue support grant allocation, by authority, of the incorporation of data changes relating to the New Earnings Survey in the area cost adjustment for 2002–03. [21878]

Dr. Whitehead: A table has been placed in the Libraries of the House comparing the standard spending assessments (SSAs) and revenue support grant (RSG) allocations for 2002–03, as announced for consultation on 4 December, with what they would be if based on the area cost adjustment (ACA) for 2001–02. This shows the effect of updating the data underpinning the area cost adjustment from the New Earnings Survey for 1999 (on which the 2001–02 ACA is based) to the New Earnings Survey for 2000 (on which the 2002–03 ACA is based). The figures also include the effect of updating the rates cost element of the ACA, but this element only makes up a very small proportion of the overall adjustment. The RSG figures are before the application of floors and ceilings.

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he intends to use his reserve capping powers this year in respect of any local authorities' council tax increases. [22732]

Mr. Raynsford: The reserve capping powers will not be used this year.

Aviation Website

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will review the information available on the aviation organophosphate information website; what estimate he has made of the severity of the problems identified in that site; and if he will make a statement. [22303]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are broadly aware of concerns expressed in relation to the possible contamination of aircraft cabin air by organophosphates, but have not reviewed the contents of any websites. The Civil Aviation Authority, which has responsibility for investigating incidents involving fumes in aircraft cabins, is currently working with aircraft and engine manufacturers to identify and analyse potential aircraft cabin pollutants and to minimise the potential for engine oil leaks. A considerable amount of cabin air quality research at a European level is either under way or about to start. The Government are monitoring these developments closely and are prepared to commission specific work on organophosphates if this proves necessary.

Education Budgets

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list for each of the years 1995–96 to 2001–02 the *(a)* total amount of education SSA provided to LEAs, *(b)* the final education budget agreed by LEAs and *(c)* the amount by which the education budget exceeded SSA. [22369]

Dr. Whitehead: The information is given in the table:

£ million

Year	*SSA*	*Expenditure*	*Difference*	*Percentage*
1995–96	17,024	17,903	879	5.2
1996–97	17,764	18,359	595	3.3
1997–98	17,840	18,237	397	2.2
1998–99	19,384	19,640	256	1.3
1999–2000	20,414	20,582	168	0.8
2000–01	21,479	21,812	333	1.6
2001–02	22,513	22,860	347	1.5

Expenditure data are outturns for 1995–96 and budgets for 2000–01 and 2001–02 because outturn data are not yet finalised.

Council Salaries

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what figures he has collated on the average salaries in 2001–02 of the leader and other cabinet members of each English *(a)* city council, *(b)* county council, *(c)* district council and *(d)* London borough council. [21412]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department does not collect information from councils on the average salaries of leaders and other cabinet members.

The Improvement and Development Agency has asked all English local authorities to submit information on member allowances following The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2001. Authorities are asked to send details once they have come to a decision following a review of allowances by an independent panel as required under the new regulation. The average allowances of leaders and other cabinet members of local authorities who have reviewed their schemes under the new regulations and made the information available to the Improvement and Development Agency, by local authority type, as of 4 December 2001, are as follows:

		Average allowances	
	Number of councils	*Leader (£)*	*Cabinet/ Executive (£)*
London borough	6	19,454	9,030
Met district	8	20,737	10,155
Shire county	13	20,701	11,643
Shire district	79	8,444	4,474
Unitary	16	15,112	7,682

Source:
www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk, Member Allowance Summary Survey.

English Partnerships

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what means he proposes to keep hon. Members informed of the progress and outcome of the Government's Quinquennial Review of English Partnerships. [21554]

Ms Keeble: We propose to announce the outcome of the first stage of the review to Parliament in the new year. A full report on the outcome of the review will be published at the conclusion of stage two of the review. We expect this to be completed by Easter.

Council Tax

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the figure for the council tax base of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead given in tables accompanying his statement of 4 December includes an estimate of non-collection. [21723]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* No. The council taxbase figures given in tables accompanying my statement of 4 December are for the taxbase used in the calculation of local authorities' revenue support grant allocations, which takes no account of council tax collection rates. It is the taxbase used by local authorities when setting council taxes that reflects an assumed collection rate.

Council Running Costs

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what figures he has collated on *(a)* the total cost and *(b)* the cost per capita in the last year for which figures are available of running (i) London borough councils (ii) English county councils, (iii) English city councils, (iv) English unitary authorities and (v) English district councils broken down into (A) administration costs, (B) electoral costs, and (C) councillor salaries. [21513]

Dr. Whitehead: English local authorities have reported the following expenditure[1] figures:

1999–2000 Outturn

	London borough councils[2]	*Metropolitan district*	*Unitary authorities*	*Shire counties*[3]	*Shire districts*
Corporate and Democratic Core[4] (£ million)	166.82	187.41	167.04	134.62	317.21
Administration and support services[5] (£ million)	1,096.55	1,101.22	1,054.81	788.40	1,929.57
Cost of local elections (£ million)	1.11	4.75	3.99	0.32	19.02
Population figures (million)	7.29	11.13	8.30	23.04	23.04
Corporate and Democratic Core cost per capita (£)	22.90	16.83	20.14	5.84	13.77
Administration and support services cost per capita (£)	150.52	98.91	127.15	34.22	83.76
Cost of local elections per capita (£)	0.15	0.43	0.48	0.01	0.83

[1] Total expenditure consisting of employee expenses plus running expenses (includes joint arrangements).

[2] Includes City of London.

[3] Includes Isles of Scilly.

[4] Includes expenditure in Councillors' allowances and expenses.

[5] Some authorities may record some administrative and support services expenditure under individual services.

SCOTLAND

Appointments

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many appointments she has made to public bodies since 7 June; and how many are in her gift. [15486]

Mrs. Liddell: I am responsible for appointing two members of the Boundary Commission for Scotland. I have made no appointments since 7 June 2001.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the increase in the departmental expenditure limit from 2001–02 to 2002–03 will be accounted for by wage costs. [21236]

Mrs. Liddell: The level of wage costs within departmental budgets this year and in future years will be dependent on negotiations. Departmental reports published next spring will give full retrospective costs.

Long-term Care

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with members of the Scottish Executive since 3 May on free care for the elderly in Scotland; and what was the outcome of such discussions. [21627]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with Ministers in the Scottish Executive on a wide range of issues. We have discussed the implications for the Government of the report by the Care Development Group. During these discussions, both the Scotland Office and the Scottish Executive made it clear that the provision of care services is a devolved matter for the Executive.

Press Officers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many press officers are employed by the Scotland Office; and how many are located in London at Dover House. [22367]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department employs four press officers, two of whom are located in Dover House.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many days were lost due to sickness absence in the Department in each of the last four years. [21331]

Mr. Leslie: The average sickness absence in working days per member of staff in the Cabinet and its agencies for the years 1996–99 is as follows. This is the most recent period for which a four-yearly analysis of statistics is available.

Year	*Working days absence per staff-year*
1999	6.8
1998	7.3
1997	6.6
1996	6.4

The Cabinet Office is committed, through a series of policies and practices on monitoring absence and managing attendance, to reduce the impact of sickness absence on its business consistent with its Service Delivery Agreement targets.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the public service agreement target for the answer of correspondence to Ministers. [21257]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office public service agreement is that 90 per cent. of ministerial correspondence should be replied to within the 15 working day target, as shown on the Cabinet Office website www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/2000/service.delivery.agreement/statement.d.htm

The Department is currently performing at 88 per cent. and figures for 2001–02 will be published in the Cabinet Office annual report shortly.

Local Authority Websites

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what measures are being taken to ensure that local authority websites are accessible to those with a range of disabilities; and which organisations have been consulted on this issue; [19065]

(2) what action his Department has taken to promote good practice in the creation and development of local authority websites. [19064]

Mr. Leslie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), on 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 24W.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Teacher Retention

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers, *(a)* in total and *(b)* by local education authority, left the teaching profession within two years of qualification in each of the last five years. [17132]

Mr. Timms: Qualified teachers who entered full and part-time regular service in the maintained schools sector in England within two years of qualification and were not in service in the third year are as follows. The most recent year for which data are available is 1999–2000.

	Qualified 1993 left service by March 1996	*Qualified 1994 left service by March 1997*	*Qualified 1995 left service by March 1998*	*Qualified 1996 left service by March 1999*	*Qualified 1997 left service by March 2000*
City of London	[2]—	0	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Camden	17	21	18	11	14
Greenwich	16	17	18	12	24
Hackney	8	[2]—	5	9	[2]—
Hammersmith	19	18	18	21	23
Islington	18	15	17	18	24
Kensington and Chelsea	9	8	6	[2]—	12
Lambeth	13	11	8	7	10
Lewisham	22	27	18	13	19
Southwark	6	6	11	17	12
Tower Hamlets	14	13	8	16	20
Wandsworth	12	23	19	22	30
Westminster	17	8	18	8	11
Barking	14	6	6	9	19
Barnet	28	34	33	43	38
Bexley	9	18	12	14	15
Brent	17	17	10	15	21
Bromley	17	18	24	33	30
Croydon	30	35	28	26	37
Ealing	20	30	27	22	41
Enfield	15	21	12	25	11
Haringey	10	14	13	23	18
Harrow	8	7	11	5	14
Havering	13	15	11	15	9
Hillingdon	20	18	19	18	28
Hounslow	15	23	26	21	28
Kingston upon Thames	14	7	14	17	7
Merton	12	19	21	12	12
Newham	17	28	37	30	45
Redbridge	17	22	15	22	16
Richmond upon Thames	12	21	21	15	10
Sutton	[2]—	14	12	14	16
Waltham Forest	10	21	13	13	20
Birmingham	50	72	64	56	65
Coventry	19	13	16	13	17
Dudley	13	9	10	8	10

	Qualified 1993 left service by March 1996	*Qualified 1994 left service by March 1997*	*Qualified 1995 left service by March 1998*	*Qualified 1996 left service by March 1999*	*Qualified 1997 left service by March 2000*
Sandwell	7	14	15	21	21
Solihull	18	17	15	16	14
Walsall	8	8	19	12	9
Wolverhampton	9	8	11	11	9
Knowsley	10	9	7	11	8
Liverpool	14	21	18	21	15
St. Helens	7	11	7	6	9
Sefton	14	18	17	9	14
Wirral	9	11	9	14	10
Bolton	8	13	12	13	11
Bury	12	9	7	6	10
Manchester	22	23	27	33	46
Oldham	7	9	8	13	10
Rochdale	7	5	5	12	13
Salford	6	12	8	11	13
Stockport	11	10	19	16	19
Tameside	5	7	10	[2]—	11
Trafford	[2]—	8	11	33	12
Wigan	[2]—	13	14	11	17
Barnsley	10	8	10	7	16
Doncaster	11	14	13	11	10
Rotherham	10	12	7	8	14
Sheffield	18	14	19	23	18
Bradford	26	25	38	19	32
Calderdale	9	7	12	9	8
Kirklees	12	17	8	17	12
Leeds	35	28	32	23	25
Wakefield	17	24	14	12	15
Gateshead	5	[2]—	10	[2]—	6
Newcastle upon Tyne	11	14	9	25	10
North Tyneside	6	5	6	6	[2]—
South Tynside	8	[2]—	8	11	[2]—
Sunderland	17	10	9	5	17
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	[2]—
Cornwall	13	17	23	16	27
Cumbria	18	18	14	13	18
Gloucestershire	25	36	28	34	31
Hertfordshire	60	85	73	80	101
Isle of Wight	6	7	6	5	7
Lincolnshire	26	23	19	19	23
Norfolk	31	33	36	32	28
Northamptonshire	30	38	29	55	27
Northumberland	13	20	11	16	18
Oxfordshire	33	48	37	57	66
Somerset	19	19	19	23	24
Suffolk	18	26	40	30	45
Surrey	70	65	82	74	92
Warwickshire	23	29	25	35	41
West Sussex	41	39	49	38	50
Reorganised LEAs[1]					
Avon	49	16	[2]—	n/a	n/a
Bath and North East Somerset	n/a	9	15	16	13
City of Bristol	n/a	15	17	20	21
North Somerset	n/a	[2]—	10	9	8
South Gloucestershire	n/a	13	14	9	17
Cleveland	29	8	[2]—	n/a	n/a
Hartlepool	n/a	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Middlesbrough	n/a	0	[2]–	[2]—	7
Redcar and Cleveland	n/a	[2]—	[2]—	7	6
Stockton on Tees	n/a	[2]—	7	7	10
Humberside	37	10	[2]—	n/a	n/a
City of Kingston-Upon-Hull	n/a	6	11	8	7
East Riding of Yorkshire	n/a	5	23	12	11
North East Lincolnshire	n/a	9	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
North Lincolnshire	n/a	[2]—	9	6	[2]—
"old" North Yorkshire	29	10	[2]—	n/a	n/a
North Yorkshire	n/a	6	12	29	22
York	n/a	5	6	6	7
"old" Bedfordshire	35	38	9	[2]—	n/a
Bedfordshire	n/a	n/a	11	22	29
Luton	n/a	n/a	[2]—	14	9

	Qualified 1993 left service by March 1996	*Qualified 1994 left service by March 1997*	*Qualified 1995 left service by March 1998*	*Qualified 1996 left service by March 1999*	*Qualified 1997 left service by March 2000*
"old" Buckinghamshire	35	37	19	[2]—	n/a
Buckinghamshire	n/a	n/a	33	25	22
Milton Keynes	n/a	n/a	10	11	9
"old" Derbyshire	36	35	16	[2]—	n/a
Derbyshire	n/a	n/a	10	11	35
City of Derby	n/a	n/a	9	5	13
"old" Dorset	31	24	6	[2]—	n/a
Dorset	n/a	n/a	6	10	14
Poole	n/a	n/a	5	7	5
Bournemouth	n/a	n/a	[2]—	9	11
"old" Durham	22	33	7	[2]—	n/a
Durham	n/a	n/a	13	30	36
Darlington	n/a	n/a	[2]—	0	[2]—
"old" East Sussex	43	44	14	6	n/a
East Sussex	n/a	n/a	14	29	26
Brighton and Hove	n/a	n/a	12	15	19
"old" Hampshire	88	95	38	6	n/a
Hampshire	n/a	n/a	53	68	74
Portsmouth	n/a	n/a	[2]—	14	12
Southampton	n/a	n/a	9	18	31
"old" Leicestershire	37	37	12	[2]—	n/a
Leicestershire	n/a	n/a	13	32	19
Leicester City	n/a	n/a	9	16	10
Rutland	n/a	n/a	[2]—	0	[2]—
"old" Staffordshire	26	35	12	[2]—	n/a
Staffordshire	n/a	n/a	15	37	51
Stoke-on-Trent	n/a	n/a	[2]—	10	11
"old" Wiltshire	34	27	10	6	n/a
Wiltshire	n/a	n/a	10	11	22
Swindon	n/a	n/a	7	14	9
Berkshire	52	53	54	22	6
Bracknell Forest	n/a	n/a	n/a	6	9
Windsor and Maidenhead	n/a	n/a	n/a	9	12
West Berkshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	6	18
Reading	n/a	n/a	n/a	11	11
Slough	n/a	n/a	n/a	[2]—	[2]—
Wokingham	n/a	n/a	n/a	12	10
"old" Cambridgeshire	29	48	47	13	5
Cambridgeshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	23	37
City of Peterborough	n/a	n/a	n/a	12	10
"old" Cheshire	49	55	42	11	5
Cheshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	23	30
Halton	n/a	n/a	n/a	[2]—	9
Warrington	n/a	n/a	n/a	8	12
"old" Devon	59	44	66	22	[2]—
Devon	n/a	n/a	n/a	28	34
City of Plymouth	n/a	n/a	n/a	13	12
Torbay	n/a	n/a	n/a	7	5
"old" Essex	63	79	105	49	5
Essex	n/a	n/a	n/a	56	69
Southend	n/a	n/a	n/a	5	8
Thurrock	n/a	n/a	n/a	[2]—	[2]—
Hereford and Worcester	24	33	25	12	n/a
Herefordshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	6	5
Worcestershire	n/a	n/a	n/a	14	26
"old" Kent	69	89	84	33	7
Kent	n/a	n/a	n/a	74	83
Medway	n/a	n/a	n/a	12	22
"old" Lancashire	57	56	55	14	[2]—
Lancashire	n/a	n/a	n/a	26	55
Blackburn and Darwen	n/a	n/a	n/a	5	5
Blackpool	n/a	n/a	n/a	5	[2]—
"old" Nottinghamshire	47	27	50	14	5
Nottinghamshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	14	15
City of Nottingham	n/a	n/a	n/a	8	8
"old" Shropshire	13	8	17	5	n/a
Shropshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	6	11
Telford and Wrekin	n/a	n/a	n/a	5	8
Not known	58	86	102	177	175
England	2,397	2,651	2,697	2,916	3,106

Some teachers had their old local authority allocated to their record after the data of local government reorganisation.

[2] Less than five

The figures exclude 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of part-time teachers not included on the Teacher Pension Scheme records.

Some teachers who leave service will return after a career break.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if work has begun on the research project into why teachers leave the profession. [21862]

Mr. Timms: Work has begun on this research project. The Department has commissioned Professor Alan Smithers and Dr. Pamela Robinson, from the University of Liverpool, Centre for Education and Employment Research to undertake this study. We expect the report to be published in March 2003.

Pre-schools

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pre-schools have closed since 1997 in *(a)* England and *(b)* the Buckingham constituency. [17841]

Margaret Hodge: The Department collects information on playgroups and pre-schools defined in terms of the sessional care that they provide for children aged mainly between three and five. It does not collect information on pre-schools separately from playgroups.

Information for England and Buckinghamshire Local Authority area is shown in the table.

Number of playgroups and pre-schools

	1997	*2001*
England[1]	15,800	14,000
Buckinghamshire LA area[2]	290	200

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 100.
[2] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Figures for 2001 for England and Government Office Region were published in Statistical Bulletin 08/01 "Children's Day Care Facilities as at 31 March 2001", which is available at www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/ and from the Library.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pre-schools have closed since 1997 in *(a)* England and *(b)* Arundel and South Downs. [18330]

Margaret Hodge: The Department collects information on playgroups and pre-schools defined in terms of the sessional care that they provide for children aged mainly between three and five. It does not collect information on pre-schools separately from playgroups.

The available information for England and West Sussex Local Authority area is shown in the table.

Number of playgroups and pre-schools

	1997	*2001*
England[1]	15,800	14,000
West Sussex LA area[2]	350	300

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 100.
[2] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.
Note:
Local Authorities provided the data.

Figures for 2001 for England and Government Office Region were published in Statistical Bulletin 08/01 "Children's Day Care Facilities as at 31 March 2001", which is available at www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/ and from the Library.

Nursery Places

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance her Department has given to *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* Early Years Development Partnerships on the distribution of funding for nursery places for three-year-olds on the basis of postcodes; and if she will make a statement. [18501]

Margaret Hodge: The responsibility for setting criteria for the distribution of nursery education places at a local level rests with the Local Education Authority in conjunction with the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership, within the strategic framework set by the Department requiring the most socially disadvantaged to be targeted first.

Our strategic framework does not prohibit Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships from allocating nursery education places for three-year-olds by postcode area if they believe that to be the most appropriate method of targeting social disadvantage for their area.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of three-year-olds in Leicestershire will receive free nursery places in 2001–02; and what is the national average. [18503]

Margaret Hodge: The current national average for the take up of nursery education places for three-year-olds is 62 per cent. We are well on the way to meeting our stated target of 66 per cent. by March 2002.

The Department does not hold comprehensive local data on the percentage of three-year-olds receiving a free place in 2001–2002 for Leicestershire or other individual local authorities.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when ILA providers will receive funding for learners booked into the system before the programme was shut down. [19549]

John Healey: Officials are setting up, as a matter of priority, arrangements to validate outstanding payments and claims for payment from learning providers so that the majority of providers, who have acted honestly throughout, can be paid as quickly as possible. We will pay for learning that has already taken place and for learning that is already booked, providing we are satisfied that eligible learning is undertaken, in accordance with the rules of the programme.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements are in place for students who have started ILA courses but were not booked into the system before the programme was shut down. [19551]

John Healey: Courses that were not booked onto the ILA system before the programme was shut down will not benefit from an ILA discount. However, officials are setting up, as a matter of priority, arrangements to validate outstanding payments and claims for payment from learning providers so that the majority of providers, who have acted honestly throughout, can be paid as quickly as possible. We will pay for learning that has already taken place and for learning that is already booked on the ILA Centre's system, providing we are satisfied that eligible learning is undertaken, in accordance with the rules of the programme.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects to launch a successor to Individual Learning Accounts. [20419]

John Healey: The Government remain committed to support those who find a lack of money a barrier to returning to education, learning or training and we are developing future plans, which build on the successful elements of the ILA programme.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her oral statement of 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 122–32, what arrangements she has made to enable people who already hold individual learning accounts to use them. [20676]

John Healey *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* Officials are setting up, as a matter of priority, arrangements to validate outstanding payments and claims for payment from learning providers so that the majority of providers, who have acted honestly throughout, can be paid as quickly as possible. We will pay for eligible learning that has already taken place and for learning that is already booked on the ILA Centre's system, providing we are satisfied that eligible learning is undertaken, in accordance with the rules of the programme. Learning which was not booked onto the ILA system before the programme was shut down on 23 November will not benefit from an ILA discount. The programme is now closed to the further booking of learning by learning providers.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills under what powers she shut down the individual learning account programme on 23 November without notice to individual learning account *(a)* holders and *(b)* providers. [20678]

John Healey *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* Section 104 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and the Regulations made under that section allow the Secretary of State a wide discretion as to how, and whether, to operate an individual learning account scheme. The powers allow the Secretary of State to begin such a scheme, to change it or to close it down.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is her estimate of the number of holders of individual learning accounts who had not used them by 23 November; and what arrangements are being made to enable these accounts to be used. [20679]

John Healey *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* As at 17 November, there were 1,235,190 individual learning account holders who had not used their accounts.

The closure of the programme on 23 November was as a result of evidence of serious potential fraud and theft involving individual learning accounts, which are being investigated by the police. All eligible learning booked onto the system before 6.30 pm on 23 November will be honoured, subject to new validation arrangements. It will only be after we have been able to complete our validation of claims and bookings from learning providers that I shall be in a position to provide an updated figure of ILA holders who have not used their accounts.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what financial advice is being provided by her Department to firms which have suffered loss as a result of the closure of the individual learning account programme. [20680]

John Healey *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* It is not expected nor appropriate for the Department to offer financial advice to any firm which has suffered a loss as a result of the closure of the individual learning account programme. Similarly, the Department did not offer financial advice to any provider at the point when they became registered with the ILA Centre.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people were employed in the individual learning account centre on 23 November; how many are employed; and whether the closure of the programme will result in redundancies in her Department. [20681]

John Healey *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* The number of staff in place at the individual learning account centre fluctuates in response to demand and to the extent to which people make use of the range of services. The ILA centre has a flexible workforce to meet these demands, with many working part-time or in a pattern of shifts. The precise number of staff is a matter for Capita Business Services Ltd. who perform this service under contract to the Department. The contract with Capita is output based and fees paid are reliant on certain key operational indicators being met.

I do not anticipate any redundancies within the Department relating to the closure of the ILA programme. These staff are fully occupied with residual issues resulting from the wind down of the present ILA programme, and development of a successor programme or programmes.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what compensation is being offered to holders of individual learning accounts who had intended to use them on or before 7 December 2001 but had not used them by 23 November. [20683]

John Healey *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* There are no plans to offer compensation to individual learning account holders who had intended to use them on or before 7 December 2001 but had not used them by 23 November.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many letters were sent out to holders of individual learning accounts to advise them that the accounts must be used on or before 7 December; and what warning was given to the recipients of the letters that the date, 7 December, had been changed to 23 November. [20684]

John Healey *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* Between 29 October and 5 November every one of more than 2.5 million individual learning account holders was sent a letter about the withdrawal of the programme on 7 December. Because of the need to take immediate action it was not possible to notify account holders prior to the decision to shut down the programme on 23 November. The shutdown meant that the ILA account holders database was not available to us. However, we issued a press statement on 23 November and provided notification of the shut down on both the Department and Capita websites which we updated as new information became available. We were also able to resume the operation, on a limited basis of the ILA helpline for account holders on 27 November.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance is given to those students whose applications for individual learning accounts had been submitted prior to the deadline of 7 December. [20999]

John Healey: On 26 October the Individual Learning Account Centre stopped accepting applications to open new accounts. Between 29 October and 5 November every one of more than 2.5 million Individual Learning Account holders was sent a letter about the withdrawal of the programme on 7 December. Notices were placed in nine national newspapers on 26 and 27 October and the ILA helpline advised account holders on their individual circumstances.

Because of the need to take immediate action it was not possible to notify account holders prior to the decision to shut down the programme on 23 November. However, we issued a press statement on 23 November and provided notification of the shut down on both the Department and Capita websites which we updated as new information became available. The ILA helpline for account holders also resumed operation, on a limited basis, on 27 November.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the impact on *(a)* learning provider companies and *(b)* applicants of her decision to close the individual learning account scheme earlier than the published date of 7 December. [21306]

John Healey: Because of the need to take immediate action it was not possible to notify account holders or ILA registered learning providers prior to the decision to shut down the programme on 23 November. I do recognise the impact this decision will have on learners and learning providers and I am taking steps to keep them informed about developments.

Out-of-school Schemes

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the Government's strategy to develop out of school and holiday schemes for 11 to 14-year-old children. [20493]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government have recognised that out-of-school-hours learning activities play a key role in developing young people and raising their attainment. "Extending Opportunity: a national framework for study support", published in 1998, set out our vision for providing more opportunities for older primary and secondary pupils to enrich their learning through out-of-school-hours learning activities. Since then £160 million has been made available through the New Opportunities Fund, including £25 million specifically for summer schools. In addition, the Department's Standards Fund has provided nearly £75 million for study support programmes this year.

The National Childcare Strategy was established to promote childcare for children aged 0–14 and for children up to age 16 with special needs. Between 1999 and 2004, £225.5 million is being made available from the New Opportunities Fund to help create new out-of-school-hours child care in England, including breakfast, after school and holiday schemes. This can benefit all children in education, including 11 to 14-year-olds. Since 1997, through the New Opportunities Fund support and other Government support, nearly 275,000 new child care places have been set up for the 3 to 14 age range.

Higher Education Staff

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of higher education lecturing staff are on non-permanent contracts. [21269]

Margaret Hodge: The latest available information is shown in the following table.

Academic lecturing staff[1] in UK HE institutions 1999–2000

	Full-time		*Part-time*		*Total*	
Terms of employment	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Permanent	66,520	80	4,870	29	71,390	72
Fixed term contract	16,380	20	8,350	50	24,730	25
Hourly paid/casual staff	10	0	3,390	20	3,400	3
Other	60	0	120	1	180	0
Total	82,970	100	16,730	100	99,700	100

[1] Covers staff whose primary employment function is either teaching or teaching/research. Staff whose primary employment function is research are not included

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency's Staff Record. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10 and percentages to the nearest whole number

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average turnover has been of teaching staff in higher education institutions in each year since 1997. [21271]

Margaret Hodge: The available information is shown in the following table.

Turnover of full-time and part-time academic lecturing staff[1] *in UK HR institutions*

	Academic year			Average
	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	1997–2000
Total staff[2]	90,250	92,170	94,360	92,260
Inflow[3]	7,940	8,670	8,510	8,370
Outflow[3]	7,140	7,120	7,060	7,110
Total turnover[4]	15,080	15,790	15,570	15,480
Turnover as percentage of total staff	16.7	17.1	16.5	16.8

[1] Includes staff whose primary employment function is teaching or teaching/research. Staff whose primary employment function is research are not included

[2] As at 31 July

[3] Includes entrants from, and leavers to, other (non HE) educational institutions, the public and private sectors, and overseas. Staff who move between other HE institutions in the UK are not included

[4] Total of inflow and outflow

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency's Staff Record. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10

Astra Group Pension Scheme

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what actuarial assessment has been made of the shortfall in the Astra Group pension scheme; and if she will make a statement. [21416]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The latest actuarial valuation of the Astra Group Pension Scheme was by William M Mercer in April 2001. My understanding is that it showed that at the due date of valuation of 30 April 2000, had the winding-up of the scheme been completed, it would have been in deficit by £10.72 million. However, the completion of the winding-up is still some time away and only when this process is complete will the extent of any deficit be known. This matter is entirely in the hands of Astra's administrators. The actuary (William M Mercer) has recommended that the next actuarial valuation be carried out with an effective date no later than 30 April 2003.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information she collates on the educational attainments of young people with disabilities and special educational needs compared with their peer group, with particular reference to *(a)* qualifications attained and *(b)* access to higher education. [20952]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The primary source of information on the activities and attainment of young people in the years immediately after completing compulsory education is the Youth Cohort Study (YCS). A question designed to identify those with a current long-term disability or health problem as defined under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was introduced in the 1998 YCS surveys. Questions on Special Educational Needs (SENs) were included in the most recent survey of 16-year-olds in 2000.

Key results from the YCS are published in Statistical First Releases (SFRs). The tables include information on attainment and participation in higher education for those with and without a long-term disability or health problem. DfES SFRs are available in the House of Commons Library and on the DfES website at http://www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/DB/SFR/.

In response to the call for more information in the 1997 Green Paper "Excellence for all children: meeting special educational needs" the Department has commissioned a longitudinal piece of research about the experiences of young people with SEN once they have left school.

The study looks at the experiences, achievements, and attitudes of young people with SEN during their transition from secondary education to early adult life. It aims to identify barriers to further education, training, employment and independent living.

Post-16 Learning

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list for each local education authority *(a)* the sum spent on post-16 education in 2000–01, *(b)* the sum budgeted for post-16 education in the current year and *(c)* the sum top-sliced from the SSA in 2002–03 for post-16 education. [21725]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The following table lists for each local education authority *(a)* estimated spend on post-16 education in 2000–01, consisting of the amount for each school with a sixth form which was used as the baseline for calculation of the Real Terms Guarantee, and an estimate of each authority's spend on post-16 Special Educational Needs; and *(c)* the provisional deduction from each local education authority's post-16 SSA for 2002–03, which each authority will receive back from the Learning and Skills Council in grant for post-16 provision. Estimated budgets for post-16 for each LEA for 2001–02 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

£ million

LEA	*(a) Estimated spend 2000–01*	*(c) LSC allocation 2002–03*
City of London	0.005	0.006
Camden	9.789	11.188
Greenwich	7.173	8.521
Hackney	1.849	2.095
Hammersmith and Fulham	4.863	5.491

£ million

LEA	*(a) Estimated spend 2000–01*	*(c) LSC allocation 2002–03*
Islington	1.879	1.839
Kensington and Chelsea	2.996	3.248
Lambeth	1.624	1.947
Lewisham	4.994	5.193
Southwark	1.250	1.866
Tower Hamlets	4.912	6.039
Wandsworth	7.000	8.252
Westminster	4.846	6.020
Barking and Dagenham	5.229	5.967
Barnet	14.448	16.589
Bexley	7.005	8.375
Brent	9.347	11.170
Bromley	13.505	16.116
Croydon	3.448	3.961
Ealing	7.508	9.925
Enfield	11.377	13.172
Haringey	5.564	5.742
Harrow	0.490	0.520
Havering	3.665	4.276
Hillingdon	9.892	11.944
Hounslow	9.773	11.589
Kingston upon Thames	5.399	6.730
Merton	1.897	2.682
Newham	2.024	2.765
Redbridge	14.594	16.135
Richmond upon Thames	0.271	0.287
Sutton	7.966	10.092
Waltham Forest	2.866	3.628
Birmingham	25.905	30.486
Coventry	8.802	11.831
Dudley	1.508	1.995
Sandwell	3.710	4.625
Solihull	2.708	2.871
Walsall	9.028	11.702
Wolverhampton	7.277	9.099
Knowsley	1.691	1.787
Liverpool	16.815	19.372
St. Helens	4.000	4.413
Sefton	7.700	9.012
Wirral	10.275	12.818
Bolton	5.066	5.781
Bury	0.514	0.545
Manchester	3.369	3.737
Oldham	3.459	4.004
Rochdale	3.542	3.874
Salford	0.615	0.653
Stockport	0.474	0.503
Tameside	1.108	1.360
Trafford	5.708	6.469
Wigan	2.307	2.605
Barnsley	1.049	1.217
Doncaster	9.098	11.155
Rotherham	5.756	7.017
Sheffield	6.178	8.378
Bradford	16.678	20.827
Calderdale	5.641	7.971
Kirklees	5.656	7.256
Leeds	18.997	21.509
Wakefield	4.391	5.436
Gateshead	5.035	5.633
Newcastle upon Tyne	7.441	9.121
North Tyneside	4.841	6.146
South Tyneside	1.261	1.427
Sunderland	3.252	4.728
Isles of Scilly	0.000	0.000
Bath and North East Somerset	5.536	6.397
Bristol, City of	4.577	5.435
North Somerset	4.887	5.704
South Gloucestershire	7.005	9.148
Hartlepool	1.106	1.466
Middlesbrough	0.323	0.344
Redcar and Cleveland	0.471	0.498
Stockton-on-Tees	1.864	1.987
Kingston upon Hull, City of	0.902	1.109
East Riding of Yorkshire	9.539	12.183
North East Lincolnshire	1.419	1.664
North Lincolnshire	0.903	1.055
North Yorkshire	18.363	21.637
York	3.260	4.078
Bedfordshire	14.782	17.995
Luton	0.725	0.894
Buckinghamshire	20.648	23.678
Milton Keynes	7.788	8.891
Derbyshire	16.020	19.485
Derby	3.762	5.039
Dorset	11.600	14.238
Poole	4.330	5.312
Bournemouth	3.505	4.181
Durham	10.337	12.320
Darlington	0.748	1.007
East Sussex	9.031	9.872
Brighton and Hove	3.739	4.122
Hampshire	7.604	8.245
Portsmouth	0.000	0.230
Southampton	0.723	0.674
Leicestershire	21.388	26.023
Leicester	3.611	3.955
Rutland	0.000	0.065
Staffordshire	21.102	26.819
Stoke-on-Trent	1.254	1.800
Wiltshire	10.934	12.910
Swindon	1.654	1.640
Bracknell Forest	2.948	3.192
Windsor and Maidenhead	4.460	5.120
West Berkshire	5.932	7.450
Reading	3.083	3.746
Slough	3.845	4.385
Wokingham	5.263	5.972
Cambridgeshire	8.931	10.414
Peterborough	7.543	8.376
Cheshire	19.278	22.764
Halton	1.873	1.769
Warrington	4.203	5.113
Devon	14.471	17.098
Plymouth	10.320	11.507
Torbay	4.042	5.384
Essex	30.079	35.289
Southend-on-Sea	5.190	6.491
Thurrock	0.000	0.232
Herefordshire	1.346	1.579
Worcestershire	12.238	16.077
Kent	49.630	56.891
Medway	9.614	11.284
Lancashire	15.639	19.250
Blackburn with Darwen	1.338	1.520
Blackpool	0.798	0.798
Nottinghamshire	19.492	23.494
Nottingham	2.210	2.776
Shropshire	4.377	4.851
Telford and Wrekin	1.452	1.649
Cornwall	9.283	11.413
Cumbria	14.467	17.697
Gloucestershire	15.302	19.646
Hertfordshire	37.939	47.742
Isle of Wight	4.739	5.615
Lincolnshire	18.553	22.222
Norfolk	16.632	20.702
Northamptonshire	18.623	22.292
Northumberland	12.691	15.781
Oxfordshire	13.796	17.319
Somerset	5.881	6.790
Suffolk	19.638	24.194
Surrey	21.970	24.793
Warwickshire	12.221	14.257
West Sussex	16.247	18.231
Total	1,133.320	1,356.000

Vocational Education

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she is taking to upgrade the standards and status of vocational education. [21813]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The White Paper "Schools: achieving success" sets out our plans to make available high quality vocational options to all students from the age of 14, which are widely recognised and offer the opportunity of entry to higher education. We have introduced vocational A levels, are reforming and extending modern apprenticeships and are introducing foundation degrees. The new GCSEs in vocational subjects to be available from September 2002 will provide a qualification of the same standard as academic GCSEs. A forthcoming consultation paper on the 14–19 education phase will address how best to break down the traditional prejudice against vocational education, and to enable more students to pursue vocational options.

Education Maintenance Allowances

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the findings of the pilot areas for education maintenance allowances; and when the scheme will be extended to the rest of the country. [22179]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) pilots are subject to a rigorous three-year evaluation study.

Early findings from the evaluation show that EMA appears to have raised participation in education. The statistical analysis estimates an average gain in participation in pilot areas compared to control areas, among EMA eligible young people, of around 5 percentage points. These findings were published in March this year.

Although we do not yet have figures on attainment, the qualitative aspect of the evaluation has found some evidence of a positive effect on young people's commitment to study, and their performance.

However, although these first findings are encouraging, it is important that we do not make any decisions on the future of EMAs until we have received further evaluation evidence.

University Teaching

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to *(a)* monitor and *(b)* improve the standard of teaching in universities. [22285]

Margaret Hodge: We are working closely with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) to ensure that revised systems are put in place to monitor and improve teaching quality which are not unnecessarily bureaucratic and costly. Proposals are currently out for consultation and we will look closely at the outcome of that process. In addition, we have requested that HEFCE produces, by July 2002, a strategic plan for enhancing teaching quality.

Homework Clubs (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress has been made in the promotion of homework clubs in schools in Portsmouth; and if she will make a statement. [22439]

Mr. Timms: We are committed to providing opportunities for young people to enrich their learning through out-of-school-hours activities. "Extending Opportunity: a national framework for study support", published in 1998, set out the contribution homework clubs can make to a school's wider programme of out-of-school-hours learning activities.

We also published Homework Guidelines, which require school homework policies to refer to any opportunities that exist for pupils to do homework, under supervision, at places other than home. In addition to school homework clubs, these may also include libraries and community centres. The homework area on the Department's Standards website supplements the guidelines with examples of good practice and case studies which teachers, governors, parents and pupils can access.

Within that framework, the promotion of homework clubs in specific parts of the country is a matter for individual local authorities and schools.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list each college of further education subject to a recovery plan, together with the allocation to each college from the Learning and Skills Council standards fund; and if she will make a statement. [19618]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* Information about colleges that are subject to a recovery plan is commercially sensitive and confidential between the individual colleges and the LSC. We are unable to release this information as it may adversely affect individual colleges' ability to attract new, non-government funded, business and may also adversely affect the colleges' ability to attract new learners. This would increase problems at the individual college. Not supplying this sensitive information is in accordance with Part 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list *(a)* the criteria used for categorising the financial health of further education colleges and *(b)* the number of colleges, in each of the last five financial years, in each of the categories; and if she will indicate which existing colleges are in category C. [19909]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The financial health of further education colleges is assessed by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) as falling into one of three categories:

Group A comprises providers that appear to have sufficiently robust finances to implement their strategic plan and to deal with the circumstances most likely to occur during the planning period.

Group B comprises providers that show signs of financial weakness that might limit their ability to implement their strategic plan if they encounter adverse circumstances during the planning period.

Group C comprises providers that are financially weak and that are, or may become, dependent on the goodwill of others. This might involve, for example, a loan from their bank for solvency purposes.

The number of colleges in each of the categories in each of the last five years is as follows:

Year[1]	*Group A*	*Group B*	*Group C*
1996	206	148	93
1997	197	151	96
1998	213	142	80
1999	242	124	65
2000	242	102	69

[1] *Source:*

Colleges' audited financial statements

Information about colleges in category C is commercially sensitive and is confidential between the LSC and colleges. We are unable to supply the information as doing so may adversely affect individual colleges' ability to attract new, non-government funded, business and may also adversely affect the colleges' ability to attract new learners. This would increase the financial pressure on the colleges. Not supplying this sensitive information is also in accordance with Part 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Education Standard Spending Assessment

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list for each of the years 1997–98 to 2001–02 *(a)* the name of each local education authority where education SSA increases have not been passported, *(b)* the total amount of education budget and *(c)* the total amount of education SSA and the surplus order deficit over education SSA. [22371]

Mr. Timms: Tables 1 to 3 list those local education authorities which did not passport in the years 1999–2000 to 2001–02, together with their total education budget, their education SSA, and the spend above or below SSA. Passporting is defined by whether an authority passed on to the education budget the year on year increase in education SSA, rather than by the relationship between budget and SSA. However, it is not possible to assess whether passporting took place simply from an analysis of budget and SSA figures, since in assessing passporting adjustments were made for items such as Capital Expenditure from the Revenue Account (CERA), one-off payments, and the ceiling on grant increases in 2001–02. There were no passporting exercises in 1997–98 and 1998–99.

Table 1: 1999–2000

£ million

LEA	*Education budget*	*Education SSA*	*Surplus or deficit*
Lambeth	115.032	111.391	3.641
Lewisham	127.548	127.492	0.056
Haringey	110.586	110.650	–0.064
Merton	63.906	66.325	–2.419
Redbridge	115.074	118.368	–3.294
Richmond upon Thames	53.338	52.456	0.882
Waltham Forest	110.433	111.051	–0.618
Birmingham	546.234	505.954	40.280
Walsall	123.863	124.648	–0.785
Knowsley	85.322	85.232	0.090
St. Helens	80.741	76.502	4.239
Trafford	105.130	91.100	14.030
Wigan	131.721	125.345	6.376
Doncaster	134.658	136.085	–1.427
Gateshead	81.637	78.264	3.373
Newcastle upon Tyne	121.426	111.037	10.389
Bath and North East Somerset	68.329	62.342	5.987
North Somerset	70.967	67.996	2.971
South Gloucestershire	99.418	93.808	5.610
Redcar and Cleveland	66.086	66.199	–0.113
Hull City	115.990	114.819	1.171
East Riding of Yorkshire	129.087	121.259	7.828
Milton Keynes	87.284	92.700	–5.416
Darlington	39.133	39.671	–0.538
Brighton and Hove	84.059	82.767	1.292
Southampton	90.432	87.375	3.057
Leicestershire	236.428	228.194	8.234
Swindon	71.156	73.292	–2.136
Herefordshire	60.529	61.103	–0.574
Lancashire	484.874	468.489	16.385
Blackpool	50.677	52.808	–2.131
Cornwall	191.623	189.829	1.794
Somerset	185.943	175.623	10.320
West Sussex	275.729	269.166	6.563

Note:

Education budget is taken from Local Authorities' Revenue Account returns. Non-passporting authorities are those which were published in the LEA comparative expenditure tables in June 1999.

Table 2: 2000–01

£ million

LEA	*Education budget*	*Education SSA*	*Surplus or deficit*
Southwark	132.620	130.405	2.216
Barnet	144.869	143.030	1.838
Brent	122.579	129.463	–6.884
Redbridge	123.490	125.904	–2.414
Salford	100.503	98.773	1.730
North Somerset	72.244	70.855	1.389
Somerset	191.534	186.168	5.365

Note:

Education budget is total education revenue expenditure recorded at line 5 on local education authorities' section 52 budget statements for 2000–01, less income from grants recorded at line 6. Non-passporting authorities are those which were published in the LEA comparative expenditure tables in June 2000.

Table 3: 2001–02

£ million

LEA	*Education budget*	*Education SSA*	*Surplus or deficit*
Brent	126.841	135.195	–8.354
Harrow	91.492	90.818	0.674
Wolverhampton	125.771	120.747	5.024
City of Bristol	161.303	145.611	15.691
North Somerset	74.582	74.508	0.073
York	68.251	66.287	1.965
Swindon	80.047	80.046	0.001
Northumberland	141.303	139.663	1.640

Note:

Education budget is total education revenue expenditure recorded at line [illegible] on local education authorities' section 52 budget statements for 2000–01, less income from grants recorded at lines 6a and 6b. Non-passporting authorities are those which were published in the LEA comparative expenditure tables in June 2001.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many publications were issued by his Department in each of the last four years. [11836]

Mr. MacShane: The total number of publications issued was:

Year	*Number*
1997–98	194
1998–99	224
1999–2000	179
2000–01	161

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office produces a range of booklets aimed at overseas audiences. It also issues recruitment literature, and leaflets to raise consular awareness among UK nationals travelling abroad. The figures include parliamentary publications such as annual FCO departmental reports on the Government's expenditure plans and human rights.

Gibraltar

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the constitutional arrangements agreed between the UK and the Irish Republic involving joint decision-making in the affairs of Northern Ireland are being used as a model for the future constitutional status of Gibraltar. [19963]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 187W. A copy of the joint press communiqué issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs when they met under the Brussels Process in Barcelona on 20 November has been placed in the Libraries of the House. The Ministers discussed the full range of issues set out in the November 1984 Brussels Communiqué. Their discussions did not include the relevance of the Northern Ireland constitutional model to Gibraltar.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if an agreement to offer Spain any joint decision-making over the affairs of Gibraltar will be put to a referendum of the people of Gibraltar. [19964]

Peter Hain: I refer to my statement in Westminster Hall on 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 88–92WH. The Government will stand by the constitutional commitment to Gibraltar set out in the preamble to the Order in Council that established the 1969 constitution. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs reiterated this in response to a question from the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) on 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 822–23.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which aspects of agreement on the future status of Gibraltar with Spain *(a)* will and *(b)* will not be subject to a referendum in Gibraltar. [21432]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to a question from the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) on 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 822.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to enter into discussions with Spain over the future status of Gibraltar. [21683]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 312W.

Mr. Dennis Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to raise the issue of border delays with the Government of Spain. [21601]

Peter Hain: I last raised the issue of border delays with the Spanish Minister for Europe on 10 December, and will continue to do so on all future appropriate occasions.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the increase in the departmental expenditure limit from 2001–02 to 2002–03 will be accounted for by wage costs. [20669]

Mr. MacShane: This information is not available at present as the figures for 2001–02 cannot be finalised until the end of the financial year. We are in any case unable to provide the figures for 2002–03 as the FCO's paybill is negotiated annually with HM Treasury.

The FCO's forthcoming Departmental Report (to be published spring 2002) will give full retrospective costs.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people are employed by the Department under the new deal for young people; and at what cost to public funds. [21314]

Mr. Bradshaw: Information follows on the number of people currently employed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office under the new deal for young people. New deal recruits take up existing vacancies so extra costs are limited to the subsidy where appropriate, and any additional training which may be needed. The cost of the latter cannot readily be identified.

In 2001 the FCO has recruited three young people under the scheme. Since 1999, 10 have been employed. They are paid an A1 salary, (the grade at which we recruit New Dealers) currently £12,600 per annum. The Employment Service subsidy is £60 per week for the first six months of their employment.

Departmental Staff (Home Working)

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to encourage staff to work from home; and how many staff do so on a regular basis. [21824]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is committed to the Work Life Balance of its staff. A range of flexible working patterns—including part-time working, job sharing and home working—is available to staff by agreement with their management.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office publicises its commitment to flexible working and encourages managers to respond positively to requests as part of their commitment to the diversity agenda.

On the basis of the latest information available, there are currently around 20 people in the FCO who work permanently or regularly from home; many more work from home on an informal or occasional basis. Other working patterns in place include term time, school hours, compressed hours, shift working, flexitime, staggered hours, reduced hours, part-time and job sharing.

Indonesia

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has had with the Indonesian authorities regarding the actions of Laskar Jihad in the Christian villages surrounding Tentena; [21765]

(2) what action he is taking regarding the attacks on religious minorities in the Poso region of Sulawesi in Indonesia. [21766]

Mr. Bradshaw: On 23 November our chargé d'affaires in Jakarata lobbied Bambang Yudhoyono, the Indonesian Co-ordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs, on the security situation in Sulawesi. Mr. Yudhoyono said that the Government were anticipating an upswing in violence and that additional military and police had been deployed to the region. Our concern was further reinforced by the chargé d'affaires at a meeting with Manuel Kaisieppo, the Minister of Development in Eastern Indonesia on 29 November. We will continue to monitor developments closely.

Al-Qaeda

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 404W, on al-Qaeda, if he will rule out support for military action against states where there is no evidence of state support of the terrorist activities of al-Qaeda. [22151]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our aim is to eliminate the threat posed by the international terrorist networks of al-Qaeda, and other international terrorist organisations. We will take the action we deem necessary in support of this aim. It would not be sensible to rule out any option in advance.

Many countries around the world suffer from the presence and activity of international terrorists. Most are prepared to address the problem, but some lack sufficient capability to do so. In co-operation with the international community we are stepping up assistance to states which oppose terrorist activity but lack the means to prevent it.

Suicide Terrorists

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 315W, what assessment he has made of the reasons for the level of preparedness up to 11 September for the willingness of suicide terrorists to use aircraft and other vehicles to inflict substantial loss of life. [22129]

Mr. Bradshaw: Alongside national and international measures aimed at deterring and preventing terrorist activity, our contingency planning takes account of all types of terrorist threats. Although we are constantly alert to the threat of international terrorism, we had no specific warning of the 11 September attacks.

Afghanistan

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evaluation his Department has made of the role of Russia in the decision by the Northern Alliance to occupy Kabul. [22170]

Mr. Bradshaw: In Kabul, the Northern Alliance took over a city abandoned by the Taliban. We are not aware of any Russian role in this decision.

Russia has made a valuable humanitarian contribution to the coalition's campaign against terrorism. We also welcomed their political support for the Bonn conference and the newly agreed Interim Administration.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the expected nature and extent of Russian influence in post-conflict Afghanistan. [22172]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Russian Government welcomed the results of the Bonn conference and saw it as an important step towards a post-conflict settlement in Afghanistan. We expect their political support to continue to ensure implementation of the decisions adopted. We also expect this to be reinforced by on-going humanitarian assistance (including medicines, a field hospital and de-mining assistance).

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support an investigation into events at Mazar-i-Sharif to establish *(a)* whether adequate steps were taken at the outset (i) to deter a revolt and (ii) to prevent access to the weapons used for the revolt, *(b)* the circumstances under which Taliban prisoners who had their hands bound were killed and *(c)* the standard of treatment of Taliban fighters (1) who tried to surrender, (2) became incapacitated and (3) who otherwise stopped fighting. [22205]

Mr. Bradshaw: We take very seriously our obligations under the Geneva Conventions with regard to the enforcement of international law and have urged the Northern Alliance to treat humanely all those who have surrendered and are taken prisoner. But we do not think it appropriate to call for an investigation into the events at Mazar-i-Sharif at the present time.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the UK will be involved in setting up procedures for the *(a)* safe surrender, *(b)* disarming and *(c)* detention of captured fighters in Afghanistan. [22203]

Mr. Bradshaw: Most fighters in Afghanistan are being held by the Northern Alliance or other Afghan groups. We have urged those groups to set up the necessary procedures to handle prisoners in accordance with international norms. We would look to the ICRC to monitor these procedures. The UK itself does not have sufficient forces on the ground to handle captured fighters.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the UK Government and their coalition allies in Afghanistan provide logistic support to ensure the humane treatment of prisoners in their custody. [22202]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK does not have sufficient forces on the ground to provide logistical support nor handle captured fighters in Afghanistan. We have urged the Northern Alliance to treat humanely all those who are prisoners in their custody.

EU (Public Information)

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps have been taken to inform people about the law-making process in the European Union. [22733]

Peter Hain: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has published a leaflet which summarises the process by which European Directives and Regulations are made. This is being given a wide distribution and is available on the FCO website at www.fco.gov.uk. Copies are available for collection in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps have been taken to inform people about the meaning of the European Union treaties. [22734]

Peter Hain: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has published a leaflet which summarises the European Union Treaties in under 300 words. This is being given a wide distribution and is also available on the FCO website at www.fco.gov.uk. Copies are available for collection in the Libraries of the House.

British Council

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many indemnity undertakings were given by his Department in respect of loss or damage to works of art loaned to the British Council for exhibition overseas for the six-month period ended 30 September; and what the value was of the contingent liabilities in respect of such undertakings which remained outstanding at that date. [22735]

Mr. MacShane: The British Council, although not a Government Department, receives a substantial Grant in Aid from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It regularly organises or sponsors exhibitions overseas of works of art loaned from National Galleries and private collections in the United Kingdom. It provides certain assurances or guarantees in respect of loss or damage while these works are on loan.

In the six month period ended 30 September 2001 the British Council provided such assurances to two national lenders and undertakings to 14 private lenders. The value of the contingent liabilities that remained outstanding as at 30 September 2001 in respect of national lenders was £464,200 and in respect of private lenders was £3,797,125 ie a total of £4,261,325.

International Judicial Procedures

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what judicial procedures will be set up to try those in custody accused of *(a)* war crimes, *(b)* crimes against humanity and *(c)* other serious violations of international law. [22204]

Mr. Bradshaw: United Kingdom courts have jurisdiction in respect of crimes against humanity and war crimes (which include serious violations of the laws applicable in armed conflict) only when the offences are committed in the United Kingdom or, outside the United Kingdom, by a national or resident of the UK or by a person subject to UK service jurisdiction. New judicial procedures are not therefore needed.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the public service agreement target for efficiency in the criminal justice system. [17064]

Mr. Keith Bradley: There is a broad range of activity to modernise and improve all of the criminal justice organisations. This work has enabled us to achieve our Youth Justice Pledge of halving the time taken from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders.

The Government are also considering and consulting on two major reports (Making Sentencing Work—report of the Review of the Sentencing Framework for England and Wales, and Lord Justice Auld's Review of the Criminal Courts In England and Wales) which will lead to wide ranging programmes to improve efficiency in the Criminal Justice System. Although there is no cross-cutting public service agreement target for efficiency, the public service agreement does contain a value for money target which it is envisaged will be set by March 2002.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assistance his Department provided in 2000–01 to those charities which are on the central register of charities but did not receive guidance under the public service agreement target set out on page 169 of the 2001 Department report. [21283]

Angela Eagle: None. This is a matter for the Charity Commission as the Government Department which has a range of statutory powers to help and supervise charities. The Chief Charity Commissioner will write to the hon. Member and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the public service agreement target to ensure by March 2001 that charities are able to operate for their proper purpose by increasing the percentage of cases where legal authority is exercised at Charity Commission instigation was achieved; [21280]

(2) if the public service agreement target for efficiency gains in the Charity Commission was achieved in 2000–01; [21285]

(3) what is the role of the Charity Commission in the cases in which it does not initiate the provision of substantive guidance on governance and administration; [21290]

(4) if the public service agreement target for the staff cost per charity monitored was achieved by March 2001; [21277]

(5) if the public service agreement target to monitor 85 per cent. of the target grant of charities by March 2001 was achieved; [21278]

(6) if the public service agreement target to benchmark impact indicators for the Charity Commission and implement them from January was achieved; [21287]

(7) what progress was made in 2000–01 in reducing absence on sick leave by staff of the Charity Commission; [21286]

(8) if the public service agreement target to improve by March 2001 the effectiveness of charities' operations by the Commission initiating the provisions of substantive guidance on governance and administration was achieved; [21279]

(9) if the public service agreement to increase the cost effectiveness of the Charity Commission's investigative results to 90 per cent. was achieved; [21276]

(10) if the public service agreement target to determine by March 2001 charities status within 95 working days of the application for registration being received was achieved; [21281]

(11) if the public service agreement target to provide guidance by 31 March 2001 to 58 per cent. of charities which are placed on the central register of charities was achieved. [21282]

Angela Eagle: These are matters for the Charity Commission, who will write to the hon. Member. A copy of the Commission's reply will be placed in the Library.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of failed asylum applicants who will be removed from the UK in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002. [17085]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 22 November 2001]:* The current Service Delivery Agreement target relating to the removal of failed asylum seekers from the United Kingdom is to remove 30,000 in 2001–02; 33,000 in 2003–04; and 37,000 in 2003–04. The totals include dependants.

The 30,000 target for this year has always been ambitious and high risk. To enable us to reach it we need to remove about 2,500 people a month. It remains our aim to achieve this monthly total by March 2002.

So far in 2001, 7,400 failed asylum seekers have been removed, which, from April onwards, includes dependants.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to reform the asylum system, particularly in terms of the effects on the provision of housing. [21016]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced the steps he is taking to reform the asylum system on 29 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 627. These include the establishment on a trial basis of 3,000 accommodation centre places. For the remainder of asylum seekers existing support arrangements will continue to be provided.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for changes to the departmental expenditure limit and administration cost limit within his responsibility. [19514]

Mr. Blunkett: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the Departmental Expenditure Limit, which covers Request for Resources 1 (building a safe, just and tolerant society) and Request for Resources 2 (protecting the public by holding prisoners in decent conditions and reducing re-offending after release), will be increased by £75,547,000 from £9,786,720,000 to £9,862,267,000. The administration costs limit will be decreased by £8,194,000 from £2,413,837,000 to £2,405,643,000.

A detailed breakdown of the winter supplementary changes has been placed in the library.

Illegal Drugs (Prisons)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent surveys have been undertaken by his Department on how illegal drugs enter prisons in England and Wales. [20436]

Beverley Hughes: The available evidence shows that the predominant route of supply of drugs into prisons is through the social visits process. Further research into the supply of drugs in prisons is being commissioned by Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.

Leave to Remain

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average length of time is that applicants wait between being granted *(a)* indefinite and *(b)* finite leave to remain in the UK and their receipt of the necessary documents; what is the longest wait in both cases at present; and how many residents of (i) Beckenham constituency and (ii) Bromley Borough are awaiting their documents. [20352]

Angela Eagle: Once an application has been granted it is normally dispatched by first class recorded delivery. Depending on Post Office delivery it should normally take one to two days after dispatch to be received. The other requested information is not centrally recorded.

Immigration

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reporting centres for conducting immigration interviews have been set up in the north-east since January 2000; how many appeals by the Immigration Appeals Authority have been heard in courts based in the north-east; and how many were planned to be heard in the north-east in 2001. [19490]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The north-east has one reporting centre at Waterside Court, Leeds, which opened in October 2000.

I understand from my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor that the number of adjudicator hearings undertaken by the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) in courts in the north-east since October 2000 until the end of September 2001 was 4,911 for asylum appeals and 976 for immigration appeals. The number of tribunal hearings was 107 for asylum appeals and 31 for immigration appeals. Data prior to October 2000 are not available.

The IAA plan to receive a specified number of adjudicator appeal cases from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate each year. As the current IAA policy is to list cases into the court nearest the appellant's place of residence, area distribution can only be undertaken when appeal papers are received and consequently cannot be planned in advance.

Animal Experiments

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the implications of the Biocidal Products Regulation for animal testing. [20924]

Angela Eagle: It is not possible for the Home Office to give an estimation of the impact of the Biocidal Products Directive (98/8/EC), which came into force in the United Kingdom in April 2001, on the scale and nature of animal use.

As a consequence of it coming into force, there will be a requirement for all biocidal products and their active substances to be authorised for use and therefore the new testing requirement may increase animal use in this area.

To minimise duplicate testing, Article 13 of the Directive requires authorisation holders to take all reasonable steps to share data. Furthermore, the Article also allows for member states to oblige applicants to share data, specifically to avoid unnecessary and duplicate testing on animals.

It continues to be our aim to reduce, refine and replace the use of animals in scientific procedures and to ensure that the benefits to humans, other animals or the environment outweigh the costs to the animals involved. In August 2000 the Home Office announced the agreement of a cross-Government concordat to increase data sharing in all United Kingdom regulatory safety testing.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department has taken to assess the effects of genetic modification in laboratory animals on the animals' welfare. [20920]

Angela Eagle: The production of genetically modified animals (as well as their use in experiments or other scientific procedures) is controlled under the terms of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. In deciding whether to grant a licence to produce, breed or use genetically modified animals, the 1986 Act requires, as with ordinary animals, that the likely benefits of the programme are weighed against the likely adverse effects on the animals concerned (the cost/benefit assessment) and that there are no alternatives which either replace animal use entirely, reduce the number of animals needed or refine the procedures to minimise pain and suffering (3Rs). We must also be satisfied that the procedures are likely to achieve the stated objectives.

Since the genetic modification of animals was first achieved, the number of genetically modified animals produced and used under the terms of the Act has increased considerably, and is likely to continue to increase. The production and use of such animals allows new areas of medical and other scientific research to be explored; provides the potential for investigating a wide variety of conditions including cancer, cystic fibrosis and multiple sclerosis; and allows the quality of the science in many areas of research and testing to be improved.

It is not always possible to predict the likely welfare effects of novel genetic modifications. However, project licence authorities are framed to permit only apparently healthy genetically modified animals to be produced or maintained unless, and exceptionally, a specific scientific justification is made and accepted for the production of genetically modified animals whose welfare may be compromised.

The vast majority (over 95 per cent) of GM animals produced and used are mice.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of each type of animal have been used in laboratory testing in each year since 1997. [20922]

Angela Eagle: The number of animals, listed by species, used in scientific procedures for each year since 1997 for which figures are available, is given in Table 1A in the annual publication "Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals, Great Britain", copies of which are in the Library. Table 5A in the same publication gives the numbers of each type of animal used in non-toxicological work, which is primarily research, and Table 10A gives the numbers of animals used in toxicological work, consisting mainly for safety testing and quality of control of medical and veterinary pharmaceuticals and other products.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the Government have invested in developing alternatives to animal testing in the last five years. [20923]

Angela Eagle: Most of the work done on alternatives is neither done by the Government nor with Government money. The budget the Home Office has made available to the Animal Procedures Committee for research in this area over the last five years is as follows:

£

Year	*Budget made available*
1997–98	182,000
1998–99	259,000
1999–2000	259,000
2000–01	265,000
2001–02	280,000

By "alternatives", we are referring to the development and promotion of alternatives which (1) replace animal use, (2) reduce the number of animals used or (3) refine the procedures involved to minimise suffering (3Rs).

This money is not the only money spent by Government Departments on alternatives. In 1999, the Home Office asked the Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Health, the Scottish Office, the Welsh Office and the Northern Ireland Office for an indication of the level of each Department's funding of alternatives. Unlike the Home Office, the funding of alternatives by other Government Departments is neither ring-fenced nor clearly demarcated from the funding of other areas of science. The Home Office was, however, provided with an estimated figure, totalling over £2 million, for the yearly expenditure across Government for research into alternatives.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Home Office inspectors there are with responsibility for scrutinising the impact of the Animal (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; and what their duties are. [20921]

Angela Eagle: There are currently 22 inspectors appointed under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. Plans have recently been announced to further increase the number of inspectors to 33 over the next three years. Five more inspectors will be taking up post in the new year and an additional six will be appointed in 2003.

The duties of an inspector are set out as follows in section 18 (2) and 18 (3) of the 1986 Act.

> "18 (2) It shall be the duty of an inspector:
>
> (a) to advise the Secretary of State on applications for personal and project licences, on requests for their variation or revocation and on their periodical review;
>
> (b) to advise him on applications for certificates under this Act and on requests for their variation or revocation;
>
> (c) to visit places where regulated procedures are carried out for the purpose of determining whether those procedures are authorised by the requisite licences and whether the conditions of those licences are being complied with;
>
> (d) to visit designated establishments for the purpose of determining whether the conditions of the certificates in respect of those establishments are being complied with;
>
> (e) to report to the Secretary of State any case in which any provision of this Act or any condition of a licence or certificate under this Act has not been or is not being complied with and to advise him on the action to be taken in any such case.
>
> 18 (3) If an inspector considers that a protected animal is undergoing excessive suffering he may require it to be immediately killed by a method appropriate to the animal under Schedule 1 to this Act or by such other method as may be authorised by any personal licence held by the person to whom the requirement is addressed."

The Inspectorate plays an active part in promoting the 3Rs (of reduction, refinement and replacement) in animal experimentation by, for example, preparation of Codes of Practice for the care and use of animals, the provision of technical expertise to others leading initiatives in this area, and participation in numerous awareness raising events.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many licences have been issued for the use of GM *(a)* mice and *(b)* other animals in laboratory testing in each year since 1977. [20919]

Angela Eagle: Project licences for particular programmes of scientific research have only been granted since 1987, when the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 came into force. Prior to this date live animal research was authorised via a personal licence system which did not set out the scientific issues in detail.

Home Office records do not show the subdivision of project licences into those that authorise the use of genetically modified (GM) animals and those which do not. It would not be possible to obtain the requested information by other means without disproportionate effort or with any guarantee of completeness. We can only say that a growing number of GM animals are used as models within some licensed programmes, often in conjunction with other live animal models.

However, since 1988 annual statistics published by the Home Office have contained information on the overall use of GM animals in scientific procedures. The detail provided has increased over the years, and the latest publication entitled 'Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals Great Britain 2000' (Cm 5344) contains a great deal of related data. Table 3 of the publication provides comprehensive data on scientific procedures by species of animal, primary purpose (including breeding) and genetic status. Copies are available in the Library.

Illegal Employment

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department is taking to deal with the illegal employment of those who have entered the country illegally. [21398]

Angela Eagle: A cross-departmental working group has been established under the Chairmanship of Lord Rooker to bring forward proposals to deal with illegal employment. The planned White Paper will provide details.

Prisons

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if bid and tender documents relating to the *(a)* design, *(b)* build and *(c)* management of prisons are published; and if he will make a statement. [21636]

Beverley Hughes: The Invitation to Tender (ITT) issued by the Prison Service at the start of a competition for the design, construction, management and financing of a new prison is freely available. The bids made in response to the ITT are commercial in confidence and therefore not published.

Drug Abstinence Orders

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Drug Abstinence Order pilots began in each pilot area; how many Orders have been *(a)* commenced and *(b)* breached in each area; and if he will make a statement. [21640]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Piloting of the Drug Abstinence Order (DAO) began on 5 November in Staffordshire, Nottingham and Hackney.

As of 6 December, one DAO has been commenced in each pilot area. No DAO has been breached.

The courts have only had this sentencing option available to them for one month, and it is too early to draw any conclusions at this stage. An interim evaluation report is due in spring 2002, copies of which will be placed in the Library.

Extended Court Hours

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements have been made for individuals to be received by local prisons beyond normal hours in pilot areas for extended court hours; and if he will make a statement. [21637]

Beverley Hughes: Pilot projects for extended court sittings are to operate in Manchester and London from April 2002. The Manchester pilot will involve an earlier court start of prisoners arrested overnight, as well as non-custody trial court in the evening, to explore the benefits of access to justice. There is no requirement to extend prison opening hours for this pilot since prisoners will only be committed to custody during normal court hours. In London, the plans for the proposed pilot remain to be finalised.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what are the *(a)* start and *(b)* expected completion dates for extended courts sittings hours pilots; what the planned extended hours are in the pilot areas; and if he will make a statement. [21645]

Mr. Wills: Planning is under way involving all criminal justice partners for pilot studies to find the most cost-effective means of extending court hours. The aim is to test whether extended hours would have an impact on delays, deter local criminals, improve access to justice and help reassure local communities. The pilots are expected to start in the spring of next year and run for approximately six months. In Manchester three remand courts will start at 9 am on Monday to Friday to deal with remand cases more quickly and release more court space in the afternoon. Additional evening trial courts will be available on Tuesday and Thursday sitting from 4 pm to 8 pm at the request of victims and witnesses who would find these times more convenient. The objective for the Manchester pilot is to extend court sitting to support the key criminal justice objectives of access to justice, reducing delay and improving services to victims and witnesses.

The objective in London is to deal immediately with evening arrests to deter criminals and provide reassurance to the public. Plans in this area are not yet finalised.

HMP Wold

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what extent the costs incurred for developing the bids for the running of HMP Wold by each bidder are included in the overall tender; whether this is a factor in the consideration of the bids; and if he will make a statement. [21646]

Beverley Hughes: The Director General of the Prison Service, as Accounting Officer, is responsible for deciding whether to include or exclude the bidding costs in the Prison Service's in-house bid made under a market test of a prison. The Director General decided, following advice from Her Majesty's Treasury, that these costs should be included in the case of Wolds prison on the basis that the equivalent costs incurred by private sector bidders have to be absorbed by the companies concerned.

Anti-drugs Strategy

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average annual administrative cost of the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordination Unit in the Cabinet Office was over the last three years. [22139]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The average annual administrative cost of the United Kingdom Anti-Drugs Co-ordination Unit in the Cabinet Office over the last three years was £813,000.

Assets Recovery Agency

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what financial steps his Department has taken to prepare for the *(a)* setting up and *(b)* running costs of the proposed Assets Recovery Agency. [22136]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* As I explained in my answer to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 4 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 230W, it is currently estimated that the agency will cost £3 million to set up and that its running costs will be £13 million per annum. These estimates are subject to revision as planning for the agency proceeds. Sufficient provision was made in the Spending Review in 2000 to cover the costs of the agency and related expenditure.

Young Offenders (Statistics)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 15 and 16-year-old boys were remanded in custody during *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* January to June 2001, broken down by age and ethnicity, on the last date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [21549]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* Receptions of 15 and 16-year-old boys remanded into custody in prisons in England and Wales in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* January to June 2001, by age and ethnicity, are shown in the table.

	Total	*15 years*	*16 years*
2000			
Total	2,791	1,001	1,790
Asian-Bangladeshi	28	11	17
Asian-Indian	13	8	5
Asian-Pakistani	39	15	24
Asian-Other	59	23	36
Black-African	71	23	48
Black-Caribbean	268	119	149
Black-Other	176	62	114
Chinese	2	2	0
Other	40	13	27
White	2,097	726	1,371
2001[1]			

	Total	15 years	16 years
Total	1,284	417	867
Asian-Bangladeshi	12	5	7
Asian-Indian	5	2	3
Asian-Pakistani	12	1	11
Asian-Other	15	3	12
Black-African	44	14	30
Black-Caribbean	89	30	59
Black-Other	108	37	71
Chinese	0	0	0
Other	24	8	16
White	975	317	658

[1] Data for 2001 cover 1 January 2001 to 30 June 2001 only, and are provisional.

EU (Co-decisions)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the basis upon which the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), made her statement of 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 422, on the powers of co-decision of the European Parliament on some Third Pillar measures. [21866]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* For the role of the European Parliament in relation to Third Pillar measures, I refer the hon. Member to the answer the Minister for Europe gave to the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) on 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1080W. I have, through my officials, written to the editor of *Hansard* making it clear that the applicable procedure is consultation with the European Parliament rather than co-decision. The point I made in my statement of 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 422—that the European Parliament have a role in the development of Third Pillar measures—is absolutely correct. The European Parliament must be consulted on all Conventions, decisions and framework decisions. It has delivered opinions on the European Arrest Warrant and on the Framework Decision on Terrorism. It will be reconsulted on the terrorism framework decision and, if the Council achieves consensus, on the European Arrest Warrant. This demonstrates that the European Parliament does in fact have oversight of Third Pillar matters.

Prison Ships

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison ships are in use; and what plans there are to increase the number. [20960]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The prison service currently operates one prison ship, Weare, which is berthed in Portland Harbour and has been operating successfully as a medium security training establishment since 1997 accommodating 400 men over the age of 25 serving the last nine months of their sentence. There are currently no plans to increase the number of prison ships. However, the prison service is always prepared to consider a wide range of options for safely accommodating the prisoner population when it is rising including the use of floating facilities, but would prefer to give primary consideration to other alternatives which provide better long term accommodation.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Freedom of Information

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when members of the public will have rights to access information held by public authorities as set out in the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and if he will make a statement. [21643]

Mr. Wills: January 2005.

Judges' Lodgings

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1135–36W, on judges' accommodation, what *(a)* sporting, *(b)* recreational and *(c)* leisure facilities are provided in each of the judges' lodgings listed. [21604]

Mr. Wills: The only sporting, recreational and leisure facilities provided at lodgings are as follows:

Birmingham—Snooker room

Leeds—Snooker room

Nottingham—Snooker room

Plawsworth—Tennis court.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1135–36W, on judges accommodation, what assessment has been made of the scope that exists for savings to be obtained by his Department if it accommodates judges on circuit other than in the judges' lodgings listed. [21603]

Mr. Wills: As part of the Triennial Review of Judges Lodgings, a notional comparison was made of the value for money provided by lodgings with alternative forms of accommodation providing appropriate standards of security, privacy and comfort. The review concluded that, taking account of the security requirements and extra environmental benefits offered by lodgings, they continue to provide the best balance between meeting the needs of the judges on the one hand and obtaining fair value for money on the other.

While the review therefore recommended that there be no change to the overall principle that lodgings continue to be the main method by which accommodation is provided, the Lord Chancellor has now decided that it will be taken forward in the context of relevant recommendations of Lord Justice Auld's report which was published on 8 October.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1135–36W, on judges' accommodation, if he will list for each of the judges' lodgings in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01, (i) the capital value and date of last valuation, (ii) the rent paid, (iii) the number of staff employed, their job titles and whether full or part-time, (iv) the cost incurred on (A) security and (B) non-security staff, (v) the amount spent on refreshments, (vi) the running and maintenance costs, not covered by (ii), (iv) or (v) above, (vii) the number of bedrooms for judges accommodation, (viii) the number of days that judges were in residence and (ix) the number of days that one or more of the bedrooms for judges accommodation were empty. [21602]

Mr. Wills: The information requested is contained in the schedules I am placing in the Library, save for the following: the estate was last valued on the 30 June 2000. However data relating to the individual capital values are classified as 'Commercial in Confidence'.

An analysis of the number of staff and their job titles was carried out as part of the Judges Lodgings Review and figures for 1999–2000 are therefore available; to provide a similar analysis for the other years would incur a disproportionate cost. Collation of the information regarding the number of days when bedrooms were empty would also incur a disproportionate cost.

An all-encompassing allowance covers a judge's stay at a lodgings; the amount spent on refreshments is not separated out from this allowance.

Conditional Fee Arrangements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the savings in 2000–01 resulting from the introduction of conditional fee arrangements. [15037]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Conditional fee arrangements were introduced in 1995 and are now widely used in personal injury cases. Because of the availability of conditional fees, personal injury and some other areas of law were taken out of the scope of civil legal aid in April 2000 when the funding code for the community legal service fund was introduced.

We estimate that net the direct savings to legal aid in 2000–01 from taking most personal injury cases out of scope were £32 million. This is based on a comparison with the previous year. It is not possible to quantify separately savings in 2000–01 resulting from the use of conditional fee arrangements in other types of cases which were taken out of the scope.

The figure of £32 million understates savings to legal aid from the introduction of conditional fees. Expenditure on personal injury cases fell substantially in the years before 2000–01 following the introduction of conditional fees, but our records do not enable us to cost this accurately.

Mental Capacity Legislation

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will publish in draft her proposed legislation on mental capacity. [21414]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government are committed to reforming mental incapacity law when parliamentary time allows. If practicable, draft legislation will be published in advance of the Bill's introduction before Parliament.

Crown Leaseholders

Dr. Desmond Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what effect the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill will have on the rights of Crown leaseholders *(a)* to enfranchise and *(b)* to acquire (i) a new and (ii) an extended lease. [22799]

Mr. Wills: Following a statement made on 2 November 1992 by Sir George Young, the Crown authorities gave an undertaking that the Crown would, as landlord and subject to specified conditions, agree to the enfranchisement or extension of residential long leases under the same qualifications and terms which applied by virtue of the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 and the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 to lessees who hold from other landlords.

It was announced on 3 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 175–76W, that the Crown authorities had confirmed that they would apply the undertaking to the provisions of the 1967 Act and the 1993 Act as amended by the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill which was then before Parliament. As was announced by my noble and learned Friend Lord Falconer of Thoroton during the Third Reading of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill, which is before this Parliament, on 19 November 2001, *Official Report, House of Lords,* column 927, the Crown authorities have now confirmed that this also applies to those Acts as amended by the current Bill. This undertaking accordingly supersedes the one given on 3 April 2001.

The full terms of the agreement made by the Crown are as follows:

(1) the Crown as landlord will, subject to the conditions described below, agree to the enfranchisement or extension of residential long leases or the grant of new residential long leases, under the same qualifications and terms which will apply by virtue of the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 and the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 to lessees who hold from other landlords;

(2) enfranchisement will be refused where property stands on land which is held inalienably;

(3) enfranchisement will also be refused where certain circumstances, which only apply to the Crown, obtain. These are:

  (i) where there are particular security considerations (on the advice of the Royal and Diplomatic Protection Group of the Metropolitan police or other security agencies);

  (ii) where properties are in, or intimately connected with, the curtilage of historic Royal Parks and Palaces;

  (iii) where properties, or the areas in which they are situated, have a long historic or particular association with the Crown.

(4) the areas referred to in paragraph (3)(iii) include the Off Islands within the Isles of Scilly (St. Agnes, Bryher, St. Martins and Tresco), the Garrison on St. Mary's, the village of Newton St. Loe and parts of central Dartmoor. The properties referred to in that paragraph include Old Land Revenue and reverter properties and grace and favour properties.

(5) where enfranchisement is refused on the grounds set out in paragraphs (2) and (3), but the tenant would otherwise qualify for enfranchisement, lease extension or the grant of a new lease by analogy with the statutes, the Crown will be prepared to negotiate new leases.

(6) the Crown will follow the valuation bases set out in the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 and the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993.

(7) the Crown will agree to be bound by arbitration where there is dispute over valuation or other terms, except in cases under paragraphs (2) and (3). The Leasehold Valuation Tribunal will be empowered to act as the arbitration body, and will hear such disputes on voluntary reference.

(8) the Crown will be entitled to apply to the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal for approval of a scheme of estate management in the same way as other landlords.

Electronic Conveyancing

Geraint Davies: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will publish the analysis of the responses to the consultation paper, "Electronic Conveyancing: A Draft Order Under Section 8 of the Electronic Communications Act 2000". [22736]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department has today published an analysis of the responses under the title "Electronic Conveyancing: Analysis of the responses to the consultation paper on a draft order under section 8 of the Electronic Communications Act 2000" (CP(R): 05/2001). I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many, and what proportion of letters received by the Department from right hon. and hon. Members between 20 June and 20 July were replied to in *(a)* under 15, *(b)* under 20, *(c)* under 30, *(d)* under 40 and *(e)* over 40 working days. [21995]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament received by ministerial agency chief executives, and Departments and agencies and performance in handling them is published annually by the Cabinet Office. The most recent report, covering 2000, was announced by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office on 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 325W. Between 20 June and 20 July 2001, the volume of correspondence and percentage of replies within each of the specified timescales was, as follows:

Total number of correspondence: 102

Replied to in under 15 days: 41 (40 per cent.)

Replied to in under 20 days: 31 (30 per cent.)

Replied to in under 30 days: 13 (13 per cent.)

Replied to in under 40 days: 12 (12 per cent.)

Replied to in over 40 days: 5 (5 per cent.)

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Portland Cement

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the location of British Portland cement manufacturing plants accredited to the EU eco-management and audit scheme. [20515]

Mr. Meacher: The UK Portland cement manufacturing plants registered under the EU eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS) are: the site of Rugby Cement at Barton on Humber, North Lincolnshire; and sites of Blue Circle Cement UK at Aberthawe, South Glamorgan; Barnstone, Nottinghamshire; Cauldon, Staffordshire; Cookstown, County Tyrone; Dunbar, East Lothian, Hope, Derbyshire; Northfleet, Kent; Weardale, County Durham; and Westbury, Wiltshire.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of the increase in the departmental expenditure limit from 2001–02 to 2002–03 will be accounted for by wage costs. [20671]

Mr. Morley: The level of wage costs within the Department's budget this year and in future years will be dependent upon negotiations. Departmental reports published next spring will give full retrospective costs.

Industrial Action

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 30 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1172W, on industrial action, if she will list the measures her Department will use to ensure that all payments are made within the 16 November to 31 January window. [21359]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) is currently taking a range of measures to ensure that delays on the Arable Area Payments Scheme (AAPS) are kept to the minimum, including:

Encouraging overtime working

Redeploying all RPA staff with relevant experience on to the AAPS

Back filling staff redeployed with casual/agency staff

Increasing the number of staff authorising claims

Using validation reports to determine which claims can best be handled by less experienced staff so that better use is made of those with more experience

Switching staff periodically from casework to payment authorisation

Deploying staff returning from FMD duties.

Institute of Animal Health

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will take steps to recover the public money committed to the Institute of Animal Health study into sheep TSEs. [21425]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The Permanent Secretary for DEFRA is currently considering this issue, in his capacity as the Departmental Accounting Officer.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance was issued to valuers with regard to the calculation of slaughter premium when valuing cattle for slaughter during the foot and mouth outbreak; and what change has been made to that guidance. [14002]

Mr. Morley: The valuation of animals to be compulsorily slaughtered for animal disease control purposes (eg TB and brucellosis) is an established practice, carried out on DEFRA's behalf by independent valuers. The valuation process should take into account any relevant factors which would have a bearing on the real market value of an animal which is due to be slaughtered. Eligibility for slaughter premium can be taken into account if, in the opinion of the valuer, this eligibility would have an impact on market value.

The system for valuing animals for foot and mouth disease was no different from established practice until the option of standard values was introduced on 22 March 2001. Standard values include an element in respect of slaughter premium where relevant. However, in the light of a number of queries on valuations from farmers and industry organisations, it was decided to issue central guidance to valuers which confirmed the Department's position. This was issued on 11 September, as follows:

> "The Department has long considered "the value" to mean the price an animal might reasonably have been expected to achieve on that day from a purchaser at an open livestock market. Any factors relating to the animal that would be taken into account had the animal been sold on the open market should thus be taken into account when assessing its value for the purposes of compensation. Such factors would include (but not be limited to) the species, its breed, age, weight, pedigree and (if appropriate) its state of pregnancy or lactation. If, for certain animals, the price obtainable at market would normally include some element for Beef Slaughter Premium, that should also be considered. If it is considered that such an element should be included, the age of the animal and the amount relating to the premium must be listed next to the animal on the valuation sheet."

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farms included in the foot and mouth cull but not recognised as infected premises have had laboratory tests conducted for the presence of foot and mouth; and what proportion of these recorded positive results. [286]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 November 2001] [pursuant to the reply, 6 November 2001, c. 145–46W]:* The original reply was incorrect, and should have been as follows.

A total of 248 premises currently classified as Slaughter on Suspicion (SOS) and 396 premises currently classified as Dangerous Contacts (DC) had laboratory tests conducted for the presence of foot and mouth disease. Of these, one DC premises returned a positive result.

Notes:

Details of positive DC

This premises was sampled as part of the 3 km cull in Cumbria. Sampling policy for this cull was to sample as many sheep as possible within the constraints of laboratory facilities. Sheep were blood sampled as they were slaughtered. If a sample tested positive all other animals on the premises were culled.

Dangerous Contact (DC) premises classified from 3 km culls only converted to IPs when results from a further stage of laboratory tests called probang returned positive, indicating the presence of live virus.

For this one DC, initial laboratory results came back positive for the presence of antibodies, which indicated exposure to disease, thus its status was recorded as that of a DC. This premises did not have samples submitted for probang testing as all the animals on the premises had already been slaughtered and therefore the tissue samples required for probang could not be taken.

The premises was therefore not converted to IP status because only one of the 32 blood samples, taken initially, returned a positive result. This is insufficient for a change in premises classification.

Source:

DEFRA Disease Control System database as at 17:30 4 December 2001. Figures subject to change as more data become available.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will instruct her Department's offices in Leeds to involve *(a)* local practising veterinarians and *(b)* other organisations with local knowledge to help eradicate foot and mouth disease. [20823]

Mr. Morley: The Leeds Disease Control Centre (DCC) has, from the onset of foot and mouth disease, involved and consulted with local veterinarians and other stakeholder organisations in an effort to promote an integrated approach to eradicating the disease. The Leeds DCC appointed a highly experienced local veterinarian—from the Thirsk area—as Liaison Officer for the Local Veterinary Inspectors, three local farmers as National Farmers Union Liaison Officers, an industrial Liaison Officer and local authority personnel to provide additional links with local communities. Regular meetings and consultation with local stakeholders have provided opportunities for the exchange of information and expertise.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the lines of communication between her Department and the farming community in Thirsk during the foot and mouth outbreak. [20826]

Mr. Morley: The Leeds Disease Control Centre has endeavoured to maintain good relations with the Thirsk farming community, both directly and through the National Farmers Union and other organisations, since the initial outbreak in the Thirsk area on 5 July. The importance of the strict biosecurity enforcement measures in the Thirsk 'Restricted Infected Area' (RIA), introduced on 30 July, which were designed to halt the spread of the disease made the need for good communications particularly important. The improvement in the biosecurity arrangements of farmers and others while the RIA was in place, as measured by the reduction in infringements of the biosecurity requirements, suggests that key messages were communicated effectively.

Fishing Industry

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how the negotiating position of the UK delegation to the December EC Fisheries Council will be determined. [21868]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The position of the UK delegation to the December Fisheries Council is determined by taking account of the scientific advice from ICES and in consultation with the industry as well as my ministerial colleagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the relative importance of the fishing industry to *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the rest of the UK. [21870]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The fishing industry is important to all parts of the UK.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who will lead the UK delegation to the EC Fisheries Council in December. [21867]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* I will lead the UK delegation to the Fisheries Council in December.

Correspondence

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of 18 July from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire concerning dormant quarries in the Peak District National Park. [17963]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* The hon. Member's letter of 18 July has been transferred to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for response.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she will reply to the letter of 8 October from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire on the export of sheep and sheep meat to continental Europe; [21860]

(2) when she will reply to the letter of 8 October from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire on the export of sheep and sheep meat to continental Europe. [21472]

Mr. Morley: I replied to the letter from the hon. Member on 6 December 2001.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will ensure that outstanding correspondence with her Department will receive a reply by 19 December. [21964]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to all Members of Parliament on 14 November explaining the scale of the current problems faced by the Correspondence Section and setting out the mechanisms put in place to overcome these problems. However we shall certainly endeavour to respond to all the hon. Member's current outstanding correspondence by 19 December.

Rural White Paper

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost is of each research project to determine measures for the headline indicators as set out in the Rural White Paper is. [19235]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* A number of research projects contribute to determining measures for the headline indicators as set out in the Rural White Paper. A consolidated list is being developed and will be placed in the Library. I will write to the hon. Member when it is available.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research she has commissioned concerning *(a)* the Rural White Paper indicator measures and *(b)* other indicator measures for her Department; and when this research will be made available. [19140]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 30 November 2001]:* A number of research projects have been commissioned on indicator measures following publication of "A Better Quality of Life: A Strategy for Sustainable Development in the United Kingdom", "Towards Sustainable Agriculture—A Pilot Set of Indicators" and the Rural White Paper. A consolidated list is being developed and will be placed in the Library. I will write to the hon. Member when it is available.

Argentinean Meat

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what imports of Argentinean meat have entered the UK food chain in the last 12 months; if the meat is from vaccinated sources; and if it is organically produced. [20002]

Mr. Morley: The table at Annexe A shows the amount of meat of foot and mouth disease susceptible species imported into the UK during the last 12 months for which statistics are available. There is no guarantee that all this meat entered the UK food chain as some meat may be re-exported.

The importation into the UK of fresh meat derived from foot and mouth disease susceptible animals originating in Argentina is currently prohibited. Prior to the prohibition, meat from vaccinated animals could be imported from Argentina, but had to be deboned and fully matured so as to remove any risk of the live foot and mouth disease virus being present.

According to an estimate in the Soil Association Organic Food and Farming report 2001 some 45 per cent. of organic meat sold in the UK is imported. It is therefore possible that some meat from organic production has been imported from Argentina. Customs import figures are not available for organic meat from Argentina because organic products are not distinguishable from conventional products in the data collected by Customs.

Annexe A: UK imports of meat and meat products from Argentina (October 2000 to September 2001)

Tonnes

Type/product	*October to December 2000*	*January to September 2001*	*October 2000 to September 2001 (total)*
Beef/beef product			
Bovine carcase meat	287	1,022	1,308
Bovine meat and offal preparations	1,609	3,392	5,001
Bovine offal	157	154	311
Beef/beef product total	2,053	4,568	6,620
Sheepmeat			
Lamb	108	98	206
Mutton	—	9	9
Sheep and Goat edible offal, frozen	—	34	34
Sheepmeat total	108	141	248

Livestock Markets

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the conditions which need to be fulfilled to allow the reopening of livestock markets. [19740]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* Some livestock markets have re-opened in Scotland reflecting the lower number of FMD cases there. A decision to re-open livestock markets in England and Wales will be made in the light of scientific and veterinary advice on progress with the eradication of foot and mouth disease. It is not possible to give a precise date but it is expected to be in the early part of 2002, provided there are no further outbreaks.

The Department has held a number of meetings with representatives of the Livestock Auctioneers Association to discuss the conditions required for the re-opening of markets, particularly as regards biodiversity. A number of ideas were discussed and these are now being reviewed by my Department. We will continue to consult fully with the LAA on this very important matter and hope to announce the outcome before Christmas.

Sugar Beet Industry

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to promote the viability of the British sugar beet industry. [20754]

Mr. Morley: Support for the sugar beet industry is regulated under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). A revised Sugar Regime under the CAP was agreed at the May 2001 Agriculture Council and runs for five years until 1 July 2006, with a review in the early part of 2003. We continue to believe that further substantive reform is needed to take account of trade liberalisation resulting from the "Everything But Arms" agreement and to put the industry on a more sustainable basis for the future.

National Forest Company

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the financial management and policy review of the National Forest Company. [21877]

Mr. Morley: We hope to be in a position to do so in the next few months.

Fluvial Trent Strategy

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made on the Fluvial Trent Strategy; and if she will make a statement. [21450]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency will be developing a strategy for the fluvial Trent over the next 18 months. I understand that the agency are already in discussions with consultants about preparing the strategy and plan to confirm their appointment later this month. The completed strategy will inform the agency's plans for flood management between Stoke-on-Trent and Newark.

Administration Costs

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of her Department's budget in 2001–02 is spent on administration costs; and if she will make a statement. [21677]

Mr. Morley: Administration costs currently make up 19 per cent. of the Department's expenditure limit for 2001–02.

Post-Weaning Multisystemic Wasting Syndrome

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she will take to compensate farmers whose pigs have been infected by Post-Weaning Multisystemic Wasting Syndrome. [20780]

Mr. Morley: We have no plans to compensate farmers for loss of pigs infected by Post-Weaning Multisystemic Wasting Syndrome (PWMS) or Porcine Dermatitis Nephropathy Syndrome (PDNS). The disease is not notifiable. I met representatives of the pig industry in October to discuss proposals for control measures and research. The Department is taking the following action:

Extensive collaboration and information exchange with other organisations both within the United Kingdom and with other countries;

Raising awareness about these diseases and providing technical assistance to private veterinary surgeons in diagnosing and investigating disease incidents;

Publication of results of three telephone surveys to assess the severity and extent of the diseases. A fourth survey is planned for later this year;

Publication of the results of a case control study to identify risk factors in the control of the diseases;

Research to identify and characterise agents involved. Wider international research collaboration is being pursued.

Illegal Meat Imports

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she has taken to tighten security at *(a)* airports and *(b)* sea ports to ensure that illegal meat is not smuggled into the UK. [20778]

Mr. Morley: Checks on meat imported at airports and sea ports is the responsibility of the local authority in which the port or sea port is situated. DEFRA officials are co-ordinating a number of initiatives, involving interested Government Departments and local authority enforcement bodies, aimed at ensuring that rules for importing animal products are enforced effectively and efficiently. We have taken action to improve publicity to travellers about import rules, to improve the collection and analysis of information about illegal imports and to use that information to better target enforcement activity. We are keeping these measures under constant review and we are looking at a wide range of other options for improvements, including, for example, the use of sniffer dogs, X-ray machines, on-the-spot-fines and changes to administrative structures.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she has taken to create a properly funded single regulatory body to apply best international practice at UK sea and airports to protect humans and animals from smuggled contaminated meats. [20779]

Mr. Morley: None. No decision has been taken that a single regulatory body is the best way to enforce import controls.

Animal Health Bill

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will ensure *(a)* that the Animal Health Bill will not impose a regulatory burden on the farming community and *(b)* that there will be a more rapid response to future outbreaks of foot and mouth disease. [20825]

Mr. Morley: *(a)* The foot and mouth disease provisions of the Animal Health Bill will not impose any additional burden on those farm businesses which are meeting current requirements, as it does not introduce any new obligations. In fact quicker containment and eradication of the disease, for which the powers contained in the Bill would provide, would indirectly benefit all farmers, other sectors of the rural economy and the taxpayer in general.

Similarly, the scrapie provisions of the Bill would not directly impose additional regulatory burden or costs on the industry. However, if the relevant enabling powers were applied, there would be a minimal increase in the level of regulatory burden and cost associated with compliance. The Bill provides powers to compensate for losses suffered or costs incurred as a result of the exercise of these powers.

(b) If there were to be a resurgence or future outbreak of foot and mouth disease the measures in the Bill provide powers to contain the disease more effectively and eradicate it more quickly. The Bill will enable us to limit the spread of disease more effectively than has been possible to date, and thereby to protect the farming community in general from further damage.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 12 December 2001

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gibraltar

Mr. Dennis Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when *(a)* he, *(b)* his Ministers and *(c)* his officials next plan to meet the Chief Minister of Gibraltar. [21600]

Peter Hain: Whenever this is mutually convenient.

Ministers are always ready to meet the Chief Minister. I had hoped that he would meet me while he was in London last month. The Secretary of State hopes to visit Gibraltar early in 2002. The Governor of Gibraltar meets the Chief Minister on a regular basis.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what alternatives to the Brussels Process are under consideration to ensure participation in talks on the future status of Gibraltar by the Government of Gibraltar. [21653]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to my statement in Westminster Hall on 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 88–92WH. The Government believe that talks under the Brussels Process represent the best way to ensure a more secure, stable and prosperous future for the people of Gibraltar.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the US Government on the future status of Gibraltar. [21655]

Peter Hain: None.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his proposals to consult the people of Gibraltar consequent on the completion of negotiations between Spain and the United Kingdom in relation to the terms whereby the consultative process shall be concluded by a referendum. [20537]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the Spanish Foreign Minister announced following their meeting held in Barcelona on 20 November, the British and Spanish Governments aim to reach by the summer of next year an agreement covering all outstanding issues between them over Gibraltar, including those of co-operation and sovereignty. A copy of the press communiqué has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Should a comprehensive agreement affecting sovereignty emerge from these Brussels Process discussions, HMG are committed to asserting the wishes of the people of Gibraltar, as stated in the 1969 Order in Council establishing the Gibraltar Constitution. Since the result of such a referendum could trigger the introduction of a primary legislation in the UK, HMG will expect to oversee the organisation and timing of any such referendum, in consultation with the Government of Gibraltar.

Georgia

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Government of Georgia concerning Russian aerial bombardment of Georgian territory in November. [22166]

Peter Hain: On 28 November the Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister briefed the British and other EU ambassadors about reported aerial bombardment in Georgia on 27 and 28 November. The Georgian embassy in London has also contacted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on this matter.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what inquiries his Department has made into allegations by the Government of Georgia that Russian aircraft bombarded the Pankisi Gorge. [22167]

Peter Hain: We raised the matter with the Russian Government in Moscow on 4 and 7 December, and with the Georgian Government on 6 December. The Russian and Georgian Presidents have agreed to establish a joint commission to investigate the incident.

Chechnya

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on Russian military action against Chechens located on the territory of other sovereign states of the former Soviet Union. [22168]

Peter Hain: We recognise that groups of Chechen fighters located in other states in the former Soviet Union pose a threat to regional security. But Russia must respect the territorial integrity of other sovereign states and not take unilateral military action. We have told the Russians that to do so would be unacceptable and would not solve Russia's security problems or promote regional stability.

Afghanistan

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department's policy is on the post-conflict construction of strategic oil pipelines across Afghanistan. [22171]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government support multiple pipelines to create more secure, diverse energy markets, but decisions on individual pipelines are a matter for commercial judgment.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the policy of creating a stable, inclusive Government in Afghanistan; and what the British contribution to this effort will be. [21881]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have played an important role in encouraging the interested parties to agree at the Bonn Conference on 5 December, to a power-sharing government. We believe that this is the first step towards a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has had a number of conversations with key figures to this end, the British Office in Kabul has engaged directly with United Front leaders, and a senior diplomat, Robert Cooper, attended the Bonn Conference. The Royal Air Force facilitated the travel of some of the delegates from Kabul.

Council of Ministers

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how long in advance he receives agendas for meetings of the EU Council of Ministers. [21963]

Peter Hain: In accordance with the Council's rules of procedure, provisional agendas are drawn up by the presidency and sent to other members of the Council and the Commission at least 14 days before the beginning of each meeting of the Council of Ministers.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in 2001 towards meeting the Public Service Agreement target of contributing to the Government's target to reduce Civil Service sickness absence rates. [22587]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is committed to reducing sickness absence by 20 per cent. (to an average of 6.5 days) by 2001. This figure was set against the 1998 baseline figure of an average of eight days. We now have a new reporting system in place, which allows us to monitor sickness absence in detail, and effectively manage individual cases. Figures for 2001 have not yet been collated, but early indications are that we are on course to meet the 2001 target.

Departmental Staff (Absence)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many days were lost due to sickness absence in the Department in each of the last four years. [21265]

Mr. Bradshaw: The following is the information:

Average number of days sickness absence per staff year

Year	*Days*
1997	[1]8.9
1998	[1]8.0
1999	[2]n/a
2000	6.1

[1] Figures for 1997 to 1998 have been uplifted to account for different recording practices in different parts of the Department and its overseas Posts. These figures are based on the average number of days, including weekends, whereas later figures are based on the average number of working days only.

[2] Figures for 1999 could be provided only at disproportionate cost: the method of recording changed part way through 1999.

We now have a new reporting system in place, which allows us to monitor sickness in detail and effectively manage individual cases. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is committed to reducing sickness absence by 20 per cent. (to an average of 6.5 days) by 2001 and by 30 per cent. (5.6 days) by 2003. These figures were set against the 1998 baseline figure of eight days. Early indications are that we are on course to meet these targets.

WALES

EU Structural Funds

9. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the First Secretary about the role of EU structural funding in the National Assembly's economic development plan. [20045]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the First Secretary regularly to discuss economic development in Wales, among other issues.

Training

10. **Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with other Government Departments and the First Secretary of the National Assembly on measures to improve access to training in Wales. [20046]

26. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with other Government Departments and the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales about measures to improve access to training in Wales. [20063]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I have regular meetings with ministerial and Assembly colleagues to discuss a range of issues.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced new measures in the Budget to improve access to training and enable employees to attain basic and level 2 skills.

In addition, the National Assembly is committed to supporting and developing access to learning in Wales.

Working Families Tax Credit

11. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many households in Wales have benefited from the working families tax credit; and if he will make a statement. [20048]

Mr. Touhig: The Inland Revenue estimates that 76,000 families were receiving this benefit at 31 May 2001.

Innovation and Enterprise

12. **Mr. Havard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with other Government Ministers and the First Secretary of the National Assembly about steps to promote innovation and enterprise in Wales. [20049]

27. **Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with other Ministers and the First Secretary of the National Assembly about steps to promote innovation and enterprise in Wales. [20064]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular meetings with ministerial colleagues in Government and with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales, to discuss a range of issues, including innovation and enterprise.

The Chancellor's recent pre-Budget report announced a number of measures which build on existing programmes to promote innovation and enterprise in Wales and across the UK. These include the extension of research and development tax credits to all UK companies and support for small businesses, which will benefit 140,000 small and medium enterprises in Wales.

Manufacturing

13. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussion he has had with the First Secretary on prospects for manufacturing growth through inward investment in Wales. [20050]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet the First Secretary regularly to discuss a range of issues including manufacturing and inward investment in Wales.

Barnett Formula

14. **David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary about the method of calculating the Barnett formula. [20051]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None.

Television Broadcasting

15. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales regarding the availability of free-to-air television programming throughout the whole of Wales. [20052]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I have discussed the availability of free-to-air television with Assembly Ministers.

I am aware that four channels are receivable by analogue terrestrial means from Welsh transmitters (BBC One Wales; BBC Two Wales; HTV Wales; S4C). About 98 per cent. of the population can receive these services. Alternatively, many households near the English border can receive services from England, including Channel 4 and Channel 5 (as well as English regional variants of the other channels). About 40 per cent. of the population live in areas where signals from England are being received. Two aerials are generally required in order to receive both Welsh and English signals clearly.

Statutory Instruments

16. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many statutory instruments dealing with Welsh matters have been passed by Committees of the House since devolution became effective; and if he will make a statement. [20053]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the responses I gave him at the Westminster Hall adjournment debate on 5 December 2001.

Welsh Language

17. **Hywel Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Welsh Language Board regarding the use of the Welsh language by Westminster Government Departments and UK-level public bodies when providing services to people in Wales. [20054]

Mr. Touhig: None. This is a matter for the Welsh Language Board which is a National Assembly for Wales Sponsored Public Body.

18. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has made to the National Assembly for Wales regarding its review of the future of the Welsh language. [20055]

Mr. Touhig: This is a review by the Culture Committee of the Assembly. It is a matter for that Committee to conduct its investigation as appropriate, and so far there has been no approach to this office.

Waiting Lists

20. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the Health Secretary of the National Assembly regarding the length of waiting lists in Welsh hospitals. [20057]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I meet regularly with the National Assembly First Secretary and Health Minister to discuss a range of issues including the length of waiting lists.

Child Poverty

21. **Mr. Caton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with other Government Departments about progress made in tackling child poverty in Wales. [20058]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I have regular meetings with ministerial colleagues to discuss a range of issues including matters that affect children in Wales.

The Government are tackling the causes of poverty, not just the symptoms to ensure all children are given the best start in life. They have pledged to halve child poverty by 2010 and end it by 2020.

The National Assembly is seeking to complement UK measures with a range of polices and programmes designed to meet the specific circumstances and priorities of Wales.

Objective 1 Funding

22. **Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales on the failure of Blaenau Gwent CBC to obtain objective 1 funding for the conversion of the Metropole theatre, Abertillery. [20059]

Mr. Touhig: The administration of structural fund programmes in Wales and individual project approvals under those programmes are matters for the National Assembly for Wales and its executive agency, the Welsh European Funding Office.

Port Talbot Steelworks

23. **Harry Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary about workers' safety at Port Talbot steelworks. [20060]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I regularly meet the First Secretary to discuss a wide range of issues, including the steel industry in Wales.

A single, combined investigation led by the Health and Safety Executive and also involving the police and Corus is currently under way. This combined approach will greatly reduce the pressure on those giving evidence, as their accounts will be taken by just one investigator.

Corus has stated that the remainder of the Port Talbot plant is operating normally.

Pensioner Poverty

24. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with other Government Departments about progress made by the Government in reducing pensioner poverty in Wales. [20061]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I regularly meet ministerial colleagues to discuss a range of issues including matters that affect pensioners in Wales.

The UK Government are committed to developing policies which enable pensioners to share in the country's rising prosperity and which tackle pensioner poverty. New measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will benefit thousands of pensioners in Wales.

The National Assembly is seeking to complement UK measures with a range of polices and programmes to tackle pensioner poverty in Wales.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions has he had with other Government departments about progress made by the Government in reducing pensioner poverty in Wales. [20036]

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with other Government Departments about progress made by the Government in reducing pensioner poverty in Wales. [20041]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I regularly meet ministerial colleagues to discuss a range of issues including matters that affect pensioners in Wales.

The UK Government are committed to developing policies which enable pensioners to share in the country's rising prosperity and which tackle pensioner poverty. New measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will benefit thousands of pensioners in Wales.

The National Assembly is seeking to complement UK measures with a range of polices and programmes to tackle pensioner poverty in Wales.

Inward Investment

25. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to meet small business leaders to discuss inward investment in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [20062]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have regular meetings with business leaders in Wales to discuss a range of issues affecting their businesses.

Inward investment makes a significant contribution to the Welsh economy by bringing in new products, new skills and new ideas. Since December 2000, Wales has attracted capital investment of £633 million, promising 5,346 new jobs and the safeguarding of 4,335 existing jobs.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

28. **Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many antisocial behaviour orders have been made in Wales. [20065]

Mr. Touhig: Four. The Minister of State with responsibility for crime reduction, policing and community safety, my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), recently participated in a Wales-wide seminar to promote ASBOs. I anticipate that this well attended event will result in greater exchange of best practice and lead to an increase in the number of ASBOs being applied for in Wales.

PRIME MINISTER

Totnes

Q11. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make an official visit to Totnes. [20077]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans at present to do so.

Senior Civil Service Appointments

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what new conditions an applicant will be required to agree to before appointment as *(a)* head of the Civil Service and *(b)* Cabinet Secretary. [20399]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 626W.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the number of *(a)* civilians and *(b)* members of military organisations killed in Afghanistan in the last two months; [22130]

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many bombing raids in Afghanistan did not hit their intended targets; and how many civilians he estimates have been *(a)* killed and *(b)* wounded by these raids. [21880]

Mr. Hoon: The coalition has from the outset of the campaign gone to very great lengths to minimise the risks to civilians from air strikes, which have been conducted against exclusively military targets. Although extensive battle damage assessment is routinely conducted after each strike, we cannot know for sure how many bombing raids may not have hit their intended targets, nor how many civilian casualties may have been caused as a result. While we investigate all such claims carefully, most cannot be verified.

War Pensions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many armed forces personnel applications for a war pension from the War Pension Agency are outstanding; and if he will make a statement. [22198]

Dr. Moonie: As at 30 November 2001, there were 4,549 applications for a war pension outstanding from ex-services personnel.

Prisoners of War (Far East)

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason the definition of British as it applies to civilian former prisoners of the Japanese differs from that applied to armed forces personnel. [22309]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* Under the former Far East prisoners ex-gratia payment scheme, the eligibility criteria for former service personnel are based upon the unit in which an individual was serving. Hence the main eligibility criterion is to have been taken as a prisoner of war while serving with our armed forces. In addition, certain other former military personnel who were taken as prisoners of war while serving in the colonial forces, the old Indian Army, or the Burmese armed forces and who received compensation in the 1950s under UK auspices under Article 16 of the Peace Treaty with Japan are also eligible for the scheme.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what estimate he has made of the additional cost of extending his scheme of ex gratia payments to all surviving British passport holders and their spouses who were interned by the Japanese; [20321]

(2) what estimate he has made of the numbers of surviving civilian internees of the Japanese and their spouses who do not qualify for payments under the rules of his scheme. [20322]

Dr. Moonie: No estimate has been made of the number of surviving civilians who were interned by the Japanese during the Second World War or of the number of them who were British passport holders at that time. We believe that the available data are too poor to be able to make such estimates.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Members' Pensions

Chris Grayling: To ask the President of the Council what provisions for hon. Members' pensions were in place in 1974; and what provisions there were in relation to former members of the armed forces in the House. [21491]

Mr. Robin Cook: Pension provision for hon. Members is made from the Parliamentary Contribution Pension Fund, established by the Ministerial Salaries and Members' Pension Act 1965. The provisions in place for hon. Members' pensions in 1974 were made under the Parliamentary and other Pensions Act 1972. This provided for pensions based on one-sixtieth of the final year's salary for each year of reckonable service on completion of a minimum of four years reckonable service when they retired on or after age 65. The Act also provided for a death in service lump sum, typically of one year's pay. Members were required to pay contributions of 5 per cent. of pay.

No special provisions are made for former members of the armed forces in the House.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Fuel Poverty Strategy

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment her Department has made of the impact of the Draft Wireless Telegraphy (Control of Material Substances Forming Part of the Telecommunications System) Regulation 2001 on the Government's fuel poverty strategy. [22357]

Mr. Alexander: Representations were received from manufacturers of energy saving devices operated by power line technology as part of the Regulatory Impact Assessment consultations in the summer of 2000.

Powerline Technology Industry

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment her Department has made of the impact of the draft Wireless Telegraphy (Control of Material Substances forming part of the Telecommunications System) Regulation 2001 on the viability of the UK powerline technology industry. [22359]

Mr. Alexander: The Department undertook widespread consultations on this matter in the summer of 2000. All representations have been taken into account in developing the Government's policy on this issue.

Micro-CHP Boiler Systems

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she has prepared a regulatory impact assessment on the impact of the draft Wireless Telegraphy (Control of Material Substances forming part of the Telecommunications System) Regulation 2001 on the introduction of micro-CHP boiler systems to the UK market. [22360]

Mr. Alexander: No representations about such boiler systems were received during consultations for the regulatory impact assessment carried out in summer 2000.

Radio Interference

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many complaints her Department has received about radio interference from products compliant with standard EN50065–1. [22274]

Mr. Alexander: There are none recorded.

Unsolicited E-mail

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research she has undertaken into systems that allow people to opt out from receiving unsolicited commercial e-mail; and what evaluation she has made of their effectiveness. [20831]

Mr. Alexander: In response to proposed or adopted European legislation, my Department has consulted publicly on the effective regulation of unsolicited commercial e-mail on a number of occasions over the last few years. This consultation has covered existing and potential self-regulatory, co-regulatory and statutory approaches towards schemes for both opting in and opting out, but has not produced a consistent consensus in favour of one solution over another.

Employment Tribunals (Buckingham)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employment tribunal cases there were in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997; and what was the total level of compensation paid. [22644]

Alan Johnson: It is not possible to tell from the database of the Employment Tribunals Service how many employment tribunal cases there were in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997, nor the respective total level of compensation paid.

Fireworks

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the effectiveness of the voluntary code agreement regarding the sale of fireworks. [21475]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friends the Members for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) and for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 305–06W.

Manufacturing Industries

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what level of Government financial assistance is paid to manufacturing industries in *(a)* Worcestershire and *(b)* Herefordshire. [20655]

Alan Johnson: Businesses in Worcestershire and Herefordshire can be eligible for assistance under the smart scheme as follows:

All SMEs (fewer than 250 employees)

Exceptional Projects—up to 30 per cent. of eligible project costs to a maximum of £450,000.

Development Projects—30 per cent. of eligible project costs to a maximum of £150,000.

Technology Reviews—up to a maximum of £2,500.

Technology Studies—up to a maximum [illegible],000.

Small Enterprises (fewer than 50 employees)

Feasibility Studies—75 per cent. of eligible project costs to a maximum of £45,000.

Small Enterprises (fewer than 10 employees)

Micro Projects—50 per cent. of eligible project costs up to a maximum of £10,000.

SME businesses in certain local authority wards in Herefordshire and Worcestershire may be eligible under the enterprise grant scheme for grants of up to £75,000 or 15 per cent. of eligible project costs for projects involving fixed capital expenditure of up to £500,000.

Herefordshire

Backbury; Bateman; Berrington; Bircher; Border; Bringsty; Broad Oak; Bromyard; Burghill; Burmarsh; Butterley; Castle; Cradley; Creden Hill; Dinmore Hill; Doward; Eardisley; Fownhope; Frome; Frome Vale; Garron; Golden Cross; Golden Valley; Gorsley; Hagley; Hampton Court; Harewood End; Hatfield; Hegdon; Hergest; Hollington; Hope End; Kingsland; Kingsthorne; Kington Town; Leadon Vale; Ledbury; Ledbury Ward (DET NO1); Leintwardine; Leominster North; Leominster East; Leominster South; Lyonshall with Titley; Mansel; Marcle Ridge; Merbach; Mortimer; Olchon; Old Gore; Pembridge; Penyard; Pontrilas; Pyons with Birley; Ross-on-Wye East; Ross-on-Wye West; Stoney Street; Thinghill; Tram Inn; Upton; Walford; Weobley; Whitfield; Wilton; Wye.

Worcestershire

Bayton and Mamble; Cofton Hackett; Kyre Vale; Lindridge; Martley; Temeside; Tenbury Town; Uffdown; Vale of the Teme.

In addition, businesses in the wards of Cofton Hackett and Uffdown in Worcestershire may be eligible under the regional selective assistance scheme for grants of up to 20 per cent. of eligible project costs for projects involving eligible costs of more than £500,000. The minimum level of grant is £75,000. SMEs may be eligible for a supplement to the 20 per cent. aid ceiling.

Since 1 April 2000 to date grant has been paid to businesses in Herefordshire and Worcestershire as follows:

	£
Smart	657,000
Enterprise grant	32,000
RSA	232,000

Food Supplements Directive

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the implications for trade with *(a)* the United States of America and *(b)* other non-European Union countries of the forthcoming EU food supplements directive. [21692]

Nigel Griffiths: Officials have looked into the trade implications of the forthcoming EU food supplements directive. In negotiations the Government argued for a safety based approach to regulation of these products that ensured any adverse impact on trade was kept to a minimum. We have received no adverse comments from the US or other non-EU countries about the trade implications of the directive.

Mobile Phones (VAT)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the rates of VAT are in each EU member state on mobile phone *(a)* handsets and *(b)* services. [21555]

Mr. Alexander: Information on the topic is published by the European Commission in a document entitled "VAT Rates Applied in the Member States of the European Community" (DOC/2905/2001), a copy of which is available in the Libraries of the House.

Ethnic Minority Business Forum

Mr. Lammy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she has responded to the Ethnic Minority Business Forum's report to her of 18 September. [23033]

Nigel Griffiths: I have today put a copy of my response to the Ethnic Minority Business Forum's report in the Library of the House.

The Government welcome the report and look forward to working with the Ethnic Minority Business Forum to ensure that our policies and business support address the needs of ethnic minority businesses.

Sellafield

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many person days per annum safeguards inspectors from *(a)* Euratom and *(b)* the International Atomic Energy Agency have spent at Sellafield since December 1993; if she will list the facilities inspected; and if she will list the reports arising from the application of safeguards at Sellafield over this time [19886]

Mr. Wilson: The safeguards provisions of the Euratom Treaty apply to all civil material in the UK and the Euratom Safeguards Office therefore inspects all parts of the BNFL Sellafield facility where such material is located. Since 1994 these inspections have involved between 1,400 and 1,750 person days of inspection each year. Reports on Euratom Safeguards Office activities are published periodically by the European Commission, most recently in July of this year (report reference COM(2001)436 final, accessible at the website of the European Parliament—Department of Trade and Industry Explanatory Memorandum 11669–01 refers).

In addition to ongoing Euratom Safeguards Office inspections, civil material at UK nuclear facilities is subject to the terms of the tripartite safeguards agreement between the UK, Euratom and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), under which the IAEA designates certain civil UK nuclear facilities, or parts of them, for inspection. In the period in question, the IAEA has chosen to inspect the following parts of the BNFL Sellafield facility: the THORP Fuel Receipt and Storage area, the Special Nuclear Materials Store 9, the Oxide Fuel Storage Ponds, and the THORP Plutonium Store. The number of person days of inspection effort involved in these inspections has reduced from some 290 per year in 1994 to about 190 in 2000—reflecting moves by the IAEA to focus its efforts on the facility's major plutonium storage areas. Reporting on IAEA safeguards activities is included in the IAEA's Annual Reports (accessible at the IAEA's website).

Venture Capital Funds

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 29 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 1039–40W, on venture capital funds (RDAs), which companies SEEDA has invested in using the regional venture capital funds. [22330]

Alan Johnson: Regional Venture Capital Funds (RVCFs) are being established to ensure that appropriate small businesses in each of the English regions are able to access equity based finance in amounts below £500,000 and to demonstrate to institutional investors that robust returns can be made in this sector. All RVCFs will be commercially focused and experienced private sector fund managers will make all investment decisions.

Following a competitive bidding process a SEEDA sponsored proposal to establish a fund in the south-east region received a conditional offer of support from the Small Business Service (SBS). The fund in the SEEDA region is expected to begin investing in spring 2002.

Gender Pay Gap

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment she has made of the gender pay gap in the private sector for women in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employment; [21780]

(2) if she will publish the most recent figures to show women's mean hourly earnings as a proportion of men's broken down by occupation. [21777]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Vernon Coaker, dated 12 December 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the earnings of women compared to men. (21777, 21780).

The New Earnings Survey (NES) can provide hourly earnings data for full-time and part-time employees, broken down by gender. The release of NES data is restricted to figures that are derived from a sufficiently large sample of employees, and have an acceptable level of accuracy. In the attached table, data has been provided for average hourly earnings for males and females and female earnings as a proportion of male earnings by occupation and for the private sector. These are based on the 2000 NES, the latest survey for which data are available.

Average hourly earnings[1] of men and women and women's hourly earnings as a proportion of men's hourly earnings by occupation and in the private sector by full-time and part-time[2]

	Men (£)	*Women (£)*	*Proportion*
All occupations[3]	11.26	9.13	0.81
Managers and administrators	17.80	12.83	0.72
Professional occupations	16.44	14.98	0.91
Associate professional and technical occupations	13.78	10.96	0.80
Clerical and secretarial occupations	7.47	7.28	0.97
Craft and related occupations	8.41	6.13	0.73
Personal and protective service occupations	8.60	6.19	0.72
Sales occupations	9.04	6.45	0.71
Plant and machine operatives	7.43	5.83	0.78
Other occupations	6.41	5.22	0.81
Private sector			
Full-time	11.16	8.50	0.76
Part-time	7,14	6.09	0.85

[1] Earnings are for employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey period was unaffected by absence and exclude overtime.

[2] Great Britain, April 2000, not seasonally adjusted.

[3] The earnings data by occupation is for full-time employees only.

Source:

New Earnings Survey.

Enterprise Grant Areas

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will publish the results of the review of enterprise grant areas; and if she will make a statement. [21783]

Nigel Griffiths: The enterprise grant scheme is being considered as part of the wider review of DTI business support. Any further changes to the geographical coverage of the scheme will not be decided until after the end of the wider review.

Standing Committee on Regional Affairs

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will table a motion under Standing Order No. 117(6) to refer *(a)* the progress made by regional development agencies in fulfilling their objects, *(b)* the role of regional chambers in scrutinising RDAs, *(c)* the contribution made by RDAs in addressing strategic transport issues, *(d)* the progression made with economic regeneration of EU Objective 1 regions, *(e)* the issues and concerns raised about the forthcoming Regional White Paper and *(f)* other matters, to the Standing Committee on Regional Affairs. [19266]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

A motion was agreed by the House on 5 December that the Committee meet to discuss 'Regional Governance in England' on 18 December.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Railtrack

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 276W, on Railtrack, if he will place in the Library advice he has received on contingency plans if the Company Limited by Guarantee fails to achieve a credit rating of A/A2. [19190]

Mr. Jamieson: The credit rating of the proposed Company Limited by Guarantee would depend upon its structure and financial framework.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total length of track on the rail network which has been replaced was *(a)* in each month between January 2000 and November 2001 and *(b)* in each year between 1990 to 2001 (i) in total, (ii) subdivided by zonal area and (iii) subdivided by train operating company area. [21039]

Mr. Jamieson: The following table from Railtrack shows for each calendar year between 1990 and 2000, the annual totals of rails replaced nationally and by Railtrack Zone. I understand that data are not available according to calendar month or train operating company area.

Miles of rails replaced per year by Railtrack Zone and nationally

Zone	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Southern	57.6	53.6	85.2	55.3	31.5	32.1	49.2	54.3	45.4	21.3	31.4
Great Western	19.1	29.1	28.4	47.7	22.6	12.7	32.7	30.1	29.2	48.2	36.7
Midlands	36.7	24.4	12.8	28.0	23.4	19.6	16.8	32.2	39.1	31.2	31.0
North West	50.3	47.0	43.3	21.8	23.3	10.4	42.5	11.1	19.0	15.8	13.7
London North Eastern	52.0	18.5	28.2	38.6	35.6	19.3	26.9	36.0	28.5	39.7	81.3
East Anglia	12.6	11.5	13.9	7.4	11.9	10.4	17.9	16.9	20.3	23.3	24.9
Scotland	8.4	5.3	11.3	7.6	2.5	4.7	10.9	8.9	25.4	30.6	29.5
National	236.7	189.4	223.1	206.4	150.8	109.2	196.9	189.5	206.9	210.1	248.5

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on how many occasions he has met the Railtrack administrator since 7 October. [21942]

Mr. Jamieson: Officials meet him regularly and report to Ministers.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions his Department has held with the Treasury on the treatment of Railtrack while in administration in the national accounts. [22066]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* My Department discusses a range of issues with the Treasury. They include the possible treatment of Railtrack plc in the national accounts.

Roads

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many road schemes costing more than £5 million were commissioned between 1992 and 1997. [21496]

Mr. Jamieson: Work started on 70 local and 76 trunk major road schemes between the financial years 1992–93 and 1996–97.

Rail Speed Restrictions

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many speed restrictions on railways there were for each month between January 2000 and November 2001 *(a)* in total, *(b)* subdivided by zonal area and *(c)* subdivided by train operating company area. [21036]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack reports that the number of temporary speed restrictions in place across its network in Great Britain for each month was:

	Number
October 2000	504
November	626
December	1,100
January 2001	1,045
February	964
March	1,188
April	908
May	779
June	773
July	742
August	753
September	696
October	675
November	659

Note:

Prior to October 2000 national figures were not compiled

These national figures cannot meaningfully be broken down into the areas covered by each train operating company area because the services of many train operating companies overlap. Individual speed restrictions will often affect the trains of several operators all using that line.

District Line

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money has been spent on repairs and renewals on the District line in each of the past six years. [20124]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for London Underground. London Underground, however, advise that the following has been spent on repairs and renewals on the District Line:

	£ million
1996–97	47.4
1997–98	49.5
1998–99	64.4
1999–2000	61.5
2000–01	77.5

Reliable data for 1995–96 are not available.

Rents

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage real terms increase in each year he predicts for formula rents for *(a)* registered social landlords and *(b)* council tenants in Barnet until 2011. [20837]

Ms Keeble: We estimate that council rents in Barnet would rise by an average of 1.6 per cent. in real terms in 2002–03 and 2.2 per cent. a year in real terms thereafter until 2011–12 if rents are adjusted in line with our proposals. Over the period 1991–92 to 2001–02, council rents in Barnet rose on average 2.5 per cent. a year in real terms. Estimates for future years are based on property valuations and other data provided by the London Borough of Barnet which may be subject to amendment. The figures for 2003–04 and later years may also be adjusted as a result of Spending Reviews.

We do not hold data on the registered social landlord rents at the individual authority level. Nationally, our rent restructuring proposals would result in RSL rents rising by RPI plus 0.5 per cent. a year until 2011–12. This figure is subject to periodic reviews by the Housing Corporation.

Manchester International Airport Group

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what proportion of residents from each English region travelled from airports in the Manchester International Airport Group in the last year for which estimates are available; [21427]

(2) what proportion of residents of the North West Region travelled from airports in the Manchester International Airport Group in the last year for which estimates are available. [21428]

Mr. Jamieson: The figures are not available in the form requested. The information that is available about the use of UK airports relates to the number of passenger journeys made to and from each airport, and not to the number of individual passengers who use each airport. The number of passenger journeys is as follows.

Arrivals and departures of UK residents at the Manchester International Airport Group[1] *by region of residence of passenger: 1999–2000*[2]

Thousand

Standard region	*Passenger journeys*
North	555
Yorkshire and Humberside	3,785
East Midlands	1,787
East Anglia	33
South East	450
South West	275
West Midlands	1,218
North West	7,118
Region unknown[3]	739
England	15,960

[1] Manchester, Bournemouth, East Midlands and Humberside airports.

[2] Figures for Manchester and Bournemouth airports are for 2000, those for East Midlands and Humberside are for 1999.

[3] This relates to journeys where the relevant information was not collected from the passenger.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement about the local finance settlement for the London borough of Havering. [21431]

Dr. Whitehead: We announced the provisional local government finance settlement for 2002–03 to the House on Tuesday 4 December 2001. Havering will receive £202.869 million in their provisional Standard Spending Assessment for 2002–03, an increase of £10.357 million (or 5.4 per cent). This translates into £143.003 million in provisional grant for 2002–03, an increase of £7.605 million (or 5.6 per cent). These increases are on a like for like basis, adjusted for changes in functions. The final settlement will be announced early in the new year.

Council Tax Benefit

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1067W, on council tax benefit, for what reasons the announcement on the council tax benefit subsidy limitation scheme has not been made; and if he will hold consultations for this year's settlement for Poole unitary authority. [22338]

Dr. Whitehead: We have announced the abolition of the council tax benefit subsidy limitation scheme with effect from 2002–03 in the White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services."

My officials sent a consultation paper on the local government finance settlement for 2002–03 to local authorities on Tuesday 4 December. Under the proposals, Poole unitary authority receives an increase in general grant of £2.9 million, or 4.4 per cent. The covering letter to the consultation paper invited local authorities to make written representations on the proposals in time for them to be received by Thursday 10 January.

Private Landlords

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to allow local authorities to register private landlords; and if he will make a statement. [21781]

Ms Keeble: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Murphy) on 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 284W.

Regional Government

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what consultations he has had with the National Assembly for Wales when preparing the forthcoming White Paper on regional government in England. [22074]

Dr. Whitehead: The White Paper will be about regional governance in England. However, meeting in Cardiff on 30 October 2001, the annual plenary meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee (which brings together Ministers of the UK Government and of the devolved Administrations) noted the progress on the Government's White Paper on English regional governance. The devolved Administrations expressed their support for extending the benefits of devolution where there was a regional demand for this, and offered to assist the process based on their experience of devolution to date.

The National Assembly for Wales will be consulted in the usual way on any issues arising in or from the White Paper which will affect its responsibilities or operations.

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the role of regional development agencies has been considered in the preparation of the White Paper on English regional government. [22061]

Dr. Whitehead: The role of the regional development agencies is being considered in the preparation of the White Paper.

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment has been made of devolution in other EU member states when preparing the forthcoming White Paper on regional government in England. [22060]

Dr. Whitehead: We are looking at a wide range of information sources during the preparation of the forthcoming White Paper. The Department's own review of research on international experience, published in October 2000, shows that EU member states have a wide variety of approaches to devolution.

Overseas Vehicle Registration

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many haulage *(a)* firms and *(b)* vehicles have moved from UK registration to overseas registration in the past three years. [21943]

Mr. Jamieson: The information on the number of firms that have registered abroad is not available. It is estimated that around 200 vehicles were registered in other member states while still specified on British operators' licences. Following a Transport Tribunal ruling in January 2001 the UK licensing authorities deemed it no longer acceptable for foreign registered vehicles to be used under the authority of a British operator's licence.

Railways

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many different point-to-point rail routes were operated in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 2001. [21944]

Mr. Jamieson: This would depend on the definition of a point-to-point rail route. The relevant National Rail timetables contain all the planned services for particular years. Copies are in the Library of the House.

Buses

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many buses have been registered to operate in England and Wales in each of the past seven years. [21947]

Ms Keeble: The information is available for the years 1997–98 to 2000–01:

Total number of buses[1] registered to operate in England and Wales

	Number
1997–98	49,400
1998–99	51,200
1999–2000	51,200
2000–01	51,600

[1] Having nine or more seats

Source:

DTLR survey of PSV operators

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many different bus routes there were in England and Wales in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [21946]

Ms Keeble: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the figures for total vehicle kilometres operated by local bus services in England and Wales during the period are as follows.

	Million kilometres
1996–97	2,270
1997–98	2,259
1998–99	2,284
1999–2000	2,247
2000–01	2,269

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many bus routes in Cornwall have benefited from Government funding in the last 12 months. [21757]

Ms Keeble: Monitoring information supplied by Cornwall county council shows that a total of 99 routes were supported by them using rural bus subsidy grant in 2000–01. In addition, the council receives revenue support grant to assist in meeting its expenditure needs, including the provision of other subsidised bus services.

Rural Bus Challenge funding was provided in 2000–01 for the Helston-Redruth Branchline Bus Service and the Gorran and District Ring-and-Ride projects. Another project to improve a number of services in the Bodmin Moor area was also approved in the 2000 challenge competition.

Transport Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the outcome was of the Transport Council held in Brussels on 6 and 7 December; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including their voting record; and if he will make a statement. [22183]

Mr. Spellar: The Transport Council met in Brussels on 7 December. I represented the United Kingdom.

The main focus of the Council was on the Galileo satellite navigation project and on aviation security. I am pleased to say that on both issues the outcome was satisfactory from our point of view.

On Galileo, Ministers were asked to agree to the release of funding from the Trans-European Networks (TENs) budget to enable the project to proceed to its next phase, and to agree on the management structure that the project would have. I was among Ministers to press for deferral of decisions on the project. I drew attention to the concerns which the recently issued PricewaterhouseCoopers report had raised, on public sector funding, overall cost and lack of commercial benefits. The report made clear that any decision on the joint undertaking would have funding implications, so I argued that a decision on this should not be taken while funding issues were not sufficiently clear. There was also some discussion of the details of the draft Regulation to establish the joint undertaking, but a majority of member states declined the Commission's request for a vote to agree the text. Decisions on the next phase of Galileo were deferred and no formal conclusions were agreed. The Presidency indicated that the Galileo project might be discussed further at the European Council at Laeken later this month.

The Council reached political agreement on a regulation establishing a Community framework for airport security standards and monitoring. The Commission had initially insisted on arrangements to oversee member states who were operating more stringent security measures. But in response to concerns which I and others expressed about the need for freedom to respond to perceived security threats it accepted that member states should be free to apply additional measures, provided they were in accordance with Community law. This important measure should ensure that high standards are in place throughout the EU and create a safer environment for air passengers using EU airports.

There was discussion of a draft directive on occurrence reporting in civil aviation, on the transposition of JAR-OPS standards into EC law, and on a draft directive on the training of aviation cabin crew. No decisions were reached on the first two issues, and the Presidency concluded that no progress was possible on the third. The UK view is that provision for cabin crew training should be included in the JAR-OPS legislation.

The Council noted the difficult economic situation faced by the air transport sector. On war-risk insurance, member states wished to return to a market approach, but the industry was not ready for that yet. In the interim the Commission was prepared to continue to approve state aid measures up to end March 2002, subject to monthly reviews. Ministers also noted the need to consider urgently ways to address possible unfair competition from third country carriers; the Commission will present a proposal in the near future.

The Council noted the importance of making early progress on the recent proposal for a Directive to replace the hushkits regulation.

The Council reached political agreement on the regulation to establish a European Maritime Safety Agency, which was proposed as part of the ERIKA II package of maritime safety proposals. We are content with the text as agreed.

The Council agreed the text of a Directive to simplify reporting formalities for ships leaving and entering Community ports. It was able to accept the European Parliament's position on the proposal, and therefore reached agreement at the First Reading.

I and the French Minister, with support from the Commissioner, stressed the need for member states to make quick progress on ratifying the Hazardous and Noxious Substances convention and other maritime pollution compensation Conventions, as the December 2000 Council Conclusions had urged.

The Council noted a Presidency progress report on the proposal to update Regulation 3820/85 on commercial drivers' hours and rest periods. Further consideration of this will pass to the Spanish Presidency.

I maintained the UK's opposition to the proposal to extend the fitting of speed limiting devices to goods vehicles above 3.5 tonnes and to coaches/buses with over eight passenger seats regardless of weight. I argued that we were not in favour of a threshold below 7.5 tonnes, but that an extension of European regulation to 7.5 tonnes would be in line with UK law. I expressed my doubt that the safety and environmental consequences of fitting limiters to lighter vehicles would be beneficial. The Presidency concluded that Council adopted the proposal by qualified majority. The proposal will now be considered by the European Parliament early in the new year.

The Council reached political agreement on a draft directive setting out initial and ongoing training requirements for professional drivers.

Following the recent fires in Alpine road tunnels, the Commission reported to the Council that it would propose legislation early in 2002 to improve safety. The proposals will address issues relating to technical equipment, driver information, traffic controls and training of operational staff. We await further details of the proposals, and will need to examine them carefully.

The Presidency presented its conclusions on the Commission's White Paper on transport policy, published earlier this year. The Presidency largely agreed with the White Paper's assessment of the negative impact of uneven development of different transport modes, and believed that modal shift and enhancement of quality should be promoted. It hoped the Council would further examine the White Paper and looked forward to Commission proposals to implement the priorities emerging from further discussion.

Under Other Business, I raised the issue of the new digital tachograph and the deficiencies in the Regulation on which the specification is based. I had previously written to the Commissioner asking her to propose amendments to address these shortcomings, which would create serious enforcement difficulties. Other Ministers at the Council supported me in asking the Commission to re-examine the issue and bring forward a new proposal to amend the Regulation. I expressed my disappointment at the Commission's response, which did not address the concerns we had put forward.

Finally, the German Minister spoke of the safety benefits of ensuring that rigid bull bars were not fixed to road vehicles above 2.5 tonnes, through voluntary agreements with industry. The Commission agreed that this was a useful suggestion, but stressed that it was the responsibility of the Internal Market Commissioner.

No votes were taken at this Council.

Elderly Persons' Homes

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many elderly persons' homes there were in the *(a)* county of Essex and *(b)* unitary boroughs of Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea in (i) 1971, (ii) 1981, (iii) 1991 and (iv) 2001. [21754]

Ms Keeble: The information is as follows:

	1971	*1981*	*1991*	*2001*
County of Essex				
Independent	[1]—	[1]—	260	210
Public Sector	[1]—	[1]—	55	12
Thurrock				
Independent	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	12
Public Sector	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	2
Southend-on-Sea				
Independent	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	65
Public Sector	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	2

[1] Information not readily available

[2] Included within "county" figure above

A1

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what timescale there is relating to the removal of the roundabouts between Blythe and Peterborough on the A1. [21759]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave yesterday (PQ 3108).

Planning Applications

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent guidance he has issued to local authorities on the procedure for considering major planning applications. [22290]

Ms Keeble: On Friday 2 November 2001, the Government announced new targets for 2002–03 for local authorities' handling of planning applications. The new targets for major planning applications are that 60 per cent. of major industrial, commercial and residential applications should be decided within 13 weeks.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will give reasons for not calling in planning applications. [22731]

Mr. Byers: As part of our fundamental review of the planning system, we have decided that as from today we will give reasons for our decision not to call in planning applications. This decision, which forms part of the raft of measures in our Planning Green Paper published today, is in the interests of transparency, good administration and best practice. The Courts have established that there is no legal obligation to provide reasons for not calling in an application.

It should be borne in mind that the issue before him for decision is not whether the application should be granted planning permission but whether or not he should call it in for his own determination. The Secretary of State's policy on calling in planning applications—which is to be very selective—is set out in the written reply by the then Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) to a parliamentary question on 16 June 1999, *Official Report*, column 138. That approach is not to interfere with the jurisdiction of local planning authorities unless it is necessary to do so. Local planning authorities are normally best placed to make decisions relating to their areas and it is right that, in general, they should be free to carry out their duties responsibly, with the minimum of interference.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Channel Tunnel Rail Link is due to be *(a)* completed and *(b)* operational. [22287]

Mr. Jamieson: Section 1 of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL), which runs from the Channel Tunnel to Fawkham Junction in Kent, is expected to be completed and operational in 2003. Section 2, from Ebbsfleet in Kent to St. Pancras in London, is expected to be completed and operational in 2007.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total costs up to 1 December associated with the negotiations for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link are. [22250]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions employs a number of consultants who advise on engineering, financial, legal and other issues related to the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL). Their work has recently included the negotiations for finalising section 2 of the CTRL, and negotiations with Railtrack relating to their purchase of section 1. The total annual budget for CTRL advisers is around £7 million.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent research he has undertaken to assess the impact of aircraft noise and sleep disturbance; and if he will make a statement. [21816]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department of Transport in 1992 published the "Report of a Field Study of Aircraft Noise and Sleep Disturbance". This was and remains the largest UK study of the relationship between aircraft noise and physical sleep disturbance.

More recently the following reports, commissioned by the DETR, have been published:

"Night Noise Contours: A Feasibility Study" (Porter et al, National Physical Laboratory, 1997)

"Adverse effects of night-time aircraft noise" (Porter et al., NATS/DORA R&D Report 9964, March 2000)

"Aircraft Noise and Sleep—1999 UK Trial Methodology Study" (Flindell et al., ISVR, Southampton University, November 2000)

"Perceptions of Aircraft Noise, Sleep and Health" (Diamond et al., DSS, Southampton University, December 2000).

Copies of these reports are available in the House Library and a fuller explanation of Government-supported research on aircraft noise and sleep disturbance is available on the Department's website at http://www.aviation.dtlr.gov.uk/sleepdisturbance/index.htm.

The then Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), announced in May 2001 that as a new full-scale objective study into sleep disturbance would be unlikely to add significantly to our understanding, the Government would concentrate instead on further research into subjective responses to annoyance by night and by day. Since that announcement a contract for the project has been awarded and a steering group representing aviation and environmental interests has been formed to oversee the work, and has met once. We are also setting up a peer review group representing both national and international experts. As well as re-assessing the association between the Leq index and reported annoyance the study will attempt to examine subjective valuation of the nuisance from aircraft noise.

VED Rebates

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many motorists qualified for a VED rebate because they bought a licence for the year starting July 2000 with half yearly payments. [21803]

Mr. Jamieson: Licences taken out between July and October 2000 did not qualify for the rebate. The total number of six-monthly licences taken out in the period November 2000 to June 2001 was approximately 2.8 million.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many hon. Members have made representations to his Department about constituents who missed out on a VED rebate because they bought their licences for the year starting July 2000 with a single payment. [21804]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of such cases referred to the Department to date by hon. Members stands at 67.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research he has commissioned into the effectiveness of the goods vehicle excise duty relief scheme; and if he will publish the results of this research. [22252]

Mr. Jamieson: The rebate scheme for goods vehicle excise duty had two stages: a rebate of up to 50 per cent. of the cost of a licence against licences in force on 30 November 2000; and a similar rebate against all licences taken out between December 2000 and November 2001. Following these transitional arrangements a new structure of vehicle excise duty for goods vehicles came into effect on 1 December 2001.

Rebates totalling £236 million were paid out in respect of some 250,000 goods vehicles against licences in force on 30 November 2000. Although the total amount rebated against licences taken out between December 2000 and November 2001 has yet to be finalised, it is expected to be of a similar order.

The Government have not formally commissioned any research on the impact of these rebate schemes. The Road Haulage Forum gives Ministers and the haulage industry a regular opportunity to discuss, take account of and assess the impacts of fiscal and other factors affecting the haulage industry.

Highways Agency

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how the extra funding under the Winter Supplementary Estimates to the Supply Estimates 2001–02 for the Highways Agency is to be spent. [22246]

Mr. Jamieson: The extra funding will be spent on local network management and technology schemes, the M42 active traffic management pilot, the system for managing project and on the civil service reform fund programme. The Winter Supplementary Estimates also include a reduction in funds that have been transferred to local authorities for roads that have been detrunked this year.

Housing Revenue Account Subsidy

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research was commissioned prior to the decision to decrease the housing revenue account subsidy, as outlined on page 5 of the Winter Supplementary Estimates to the Supply Estimates 2001–02; and if he will publish this research. [22249]

Ms Keeble: The decision to decrease the housing revenue account subsidy provision for 2001–02 in the Winter Supplementary Estimates was informed by changes in the amounts claimed by local housing authorities for reimbursement of the rent rebate element on their second advance claim forms. These claims govern on-account payments for the second half of the financial year.

New Local Government Network

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent meetings Government Ministers have had with representatives of the New Local Government Network. [21984]

Dr. Whitehead: Colleagues and I meet up with representatives of the New Local Government Network and many other groups interested in local government from time to time. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and I met with representatives of the

New Local Government Network on 20 June and on 18 July. The Minister for Local Government attended conferences held by the New Local Government Network on strategic partnering on 16 July and on procuring best value outcomes on 30 October. I spoke at an NLGN conference on best value on 3 December and met representatives of the NLGN at a conference on 29 October. Ministerial colleagues also hold meetings with NLGN representatives from time to time, the details of which are not recorded by this Department.

Lincolnshire County Council

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the National Standards Board is investigating complaints on alleged breaches of the code of conduct by Lincolnshire county councillors; and if he will make a statement. [22217]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* The Standards Board is not able to investigate any complaints about breaches of the code of conduct until the council has adopted a code as required under section 50 of the Local Government Act 2000. I believe that Lincolnshire county council has yet to adopt such a code.

Planning

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish his Green Paper on Planning. [22729]

Mr. Byers: Following our review of the planning system, I am today publishing a Green Paper "Planning: delivering a fundamental change" setting out our proposals for reform.

A good planning system is vital to our quality of life. We need a system that fully engages people in shaping the future of their communities and local economies. The present planning system is too complicated, too slow and engages insufficiently with local communities. We need to make it more efficient and more accessible so that it better serves everybody with an interest in the growth and development of their community, whether individuals, businesses or representative organisations.

The Green Paper sets out our proposals for simplifying the complex hierarchy of regional, county, unitary and local plans. We propose to replace local plans with new Local Development Frameworks that will have two main components: a set of core criteria that will allow local authorities to express a vision for the future of their areas and a strategy for its delivery; and action plans for specific areas where detailed planning is required. These include, for example, neighbourhoods, villages, town centres and major development sites. We intend that action plans should be a particular focus for community participation in the planning of local areas.

The Green Paper proposes a much stronger emphasis on customer service, including delivery to business. New targets for processing planning applications by local authorities will distinguish business from householder applications in order that all applicants should have a clear and realistic expectation of the speed of decision. We propose that delivery contracts should be agreed between local authorities and business for the biggest planning applications that would include an agreed timetable for reaching planning decisions.

The Green Paper proposes the introduction of business planning zones in which planning consent will not be necessary for certain businesses so long as strict quality standards are met. We propose that each region should have at least one zone to promote technology companies.

The Green Paper seeks to put communities at the heart of the planning system. We propose better community participation in the preparation of our new Local Development Frameworks and action plans. A statement of community involvement will set standards for consultation on planning applications and plans. Master planning of major sites will help developers plan for higher quality development, in partnership with local people and local authorities. There will be a much clearer procedure for submitting planning applications and a new emphasis on openness and accountability within the planning process.

I also propose to speed up the handling of planning applications that have been called in and appeals that have been recovered for my determination. I give reasons where applications are called in but, up to now, they have not been given when I decide not to call in an application. In the interests of greater openness I shall, from today, give reasons in both circumstances.

Copies of the Green Paper are being sent to every Member representing an English constituency and they will be available in the Vote Office and in the Library. An electronic copy can be viewed at www.planning.dtlr.gov.uk.

Compulsory Purchase and Compensation

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish his consultation paper on Compulsory Purchase and Compensation. [22730]

Mr. Byers: Following the fundamental review of compulsory purchase procedures and compensation, I am publishing today a consultation paper setting out our proposals for major changes to the way that the compulsory purchase and compensation system operates. Our objective is to make the system simpler, fairer and quicker. We will:

simplify the law

clarify the powers available for acquiring land for planning and regeneration purposes

speed up the confirmation process

ensure that implementation follows promptly once an order is confirmed

provide a fairer basis for assessing compensation.

Speed Cameras

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what evidence he has collated on how speed cameras have contributed to reducing road accidents in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [22231]

Mr. Jamieson: A Home Office study published in 1996 showed that accidents fell by 28 per cent. and speeds were reduced by an average of 4.2 mph at speed camera sites. Eight police force areas have been trialling a new funding system for speed cameras. Monitoring of the first year's operation of the pilots has shown a 47 per cent. reduction in those killed and seriously injured at camera sites and an 18 per cent. reduction in KSIs in the areas as a whole. The new funding system is now available nationally and I fully expect that, as more areas join, the numbers of those killed or seriously injured will decrease still further.

Gibraltar

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what representations he has received from the US Government on Spain's policy that the European Commission's proposal for a Regulation on Aviation Security should not apply to Gibraltar; [21654]

(2) what representations he has received from NATO on Spain's policy that the European Commission's proposal for a Regulation on Aviation Security does not apply to Gibraltar. [21656]

Mr. Jamieson: We have received no such representations.

Neighbourhood Wardens

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if applications may be made for new neighbourhood wardens schemes starting in 2004; [22222]

(2) what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and *(b)* other bodies on marketing, expansion and funding opportunities for the neighbourhood wardens scheme; [22219]

(3) what the budget is for the neighbourhood wardens scheme for *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002; [22226]

(4) which areas are running the neighbourhood wardens scheme, and what assessment he has made of the results of the scheme in each area; [22225]

(5) what funding will be available for the *(a)* continuation of current and *(b)* creation of new neighbourhood wardens schemes after 2004. [22221]

Ms Keeble: Following discussions with officials I announced continued funding for existing neighbourhood warden schemes in England at the annual wardens conference on 19 November. Marketing expansion and funding opportunities for wardens schemes were discussed at that conference and continue to be reviewed.

There are 85 neighbourhood and 125 street warden schemes covering each of the government regions. The Government have commissioned a national evaluation of the neighbourhood warden programme which is due for completion by mid 2003. The evaluation is intended to provide an assessment of scheme impacts and to understand the processes of scheme implementation. It is not possible to consider each and every scheme in the same detail but care is taken to ensure that all regions receive roughly equal coverage that enables a picture of national-level impact to be established. In addition, schemes are encouraged to undertake local-level evaluations appropriate to their needs. Street warden schemes in [illegible]land have yet to start and will be subject to a similarly rigorous evaluation process.

Government funding for neighbourhood wardens is £5 million for 2001–02 and £4.5 million for 2002–03. For street wardens the figures are £5 million and £10 million respectively.

The continuation of funding for existing and future warden schemes will depend on the outcome of the 2002 Spending Review and at this stage it is too early to make applications for new schemes.

Galileo Project

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of *(a)* the economic impact of the Galileo project for the UK transport sector and *(b)* the number of jobs the project will create for British industry; and if he will make a statement. [22236]

Mr. Jamieson: A UK cost-benefit assessment carried out in September for my Department and the British National Space Centre by ESYS Consulting suggested that Galileo could yield net economic benefits for UK users and suppliers, based on European Commission studies and discussions with potential UK users. However, the recent study for the Commission by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC), released on 22 November, excludes supplier benefits and estimates a much reduced and narrower range of benefits for transport users than previous Commission estimates. The report also made clear that there would be a need for continuing public sector funding throughout future phases of the project. On Friday the Transport Council deferred decisions on the next stage of Galileo in order to allow time for further consideration of the PWC report.

Transport Expenditure

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of Britain's national income is spent on *(a)* roads, *(b)* railways and *(c)* the underground. [22079]

Mr. Jamieson: About 1.4 per cent. of the UK's gross domestic product is spent on the provision and maintenance of transport infrastructure and support for public transport services.

Of this figure, about one third relates to roads and one third is spent on the railways. The remaining one third covers all other forms of transport spending, of which spending on London Underground forms a small proportion.

TREASURY

Departmental Rents

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the annual rental value is of the London Headquarters of *(a)* HM Customs and Excises, *(b)* the Inland Revenue, *(c)* the Government Actuary's Department and *(d)* the UK Debt Management Office; and what assessment he has made of the rental values of similar office space size in (i) Coventry, (ii) Birmingham, (iii) Wolverhampton and (iv) Stoke on Trent. [10249]

Ruth Kelly: The following table lists the annual rental value of the London headquarters of *(a)* HM Customs and Excise; *(b)* the Inland Revenue; *(c)* the Government

Actuary's Department; and *(d)* the Debt Management Office. HM Customs and Excise and the Government Actuary's Department co-locate in the London accommodation, so the rental value has been apportioned based on their percentage of occupation.

No assessment has been made of the rental value of similar offices in (i) Coventry, (ii) Birmingham, (iii) Wolverhampton and (iv) Stoke on Trent as the Departments do not have offices of a comparable size. Neither the Government Actuary's Department nor the Debt Management Office occupy any space outside of London.

Annual rental value of London headquarters

	£
HM Customs and Excise	5,000,000
Inland Revenue	2,200,000
Government Actuary's Department	650,484
Debt Management Office	957,852

Mortgage Advice

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to allow the Financial Services Authority to take over the regulation of mortgage advice to consumers; and if he will make a statement. [8928]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 25 October 2001]:* I am announcing today that, in the light of representations made by the industry and others, and taking account of the views of the report and responses to the Banking Services Consumer Codes Review, I have decided to extend the FSA's powers to enable it to regulate mortgage intermediaries and advice.

Manufacturing Summit

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if *(a)* he and *(b)* other Treasury Ministers will attend the manufacturing summit in early December. [15698]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 19 November 2001]:* The Chief Secretary to the Treasury attended the "Manufacturing and the Regions" summit on 5 December.

HIPC Initiative

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list *(a)* the countries eligible for debt relief under the heavily indebted poorer countries initiative whose debt repayments to the United Kingdom are now being held in trust, *(b)* the amount of money held in trust in respect of each such country and *(c)* the level of debt outstanding to the United Kingdom from each such country. [18387]

Mr. Boateng: Since the Chancellor made the announcement on 2 December, the following countries have made payments that are eligible for the hold in trust policy:

Country	*Payments held in trust (£000)*	*Amount of debt (£ million)*
Burkina Faso	64.9	1.0
Central African Republic	2.4	0.5
Ethiopia	60.9	15.4
Guinea	91.7	5.3
Vietnam	730.5	54.4
Yemen	106.8	3.3

Ethiopia and Guinea have since reached their Decision Point, where they are no longer required to make payments to the UK. Burkina Faso had reached Decision Point before December 2000, but interim relief has been suspended. Payments from Burkina Faso will continue to be held in trust.

The following countries have reached a Decision Point since the Chancellor made the announcement, but prior to Decision Point did not make any payments for holding in trust. Now that they have reached a Decision Point, they are all receiving 100 per cent. debt relief and are no longer required to make any payments to the UK.

£ million

Country	*Amount of debt*
Chad	0
Gambia	0
Guinea Bissau	0
Madagascar	25.5
Malawi	3.9
Nicaragua	1.0
Niger	10.9
Rwanda	0.1
Sao Tome and Principe	0
Zambia	239.2

The following countries have not yet reached a Decision Point under HIPC, and any payments they do make will be held in trust:

£ million

Country	*Amount of debt*
Angola	118.6
Burma	23.1
Burundi	0
Congo	143.1
Cote D'Ivoire	48.0
DR Congo	165.5
Ghana	216.7
Kenya	52.9
Laos PDR	0
Liberia	18.4
Sierra Leone	3.6
Somalia	29.2
Sudan	374.9
Togo	15.7

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on the treatment of interest earned on money paid as debt service payments by highly indebted poor countries to the United Kingdom and currently held in trust by the Government. [18386]

Mr. Boateng: Money that is held in trust will be returned when the proceeds can be shown to go towards poverty reduction. At that point, the UK will return all payments made since 1 December 2000. The commitment of the Chancellor's speech on 2 December 2000 was that the UK will not benefit financially from these historic debts and, as such, all payments made will be returned to fund poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in HIPC countries.

Small Businesses

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 271W, for what reason he will not reply on the representations he has received on changes to insurance policies and premiums for small businesses since 11 September; and if he will make a statement. [18400]

Ruth Kelly: We receive a great many representations from both industry and individuals. Identifying those that have been sent on a specific subject could not be done without disproportionate cost.

Golden Jubilee Coin

Mr. Brady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans have been made for the production of a Crown piece to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee. [18548]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* Her Majesty the Queen has been graciously pleased to approve the Chancellor of the Exchequer's recommendation that in 2002 a crown piece should be issued to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Her Majesty's accession to the throne. Further details will be announced shortly.

Earnings

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of people whose earnings were *(a)* below a third and *(b)* between a third and a half of median male earnings paid tax on each of the last six years. [20456]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of the proportion of taxpayers whose earnings were *(a)* below a third of male median earnings, and *(b)* between a third and a half of male median earnings are in the table:

	Employee taxpayers as a percentage of employees	
Year	*with earnings less than $^1/_3$ of male median earnings*[1]	*with earnings between $^1/_3$ and $^1/_2$ of male median earnings*[1]
1995–96	61	95
1996–97	56	91
1997–98	56	93
1998–99	56	100
1999–2000	59	100
2000–01	69	100

[1] Male median earnings figures are based on New Earnings Survey, full-time male employees on adult rates, whose pay for the survey period was unaffected by absence.

The taxpayer estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and the employee estimates are based on the Labour Force Survey. These estimates are subject to sampling errors and changes in the percentages over time should be treated with caution.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will place in the Library in respect of each ward where an exemption from stamp duty will be introduced the *(a)* average property price and *(b)* percentage of properties purchased where no stamp duty was paid in the last year for which information is available; [21112]

(2) what impact he expects the exemption from stamp duty to have on the prices of houses valued below £150,000 in wards in which an exemption from stamp duty will apply. [21009]

Mr. Boateng: The ward-based information requested is not available.

The Government intend the exemption to help in the revival of property markets in qualifying areas, which will make investment in these areas more attractive and encourage people to live and do business in them.

Food Supplements

Dr. Fox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are employed in *(a)* the retail and *(b)* the manufacture of specialist health food products; and what assessment he has made of the impact on employment in these sectors of the forthcoming EU Directive on food supplements. [21690]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Dr. Liam Fox, dated 12 December 2001:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the number of people employed in (a) the retail and (b) the manufacture of specialist health food products (21690).

There are no separate figures available for retailing specialist health food products as these estimates are combined with other specialist retailing.

In December 1999, the latest date for which estimates from the Annual Business Inquiry are available, there were 900 employee jobs in the manufacture of homogenised food preparations and dietetic food in Great Britain.

I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that the proposed EU directive would not have any immediate effect on employment in these sectors as it would not immediately outlaw any products currently sold in the UK.

Departmental Staff (Home Working)

Mr. Challen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to encourage staff to work from home; and how many staff do so on a regular basis. [21822]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has a number of alternative working policies in place such as flexible working hours, working part time, compressed hours as well as working at home. These are available to all staff by agreement with their manager. Details are advertised on the Treasury's Intranet. All staff have the opportunity to work at home occasionally on appropriate work with their manager's agreement. About 30 members of staff regularly work at least one day a week at home with access to the Treasury's IT systems.

Hypothecated NHS Tax

Linda Perham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the public's willingness to pay a hypothecated NHS tax. [22302]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government have made their commitment to increasing resources over the next three years for the NHS, funded from general taxation and linked to reform. Decisions on taxation will be for future Budgets and spending will be for the Spending Review.

Customs and Excise (Fraud)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was *(a)* the total expenditure on HM Customs and Excise and *(b)* the total expenditure on counter-fraud work within HM Customs and Excise in the last year for which figures are available. [21732]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* Many Customs and Excise activities play an important part in countering fraud, including tax control work, debt collection and publicity. However, since 1 April 2001 the Department's restructured Law Enforcement function has had prime responsibility for tackling indirect tax fraud, drugs smuggling and the range of other criminal matters assigned to Customs and Excise. Many Customs Law Enforcement officers have a multi-functional role, tackling both tax fraud and non-tax criminality.

Because of restructuring, it is not possible to provide equivalent figures for earlier years, but in 2001–02 the Law Enforcement function of Customs and Excise has a budget of some £320 million current, and £40 million capital. The Customs and Excise voted departmental expenditure limit (as amended by the recent Winter Supplementary) is £1,122 million.

Capital Assets

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 55W, on capital assets, what record the Office for National Statistics keeps of the advice it gives to Departments regarding the accounting treatment of PPPs. [22289]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 12 December 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question concerning what record the Office for National Statistics keeps of the advice it gives to Departments regarding the accounting treatment of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs). (22289)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) keeps records of all advice given on classification issues. The ONS has not however been asked for advice on the accounting treatment of capital assets under individual PPPs. This is decided by departments on the basis of generally accepted accounting practice, as specified in the Resource Accounting Manual published by HM Treasury. The National Audit Office audits department's decisions. The agreed treatment is reflected in the national accounts.

Social Exclusion

Andrew Selous: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many competitive grant schemes administered by his Department and its agencies were open in each of the last 10 years to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion. [22431]

Ruth Kelly: No competitive grant schemes are currently administered, or have been administered in each of the last 10 years, by the Chancellor's Departments and agencies.

Andrew Selous: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish a list of the grants made under the competitive grant schemes administered by his Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22419]

(2) if he will list the competitive grant schemes, administered by the Treasury and its agencies, open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; and, for each scheme in each year *(a)* the number of applicants, *(b)* the number of successful applicants, *(c)* the total of grants awarded, *(d)* the number of pages in the application form and *(e)* if the grant can be used to fund the core costs of the applicant organisation; [22430]

(3) if he will place in the Library a copy of the application form for each of the competitive grant schemes administered by his Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion. [22414]

Ruth Kelly: No competitive grant schemes are currently administered, or have been administered since 1997, by the Chancellor's Departments and agencies.

Andrew Selous: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate has been made of the administrative cost to the *(a)* state, *(b)* unsuccessful applicants and *(c)* successful applicants of the competitive grant schemes, provided by his Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion. [22406]

Ruth Kelly: No competitive grant schemes are currently provided, or have been provided since 1997, by the Chancellor's Departments and agencies.

Spirits (Taxation)

Ian Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his plans are for consultation on the proposal to introduce a tax stamps system for spirits. [23122]

Mr. Boateng: Following initial discussions with the drinks industry over the summer, customs and Excise published on 11 December 2001 a formal consultation document on this proposal. A copy of the consultation document is available in the Library.

Financial Services Authority

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to extend the scope of the Financial Services Authority's responsibilities. [23124]

Ruth Kelly: In the light of representations made by the industry and others and taking account of the views of the report and responses to the Banking Services Consumer Codes Review, I have decided to extend the FSA's powers to enable it to regulate mortgage intermediaries and advice. The FSA will also be given responsibility for regulating general insurance intermediaries.

Giving the FSA powers to regulate mortgage and insurance intermediaries will streamline regulation. Intermediaries selling a range of products—general insurance, pensions, or mortgages—will all come under the FSA as single regulator, minimising compliance costs.

I intend to consult others on the appropriate transitional arrangements to ensure a smooth handover of responsibility to the FSA.

A regulatory impact assessment of the decision to give the FSA responsibility for regulating mortgage advice and general insurance intermediaries is available in the Library.

Child Benefit

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the rates of child benefit for the first and subsequent children from April 2002 required to ensure that if a higher rate taxpayer in receipt of child benefit paid tax on it at *(a)* the higher rate or *(b)* the standard rate, the net cash amount of benefit received remained at the level already announced from April 2002; and if he will estimate (i) the gross annual programme cost of increasing child benefit to those levels and (ii) the net cost to the Exchequer of raising child benefit to those levels (1) with no taxation and (2) with higher rate taxpayer recipients paying tax on the benefit at the higher rate, taking into account the consequential effects on working families tax credit, income support payments and other means-tested benefits. [22058]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Child benefit will be £15.75 per week for the first child and £10.55 per week for subsequent children from April 2002. If it were taxable at the basic rate, in order for a taxpayer to receive the same net benefit it would have to be increased to £20.20 per week for the first child and £13.55 per week for subsequent children. If it were taxable at the higher rate, the corresponding figures would be £26.25 per week for the first child and £17.60 per week for subsequent children.

The gross programme cost of increasing child benefit to £20.20 per week for the first child and £13.55 per week for subsequent children would be £2.5 billion in 2002. The gross programme cost of increasing child benefit to £26.25 per week for the first child and £17.60 per week for subsequent children would be £6 billion in 2002. The net cost to the Exchequer of these increases would depend on how they were treated in income-related benefits and working families tax credit.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Maths Teachers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many maths teachers were employed in secondary schools in *(a)* 1984, *(b)* 1988, *(c)* 1992, *(d)* 1996 and *(e)* 2000; and what their qualifications were. [8405]

Mr. Timms: Full-time teachers who spent some or all of their time teaching maths in English maintained secondary schools are as follows:

	Academic year			
	1983–84[1]	*1987–88*	*1991–92*	*1996–97*
Maths teachers	40,500	35,500	31,000	25,200
Qualifications—maths main subject[2]				
Degree	28	27	30	40
BEd	6	8	9	16
PGCE	0	7	10	11
Cert. Ed.	19	15	15	12
Other	3	3	4	2
Maths subsidiary or related subject[2]	18	14	10	—
Other subjects[2]	26	25	22	20
Total[2]	100	100	100	100

[1] 1983–84 survey did not separately identify PGCEs which trained students to teach maths. Most maths-qualified teachers with a PGCE will be included in the 'degree' or 'other' columns

[2] Percentage

In 1996–97, subjects were not designated as main, subsidiary or related. All subjects were treated as at the same level. The concept of related subject was not used for maths.

The percentages of teachers with each qualification have been rounded to the nearest whole number and as a result the component parts may not add to 100 per cent.

Data for 1996–97 are the latest available.

Teacher Vacancies

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the levels of teacher vacancies were in January in *(a)* primary, *(b)* secondary and *(c)* special schools broken down by (i) Government office region, (ii) subject and (iii) level; and what changes there have been in these totals from those issued in the SFR 16/2001 on 20 April. [9109]

Mr. Timms: Teacher vacancies as a percentage of teachers in post in the English maintained schools sector in January 2001 were as follows:

	Nursery and primary	*Secondary*	*Special*	*All maintained schools sector*
Grade				
Head	0.8	0.8	1.0	0.8
Deputy head	1.8	1.2	2.9	1.7
Classroom teacher	1.5	1.5	2.3	1.4
Government office region				
North East	0.6	1.0	0.1	0.8
North West	0.4	0.6	0.9	0.5
Yorkshire and the Humber	0.3	0.6	0.6	0.5
East Midlands	0.7	0.6	2.2	0.7
West Midlands	0.7	1.1	1.5	0.9
East of England	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.7
London	3.3	3.8	4.6	3.5
South East	1.6	2.1	4.4	2.0
South West	0.6	0.7	1.3	0.6
England	1.2	1.4	2.2	1.4

The number of teacher vacancies in the maintained schools sector in January 2001 was as follows:

	Nursery and primary	Secondary	Special	All maintained schools sector
Grade				
Head	150	30	10	190
Deputy head	270	80	30	380
Classroom teacher	1,690	2,480	240	4,400
Government office region				
North East	60	100	[1]—	160
North West	110	150	20	280
Yorkshire and the Humber	60	110	10	190
East Midlands	100	100	20	210
West Midlands	140	240	30	400
East of England	310	340	20	670
London	820	880	90	1,790
South East	420	550	90	1,060
South West	90	110	10	210
All vacancies	2,110	2,590	280	4,980

[1] Less than five

Note:

Totals may not appear to equal the sum of the component parts because of rounding.

Classroom teacher vacancies in maintained secondary schools by subject were as follows:

	Vacancies as a percentage of teachers in post	Number of vacancies
Mathematics	2.1	410
Information Technology	2.8	120
Sciences	1.6	400
French	1.6	160
German	0.8	30
Other languages	3.2	50
All languages	1.5	250
English	1.8	360
Drama	1.7	60
History	0.5	40
Social Sciences	0.4	20
Geography	0.6	50
Religious education	1.8	100
Design and technology	1.3	210
Commercial/business studies	1.3	40
Art, craft or design	0.7	50
Music	1.8	80
Physical education	0.8	100
Careers	4.3	10
Other main and combined subjects	1.7	200
All subjects	1.4	2,480

Note:

Totals may not appear to equal the sum of the component parts because of rounding.

As in previous years, the provisional numbers of vacancies published in SFR16/2001 have changed slightly following further validation checks on the data. The total vacancy figures for the nursery and primary phase remain unchanged at 1.2 per cent. and 2,110 posts. The total vacancy figure for the secondary phase has increased from 2,580 to 2,590; the rate remains unchanged at 1.4 per cent. The total secondary schools classroom teacher vacancy figure has increased from 2,470 to 2,480; the rate remains unchanged at 1.4 per cent. The total vacancy figures for special schools remain unchanged at 2.2 per cent. and 280 posts.

Capital Spending (Schools)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of grant allocation for capital spending in schools is *(a)* discretionary and *(b)* must be spent on items stipulated by the Government. [19709]

John Healey: The table shows, for next year, the proportion of capital investment in schools through discretionary funding which is un-hypothecated; discretionary funding which is hypothecated for schools capital investment; and funding which must be spent on specific schools capital projects. The table shows this for both capital grants and for all capital support.

Percentage

Percentages related to the financial year 2002–03	*Grant*	*Total capital support*
Discretionary: un-hypothecated	—	16
Discretionary: hypothecated for schools capital	74	41
Project specific	26	43

Notes:

1. Discretionary un-hypothecated: denotes capital support that is allocated to local authorities for schools, but which they are able to use for other services.
2. Discretionary hypothecated for schools: denotes funding that is allocated to local authorities or schools to be spent on school capital works in accordance with their highest priorities.
3. Project Specific: denotes funding that is allocated to local authorities or schools to be spent on specific agreed projects.
4. Total capital support includes grant and credit approvals including PFI credits.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the Government grant allocation for capital spending on schools by LEA in each year since 1997, excluding centrally managed initiatives. [19710]

John Healey: Tables showing the capital allocations by local education authority in England from 1997–98 to 2001–02 have been placed in the Libraries. Table A shows this for capital grants, table B shows this for all capital support.

Selection

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills *(a)* how many and *(b)* what percentage of those schools which have chosen for the current year to select up to 10 per cent. of pupils by aptitude, have selected by the means of (i) standardised tests, (ii) reports from primary school, (iii) interview with pupil, (iv) interview with parents and (v) a combination of the above. [20736]

Mr. Timms: This information is not collected centrally. School admissions are dealt with at local level by the relevant admission authority for each school. It is the responsibility of admission authorities to set their own admission arrangements, after consultation with other admission authorities in their area, and they are expected to have regard to the guidance in the School Admissions Code of Practice. Where a school has a specialism and gives priority to pupils on the grounds of aptitude for that specialism, it is up to the school's admission authority to decide how to assess pupils' aptitude, though the school must publish its admission arrangements, including details of any aptitude testing.

Scottish Students

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the number of students resident in Scotland who attend further education in England and Wales. [21542]

John Healey *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The number of students studying in further education sector colleges in England in 1999–2000 was 3.7 million, of which 5,600 were resident in Scotland.

For information on students attending further education colleges in Wales I refer the hon. Member to the National Assembly for Wales.

Teachers' Work Load

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations she has received about the work load in pre-school nurseries and playgroups. [21955]

Mr. Timms: I am not aware of any recent representations on this issue.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what is her latest assessment of the number of hours being worked by teachers each week; and if she will make a statement. [21956]

Mr. Timms: The PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) teacher work load study indicates that, during term time, teachers work around 52 hours per week. PwC's final report will in due course be referred to the School Teachers Review Body.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will publish the findings of the PricewaterhouseCoopers report into teachers' work load before 24 January 2002. [21958]

Mr. Timms: The final report from PricewaterhouseCoopers is available on the DfES website at the following address: www.teachernet.gov.uk/workloadstudy.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the terms of reference were for the PricewaterhouseCoopers report into teachers' work load. [21959]

Mr. Timms: The aim of the work load study was to identify the main factors that determine teachers' and head teachers' work load, and to develop a programme of practical action to eliminate excessive work load and promote the most effective use of all resources in schools.

Boxing

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will introduce boxing into schools as a specialist part of the sports curriculum. [22078]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The new National Curriculum for Physical Education, which was introduced in September 2000 specifies six areas of activity which schools should provide. Boxing is not one of those activities and there are no plans to introduce it.

Indiscipline (State Schools)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will make it her policy to publish data on levels of indiscipline in state schools; [22258]

(2) pursuant to her answer of 6 December on levels of indiscipline, for what periods since 1987 data 2001, *Official Report*, column 450W on levels of indiscipline in state schools are available on a consistent basis; and if she will publish such data. [22257]

Mr. Timms: We do not have consistent data on levels of indiscipline in schools. Methods for gathering information about pupil behaviour changed after Ofsted was set up in 1992, and a further change took place in 1996–97.

Information gathered by Ofsted inspectors about indiscipline in schools informs statements given in the annual reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools. I have therefore asked Mike Tomlinson to write to the hon. Member and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of the increase in the departmental expenditure limit from 2001–02 to 2002–03 will be accounted for by wage costs. [20672]

Estelle Morris: The level of wage costs within departmental budgets this year and in future years will be dependent upon negotiations. Departmental reports published next spring will give details of Departments' expenditure.

WORK AND PENSIONS

CSA

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to compensate parents with care who have suffered financial loss as a result of the CSA not reflecting the amount they have been denied as a result of non-receipt of child support payments. [13608]

Malcolm Wicks: In common with other Government agencies, the CSA can make payments to compensate its clients for financial loss suffered as a result of maladministration. This compensation scheme can cover maintenance payments lost as a result of administrative failures in the agency. Compensation payments cannot, however, be made to cover maintenance withheld by non-resident parents where the CSA has acted correctly in seeking to enforce liability.

Benefit Systems

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of the local government performance indicators for 2000–01 on housing benefit and council tax benefit for each local authority. [15151]

Malcolm Wicks: Best Value Performance Indicators for housing benefit and council tax benefit for English local authorities are contained in The Local Government (Best Value) Performance Indicators Order 2000, SI 2000 No. 896. A copy is available in the Library.

Performance indicators for Scotland and Wales are the responsibility of the Accounts Commission for Scotland and the National Assembly for Wales respectively.

Carers

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the measures the Government have brought in since 1997 to assist people who are carers for others. [12335]

Maria Eagle: The Government's general approach to carers is outlined in "Caring About Carers", the report of the National Carers Strategy published in February 1999. A great deal has already been achieved to implement the Strategy and further work is continuing.

The table shows the measures introduced specifically for carers since 1997:

Date	*Measure*
February 1999	Introduction of the Carers Grant—to enable local authorities to provide a wider range of services to give carers a break
December 1999	The Employment Relations Act gave carers in paid work the right to have time off to deal with family emergencies
February 2000	Introduction of carers website to give details of services and benefits affecting carers
March 2000	Introduction of the work life balance initiative to promote good practice to help employers explore work life balance
April 2000	The Carers and Disabled Children Act gave local councils the power to give carers a needs assessment in their own right. The Act also allows local authorities to give vouchers for buying-in provision when a carer needs respite
April 2001	The ICA Earnings Limit was increased by £22 to the level of the National Insurance Lower Earnings Limit to help carers who are able to combine work with caring
April 2001	The Carer Premium paid through Income-Related Benefits was increased by £10 per week, to provide additional financial support to carers who are less well off
July 2001	Launch of UK Online Life Episode "Looking after someone" to provide a wide range of information for carers

In autumn 2000, a substantial package of measures to help carers was announced. This amounts to over £500 million of extra support in the first three years covered by the announcement.

It includes a number of improvements to the main carer benefits aimed in particular at helping older and poorer carers, as well as helping carers to keep in touch with work by making part-time employment more worthwhile financially.

The package also included measures to remove the barrier that prevents people aged 65 or over from claiming invalid care allowance will be removed; ensure entitlement to ICA will continue for up to eight weeks after the death of the disabled person; and rename ICA as 'Carer's Allowance'.

These changes will be introduced by Regulatory Reform Order (RRO) at the earliest opportunity.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in the Buckingham constituency are on the new deal programme, broken down by each category of the new deal. [17852]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the table.

Programme	*Number of people on the programme*[1]
New deal for young people	4
New deal 25 plus	20
New deal for lone parents	[2]17
New deal 50 plus (employment credit claims)	[3]10

[1] End September 2001

[2] Figure for end of August 2001

[3] Figure for end of October 2001

Note:

The figures are not cumulative

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Information at constituency level is not available for the new deals for disabled people and partners.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Government Departments have signed new deal employer agreements. [18053]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Twenty-seven Government Departments and agencies have signed national new deal employer agreements. A number of other Departments and agencies have signed employer agreements with their local jobcentres.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people on the new deal for young people in the Loughborough constituency have joined *(a)* subsidised employment, *(b)* the Environmental

Task Force, *(c)* the voluntary sector and *(d)* full-time education or training in each year since its first year of operation. [18492]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table.

Number of young people starting NDYP options in Loughborough

Year	*Subsidised employment*	*Environment task force*	*Voluntary sector*	*Full-time education and training*
1998	5	3	5	19
1999	9	25	22	50
2000	6	20	19	19
2001[1]	6	8	11	20
Total	26	66	57	108

[1] To end September

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Debt Reduction

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the expected reduction in debt in 2001–02 from cases of overpayment. [18987]

Malcolm Wicks: The amount of new debt recorded from April to October 2001 was 14 per cent. lower than the same period in 2000–01.

Debt Management System (Cancellation)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the cost in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 from the cancellation of the debt management system. [18995]

Malcolm Wicks: The debt accounting and management system (DAMS) procurement contract was discharged in July 1999. The costs of DAMS are commercial in confidence, but the Benefits Agency paid only for what was of value. No costs were incurred after 1999.

Overpaid Benefits (Recovery)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the target saving in 2000–01 from the recovery of overpaid benefits was achieved. [18997]

Malcolm Wicks: The overpayment recovery target for 2000–01 was exceeded by 1.2 per cent.

Departmental Resources

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the unallocated resource provision referred to on page 96 of the 2001 Departmental report. [19523]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The unallocated resource provision referred to on page 96 of the 2001 Departmental Report contains two separate elements of agreed funding.

The first relates to the Welfare Modernisation Fund; the level of funding was agreed in the last Spending Review. Use of the funding is subject to joint Treasury and Departmental agreement, before it may be allocated to specific projects.

The second relates to the Departmental Unallocated Provision, which was established in accordance with treasury guidelines; to be a source of funding held by the Department, initially unallocated for specific use, but to be used as the first port of call to meet unexpected funding pressures, rather than a call being made upon the Reserve.

Child Poverty

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many children were living in poverty in *(a)* April 1997 and *(b)* April 2001. [19805]

Malcolm Wicks: Child poverty and social exclusion are complex multi-dimensional concepts, affecting many aspects of children's lives—including their living standards, health, housing, the quality of the environment, and opportunities to learn. The third "Opportunity for all" report (Cm 5260) sets out the Government's strategy for tackling child poverty and social exclusion and presents the latest information on the indicators used to monitor progress against this strategy.

Housing Benefit

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of *(a)* council and *(b)* registered social landlord tenants in each region of England are in receipt of housing benefit; and how many of these are pensioner households in each case. [19819]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Percentage

	Housing benefit		*Pensioner households*	
	Council tenants	*Housing association tenants*	*Council tenants*	*Housing association tenants*
England	54	56	46	42
North-east	57	60	39	54
North-west	56	59	41	52
Yorks and Humberside	55	52	54	31
East midlands	51	58	53	25
West midlands	52	49	46	46
East	50	64	56	51
London	54	55	37	33
South-east	51	53	47	43
South-west	57	65	51	46

Notes:

1. Council housing covers housing rented by local authorities and New Town development corporations. Housing association covers housing associations, charitable trusts and local housing companies.
2. Pensioners are defined as households where the benefit recipient and/or the partner are aged 60 and over.
3. These estimates are based on sample counts that have been adjusted for non-response using multi-purpose grossing factors for region, Council Tax Band and a number of demographic variables.

Source:

Family Resources Survey 1999–2000

Long-term Unemployed

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his statement of 28 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 972-75, what plans he has for training to be provided for the long-term unemployed under his proposals. [20271]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The primary aim of the StepUP pilots will be to give people experience of work rather than training. We expect employers offering transitional jobs to help people gain the skills, the support and the experience of work they need, rather than follow a set training programme. This will act as a stepping stone to jobs in the local labour market.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will reply to question 12335, from the hon. Member for High Peak, tabled on 31 October, relating to carers. [20283]

Maria Eagle: The question was answered today.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what strategy there is to ensure that all pensioners who are eligible for the minimum income guarantee know they can apply for the extra income. [19363]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* There are a number of measures already in place to ensure that pensioners know they might be eligible for the Minimum Income Guarantee.

From 15 October 2001, callers to the Retirement Pension Telecentre who are not already receiving MIG are asked a series of questions to identify if they may be entitled and encouraged to claim if they wish to do so. Those pensioners who claim Retirement Pension by post are sent a MIG leaflet.

We are looking at a number of options to extend this service so that a claim to MIG will be invited automatically following certain key life events, for example when the pensioner reaches age 75 or 80, or when another benefit, such as Attendance Allowance, is awarded.

We are also working in partnership with organisations for older people to improve access to benefits and take up of the MIG. This includes projects on a national good practice guide and a survey of local take up initiatives.

BAE Systems

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the employment implications of BAE Systems' decision to close the Regional Jet RJ and RJX programme; and what steps his Department is taking to provide assistance to the employees being made redundant at Woodford. [20354]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Redundancies were announced by BAE Systems on the 27 November at a number of UK locations including Woodford where 993 redundancies will take place.

Employment Services have arranged a meeting with the management team at BAE on the 5 December to discuss the support available for employees. This is likely to include an on-site Jobshop, with support for employees' jobsearch, along with training and careers advice and guidance. We will be working with local training providers and the North West Development Agency to ensure that support meets local needs.

Remploy

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many employees of Remploy have been dismissed in the past 12 months; and how many of these were trainees. [20424]

Maria Eagle: During the 12 months from December 2000 to November 2001, 2,315 people left Remploy's employment, for a variety of reasons.

The number of trainees leaving the WorkStep programme without employment during this period was 189. Reasons for leaving included poor conduct, resigning for personal reasons, and medical reasons.

During the same period, Remploy took on 344 trainees into permanent positions in Remploy sites and progressed another 121 trainees into external employment.

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many non-disabled workers have been recruited through agencies who are employed by Remploy. [20425]

Maria Eagle: Remploy rarely recruits employees through the use of employment agencies relying mostly on the Employment Service to refer candidates for employment.

Remploy does use agency labour (not employed by Remploy) from time to time to address temporary work load fluctuations, or the need for specialist skills. These individuals are supplied by an agency, often on a week-to-week, short-term, temporary basis, to meet customer demands while avoiding incurring long-term costs and liabilities.

Currently, Remploy is using around 30 agency employees in this capacity.

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what was the total cost of administration in Remploy in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [20426]

Maria Eagle: The total costs of administration in Remploy were:

Year	*£ million*
1997–98	19.6
1998–99	17.6
1999–2000	17.7
2000–01	18.0

These totals cover all salary and bought-in costs for everything except direct labour, factory overheads, sales and marketing, distribution and financial charges.

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the individual annual remuneration was to *(a)* the Chairman and *(b)* executive directors of Remploy in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000 and (iv)2000–01. [20427]

Maria Eagle: Individual annual remunerations were as follows.

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Chairman (D. G. Heywood)	14,000	13,000	10,400	—
Chairman (A. E. Pedder—appointed 1 January 2000)	—	—	10,800	72,500
Chief Executive (A. G. H. Withey)	110,000	115,000	114,500	47,700
Chief Executive (R. Paffard—appointed 1.11.00)	—	—	—	58,000
Finance Director	78,000	80,000	84,100	87,800
Personnel Director	76,000	78,000	83,000	86,200
Operations Director	76,000	79,000	84,200	97,200
Sales and Marketing Director (appointed 1 November 1998 to 31 December 2000)	—	31,000	76,400	—

[1] Mr. Pedder's involvement was increased to provide cover until the new chief executive was appointed, and to develop the new strategies for the company.

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what were the average weekly hours worked by Remploy employees in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [20432]

Maria Eagle: Remploy does not record average weekly hours of work for its employees.

However, in this period the standard contracted hours of work for employees have reduced.

In 1997–98, standard hours were 37 per week. On 31 May 1999 they were reduced to 36.5 hours per week and on 5 June 2000 they were further reduced to 36 hours per week.

Disability Living Allowance

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to review the *(a)* design and *(b)* content of the disability living allowance claim form to make it more accessible to people with mental health problems; and if he will ensure that mental health service users play an active part in this review. [20781]

Maria Eagle: We are currently looking at how the disability living allowance claim form can be made more easily accessible for all disabled people: This follows changes earlier this year, when we reduced the claim pack by nine pages without losing essential information. However, we recognise that people with mental health problems can have special difficulty expressing their needs on a claim form, which is why we are considering alternative methods of obtaining the information we need, for example, by using Community Psychiatric Nurses to interview some people with mental health problems.

We intend to consult organisations of, and for disabled people, including those with mental health problems, as part of these initiatives.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason the Government last year added regulation 10C of DLA Regulations, pursuant to the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1972 on what constituted attention in section 72(1) for the disability living allowance care component. [20880]

Maria Eagle: Regulation 10C was added to the Social Security (Disability Living Allowance) Regulations 1991 with effect from 25 September 2000 in order to make clear that remote "attention" via the telephone, or other electronic means, does not count as attention in connection with bodily functions for the purposes of the care component of disability living allowance. This restores the original policy intention that attention in connection with bodily functions must be carried out in the presence of the severely disabled person.

HIV

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will amend the Liability Discrimination Act 1995 to protect people with HIV from discrimination at the point of diagnosis. [20879]

Maria Eagle: We are currently considering what amendments should be made to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Nursing Care

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what entitlement self-funding residents in residential or nursing care have to *(a)* attendance allowance, *(b)* nursing care contributions from their local health authority in England from 1 October, *(c)* attendance allowance and *(d)* nursing and personal care contributions under the scheme for such support proposed by the Scottish Executive. [20898]

Maria Eagle: People in residential care or nursing homes in England and Scotland who fund the whole cost of their care from their own resources can receive attendance allowance. From 1 October 2001, such residents in England can have the opportunity to have their need for nursing care assessed by an NHS nurse. This determines the level of payment that the NHS pays to the nursing home in respect of that person's nursing care: low (£35 per week), medium (£70 per week) and high (£110 per week). Such payments are disregarded in determining whether or not a person is a self-funder.

Proposals for changes to the provision of nursing and personal care in Scotland are a matter for the Scottish Executive. If, however, the result of the proposals for personal care are such that people who were self-funders no longer meet the whole cost of their care from their own resources attendance allowance will no longer be payable.

Social Fund

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Social Fund payments made at the Wallasey or Hoylake offices which are paid off-line will be met from *(a)* additional departmental funds and *(b)* existing Social Fund allocation for the Wirral area. [20909]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* As is the normal practice for all social fund payments, any which are paid off-line are being met from the existing social fund allocation for the Wirral District. However, as a matter of course, the District budget is closely monitored.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to extend the winter fuel allowance to disabled people. [21440]

Mr. McCartney: Help is already available, through disability benefits and the disability premium in income support, in recognition of the extra costs, including heating, which disabled people may have. There are no plans to extend the winter fuel payment scheme to disabled people under age 60.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people will receive winter fuel payments in 2001–02 in Portsmouth, South. [21799]

Mr. McCartney: Last winter, around 17,600 people aged 60 and over in Portsmouth, South constituency received a winter fuel payment. The figure for this year will be similar.

Benefits (Scotland)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions he has had with members of the Scottish Executive since 3 May on free care for the elderly in Scotland; and what was the outcome of such discussions. [21628]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 19 November 2001, *Official Report,* columns 154–55W, and the written answer I gave the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) on 21 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 347W.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent representations he has received from independent financial advisers regarding the implementation of stakeholder pensions. [21543]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* Ministers have many meetings with pensions industry representatives, including independent financial advisers.

Pension Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what additional IT systems will be required in respect of the new pension credit; and how many additional staff he expects to employ. [22374]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* Pension credit will be introduced initially on the Department's existing computer systems, in order to de-risk the project. It will transfer as a replacement system, on modernised IT, at a later date, when the new benefit has been successfully implemented.

The pension service, to be launched in April 2002, will administer pension credit, ensuring that pensioners received a joined up service. The numbers of staff required to deliver this new service are still being finalised.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 758W, what precedent exists for awarding the Jubilee Medal to non-service men and women, particularly to those working in the emergency services. [19092]

Tessa Jowell: In 1997, the Silver Jubilee Medal was awarded to a wide range of recipients other than the armed forces, including the police, local services (including fire, health, social and education) and the civil service.

On the question of eligibility for the Queen's Golden Jubilee medal, I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave today to the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb).

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to award the Queen's Jubilee Medal to the *(a)* Fire and *(b)* Ambulance Service. [20968]

Tessa Jowell: As I announced on Tuesday 4 December, the Government have decided that eligibility for the Golden Jubilee medal should be extended to include members of the emergency services: the police, fire and ambulance services, the Coastguard, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, and the Mountain Rescue service. As is the case for the armed forces and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, the medal will be issued to serving members who have completed a minimum of five years' reckonable service on 6 February 2002.

A copy of the announcement has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

English National Stadium

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what time limits she has set for discussions between Patrick Carter and the Football Association on the English National Stadium; [18513]

(2) when she expects discussions about football's national stadium between the Football Association and Patrick Carter to be concluded; when she will publish the report of Patrick Carter's investigation into the English National Stadium; and if she will make a statement. [18512]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not set a deadline, but we hope to make an announcement and publish Patrick Carter's report before the Christmas recess.

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how far below the water table the playing surface is of the proposed National Football Stadium in the Birmingham bid. [19701]

Mr. Caborn: Birmingham city council have confirmed that the proposed level of the playing surface is above the water table.

Ministerial Duties

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the non-parliamentary events at which *(a)* she and *(b)* other Ministers in her Department have made a speech in an official capacity since 8 June; and what was the (i) purpose and (ii) date of the attendance. [21379]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The information requested is in the following table. This excludes speeches made at party or other non-departmental events.

Date	*Minister*	*Event*
12 June 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Presentation of the Samuel Johnson Prize for Non-Fiction 2001
18 June 2001	Secretary of State	Launch of Architecture Week
20 June 2001	Secretary of State	Smith Institute seminar
25 June 2001	Secretary of State	Launch of South East England Cultural Strategy
26 June 2001	Secretary of State	CBI Tourism conference
27 June 2001	Secretary of State	5th Lottery Monitor annual conference
27 June 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Launch of the Film Council's Regional Investment Fund for England
29 June 2001	Secretary of State	Announcement of site for Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fountain
2 July 2001	Secretary of State	South West Regional Cultural Strategy launch
2 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	New Opportunities Fund Digitisation Launch
3 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Launch of NESTA awards
4 July 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Dinner for South West Tourism and industry representatives
5 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Royal Academy of Dance Academic awards
5 July 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Lunch with North Devon Marketing Bureau and Exmoor tourism representatives
10 July 2001	Secretary of State	Radio Festival
11 July 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	British Hospitality Association's annual reception
11 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Launch of National Foundation for Youth Music, Early Excellence Centre
12 July 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Regional Cultural Consortium strategy launch
13 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	North West Development Agency annual conference
13 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Launch of North West Regional Cultural Strategy
13 July 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Physical Education and Sport conference
17 July 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Liverpool Football Academy
17 July 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Brookfield High School
20 July 2001	Minister of State for Sport	East Midlands Sport Board "Government Plans for Sport"
22 July 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Welsh Tourism industry dinner
23 July 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Opening Ceremony of Cerebral Palsy—Internal Sports and Recreation Association World Games
16 July 2001	Secretary of State	British Inward Tour Operators Association reception
16 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	National Heritage Memorial Fund Reception to celebrate the 21st Anniversary of the Fund
26 July 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of British Library's Exhibition: "Lie of the Land"
1 August 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Launch of Playday 2001—Children's Play Council
6 September 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Supporters Direct conference
6 September 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Institute of Sports and Recreation Management conference
10 September 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Launch of Audiovisual Industries Training Group report
13 September 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of Julian Stair exhibition at Contemporary Applied Arts
19 September 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Launch of North East Sports Strategy
20 September 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Medilink Live Medical Technology Fair
20 September 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	English Historic Towns Forum conference
22 September 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Sport Across Staffordshire
24 September 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Sport England conference "Past, Present, Future"
25 September 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Launch of British Hospitality Association's Industry Forum
25 September 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of new Collections Centre, Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester
26 September 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Arts and Business reception
26 September 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Launch of "Whose London" (LWT Community Arts initiative)
4 October 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Launch of Non-League Club Directory
4 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of the Japan 2001 "Facts of Life" exhibition at the Hayward Gallery
8 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of the Paul Robeson exhibition at the Theatre Museum, Covent Garden
8 October 2001	Secretary of State	Opening of Robin Howard Dance Theatre
9 October 2001	Secretary of State	Launch second round of Artsmark scheme
10 October 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Good Practice in Financing the Creative Industries conference
11 October 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Launch of Anti-Racism Charter for Sport
11 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Paul Hamlyn Foundation awards for Visual Artists
12 October 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Tourism Management Institute seminar
16 October 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Launch of Colchester Utd. Community Sports Trust
16 October 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Opening of Ipswich FC's Training Academy

Date	*Minister*	*Event*
16 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of the "Radical Fashion" Exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum
17 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Design Conference at Imperial War Museum
17 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of "Art on The Line" Exhibition at Courtauld Institute Gallery
17 October 2001	Secretary of State	"Taking the Lead: Good Design in Public Buildings" conference
17 October 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Yorkshire Tourist Board's Annual Tourism conference
18 October 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Heart of England Tourist Board's annual general meeting
18 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Reception to celebrate the 10th Birthday of Public Monument and Sculpture Association at Courtauld Institute Gallery
19 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Cheltenham Literature Festival
22 October 2001	Secretary of State	"A Media Odyssey"—Society of Editors conference
22 October 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Launch of Channel Four's "Four Minute Wonders"
23 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Launch of the Regional Task Force report "Renaissance in the Regions"
23 October 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Lunch with Association of Leading Visitor Attractions
25 October 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Restaurant Association's annual business conference
26 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Historic Environment Forum seminar on the Valetta Convention
27 October 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Opening of Michael Young Centre in Cambridge
29 October 2001	Secretary of State	Launch of Centenary Development at Tate Britain
29 October 2001	Secretary of State	Museums Association conference
29 October 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Launch of ITC guide "Adjusting the Picture"
31 October 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	New Statesman Media Lecture
1 November 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	"Excellence Through People" awards ceremony
1 November 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Sport England Regeneration Policy Advisory Group dinner
6 November 2001	Secretary of State	Coalfields Lottery conference
6 November 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Launch of the "Timestars" Teletext pages
6 November 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Local Government Association Launch of "Realising the Potential of Cultural Services"
6 November 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	British Video Association annual general meeting
7 November 2001	Minister of State for Sport	British Casino Association annual general meeting
7 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Empowering the Learning Community Steering Group meeting
8 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Arts and Business Awards 2001 at the National Theatre
8 November 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	Westcountry Excellence Food and Tourist awards
9 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Society of Chief Architects of Local Authorities (SCALA) conference
9 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Linbury Biennial Prizes for Stage Design at National Theatre
9 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Launch of London's Living Library 2001
13 November 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Tourism Society annual dinner
13 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Launch of the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Cultural Strategy
15 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Hands On! conference at Stratford Circus Arts Centre
19 November 2001	Secretary of State	Champions for Change Millennium awards
20 November 2001	Secretary of State	Arts and Corporate Social Responsibility seminar
20 November 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Opening of the River Tees Watersport Centre
20 November 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	South East Tourist Board awards ceremony
21 November 2001	Secretary of State	Launch of English Heritage annual report
21 November 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Business in Sport and Leisure annual conference
21 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Skillset annual awards
21 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Launch of Gateway to the South Bank public art project
22 November 2001	Secretary of State	Foreign Press Association lunch
22 November 2001	Secretary of State	Celebration of the Age Concern Millennium awards
22 November 2001	Secretary of State	"Switzerland Lights Up Tate Modern"
24 November 2001	Secretary of State	Annual Congress of Athletics
25 November 2001	Secretary of State	Shakespeare Schools Drama Festival Showcase at Duke of York's Theatre
26 November 2001	Secretary of State	Institute of Public Policy Research lecture
27 November 2001	Secretary of State	Community Media Association annual festival
27 November 2001	Secretary of State	British Art Market Federation anniversary dinner
27 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	Artsmark Awards for London Schools
28 November 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Central Council for Physical Recreation annual conference
29 November 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Institute of Sports Medicine annual awards
30 November 2001	Minister of State for the Arts	National Literacy Trust annual conference
30 November 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Arts and Business: New Partners reception
3 December 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	"Broadband Britain—the Content Challenge" conference
4 December 2001	Secretary of State	Launch of Spirit of Friendship Festival
4 December 2001	Minister of State for Sport	Sport England national conference on Sport and Regeneration

Departmental Staff (Home Working)

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps her Department is taking to encourage staff to work from home; and how many staff do so on a regular basis. [21837]

Dr. Howells: The Department is committed to the work-life balance of its staff and supports a range of flexible working patterns including part-time working, job-sharing and homeworking. Staff are encouraged to make use of the Department's formal home working policy for regular home working. Staff are also facilitated and supported to work from home with their manager's agreement. There are currently seven staff working from home on a regular basis, with resources available to support a further six opportunities. A number of staff throughout the Department also work from home on an occasional basis.

The Department publicises its policy on flexible working and encourages managers to respond positively to requests as part of its commitment to the diversity agenda.

Youth Services (Ilford)

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what initiatives her Department *(a)* has implemented and *(b)* plans to implement that encourage youth participation in sports and cultural activities in the Ilford, North constituency. [22292]

Mr. Caborn: The Government are committed to the development of sport and increasing opportunities for participation throughout the country, particularly among young people. The strategy for sport—A Sporting Future for All—and the Government's Plan for Sport set out an action plan on how we intend to achieve those objectives. Responsibility for developing sport for young people at the local level rests with a number of organisations including Sport England, local authorities, local education authorities, schools, sports governing bodies, sports clubs and volunteers.

A number of national programmes which will provide better sports facilities and improve sports provision are being implemented in the London borough of Redbridge including lottery funding where around £4.5 million has been committed to community sports facilities in the borough, the School Sport Co-ordinators programme where a bid is currently being worked up by the local authority and NOF Round three under which £2.1 million has been allocated to the borough. A secondary school in the borough is also showing interest in designation as a specialist sports college.

The Arts Council has made six lottery awards in Ilford, North totalling £26,309 (details as follows). London Arts Board has made five awards benefiting Ilford, North, totalling £100,352 (details as follows), through the Regional Arts Lottery Programme.

Recipient/project name	*Award amount (£)*	*Award date*	*Local authority*	*Distributing body*
Avigdor Primary School Parents' Association Avigdor Cultural Club	4,700	6 November 1997	Redbridge	Arts Council of England
The New Redbridge Wind Orchestra Music in the community—The New Redbridge Wind Orchestra	3,750	6 November 1997	Redbridge	Arts Council of England
Take Away Productions Ltd. The Take Away Project	5,000	19 March 1997	Redbridge	Arts Council of England
Triple's Show Gang This group produce an annual amateur drama production. The award will pay for their first production which will raise funds for Haven House hospice	2,859	25 July 2001	Redbridge	Arts Council of England
Wanstead and Woodford Cine and Video Club Video equipment, portable screen and sound equipment	5,000	13 May 1997	Redbridge	Arts Council of England
Quadraphonic 'Quadraphonic' CD	5,000	19 March 1997	Redbridge	Arts Council of England

Note:

According to the information supplied by the Arts Council of England

RALP awards benefiting Redbridge

Organisation	*Postcode*	*Awarded (£)*	*Artform*	*Borough(s) of*
Arts Initiative Ltd.[1]	E1 6LS	30,000	Combined Arts	Hackney, Redbridge, Waltham Forest
para active theatre[2]	IG3 9SX	12,102	Drama/Theatre/Combined Arts/Dance	Barking and Dagenham, Newham, Redbridge (went on to tour other boroughs)
Pascal Theatre Company[3]	WC1H 9AR	25,000	Drama/Theatre	Barnet, Camden, Harrow, Redbridge
Shruthi Laya Shangam[4]	SE26 4ES	17,330	Music/Dance	Lambeth, Lewisham, Redbridge
The Lions Part[5]	E11 4HB	15,920	Drama/Theatre	Camden, Kingston upon Thames, Lambeth, Redbridge, Southwark

[1] Linked: a two mile long multi-media, sound and music site-specific art installation by Graeme Miller w/support from Museum of London, about the history of the M11 Link Road and residents of the 400 houses which once stood there.

[2] Al-Daakan: towards the costs of a devised performance piece which will tour London venues, integrating Indian classical dance, Filmi dance, physical theatre, mask and puppetry and supported by a series of related educational workshops.

[3] London-Continental: The development and production of a new play which will be based on interviews with over 60s who lived in the East End as young people, and their grandchildren.

[4] Unique music and dance fusion: a series of performances of new work by Prasanna Ramaswamy by Western and Indian artists at Royal Festival Hall, developing a fusion of Western and Indian Classical music and dance, and including involvement of London-based students.

[5] Land Girls/A Sleep of Prisoners Double Bill: a theatre double bill commemorating World War 2 (a play from 1951 and a new devised work) to be performed in London churches including outreach and workshop programmes for older people as part of the research process.

Boxing Centres

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much funding her Department provided to local boxing centres in the last 12 months. [22077]

Mr. Caborn: In the year up to 30 November 2001, Sport England has made awards under the Lottery Sports Fund of £81,250 to the Finchley and District Amateur Boxing Club and £36,206 to the Riverside Leisure Centre in Bristol for the purchase of boxing rings and equipment. In addition nine awards totalling £30,929 have been made under the Awards for All programme for boxing equipment or to boxing clubs.

Historic Environment

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will publish the Government's statement of policy towards the historic environment. [22961]

Tessa Jowell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and I will publish our statement "The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future" tomorrow. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and will be available at my Department's website at www.culture.gov.uk.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Electoral Database

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to make the national registry and voting data electronic; and if he will make a statement. [22440]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

The LASER (Local Authorities Secure Electoral Registers) project has been established by my Department, in conjunction with the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), the Office of the e-envoy, the Electoral Commission, the Local Government Association and electoral administrators. Its aim is to provide electronic access for authorised users to electoral registers on a national basis. Tenders have been sought for work on the preliminary stages of the project, which will benefit from £12 million Capital Modernisation Funding.

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals he has to facilitate geographic access to magistrates courts in the county of Essex. [R] [21752]

Mr. Wills: I have no proposals in respect of geographic access to magistrates courts in Essex. It is the Government's policy that decisions concerning the number, location and future of magistrates courts in Essex, as with each of the 42 magistrates courts committee areas, are for the local courts committee to determine, in consultation with its local paying authority or authorities.

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the future of Witham magistrates court. [R] [21751]

Mr. Wills: I am not aware of any agreed plans that the Essex magistrates courts committee may have in respect of the Witham magistrates court.

Departmental Staff (Home Working)

Mr. Challen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps her Department is taking to encourage staff to work from home; and how many staff do so on a regular basis. [21823]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department introduced a major new flexible working package in 2001, including the option to work from home on a regular basis.

Any individual may seek to work from home for personal reasons, and staff are encouraged to make out a business case by using comprehensive guidance, available electronically, to consider feasible options. The department will support staff with the necessary equipment within the home environment where appropriate.

The Court Service has set up a pilot exercise to explore the merits of home working on a more extensive scale, to establish whether there are significant benefits to the organisation.

Currently there are fewer than 40 staff who work from home on a regular basis. However, we fully expect that number to increase.

Commission for Judicial Appointments

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress has been made in the establishment of the Commission for Judicial Appointments since the first Commissioner was appointed in March. [23120]

Mr. Wills: I am pleased to tell the House that Her Majesty yesterday made Orders in Council appointing seven new Deputy Commissioners to assist Sir Colin Campbell, the First Commissioner for Judicial Appointments, in conducting an ongoing audit of the appointments procedures for judges and Queen's Counsel. The remit of the Commission also extends to investigating individual complaints about the way these procedures are applied. The Deputy Commissioners are:

Urmila Banerjee

Tony Boorman

Jane Drabble

Frances Heidensohn

Sir Duncan Nichol

John Simpson

Jean Tomlin.

Additional, John Simpson is also appointed as Commissioner for Judicial Appointments in Northern Ireland.

Land Registry

Kali Mountford: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress has been made towards the implementation of the recommendations made in the Quinquennial Review of Her Majesty's Land Registry. [23035]

Mr. Wills: The Government have approved a wide-ranging programme of work in response to the review. Details will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

HM Land Registry is committed to providing the world's best service for guaranteeing ownership of land, and for facilitating property-related transactions. As a fourth time Charter Mark winner, the Land Registry already delivers excellent service to its customers. Further improvement to its internal operations recommended by the review are being pursued vigorously. By bringing forward this wider work programme, the Land Registry can, with the help of other Government Departments and stakeholders, develop innovative and customer-focused services for an even better service.

The main elements of the wider programme, much of which depends on the Land Registration Bill introduced in July, are to:

develop and promote electronic conveyancing services, including the National Land Information Service;

expand the geographic coverage and content of the land register;

explore ways in which the land register can contribute to making the property markets more efficient and more transparent;

consider the business case for providing further advisory services relating to land registration by 2003; and

launch a new independent adjudication service for land registration disputes in 2003.

Those elements of the programme which are for the Land Registry to take forward will be delivered through a new 10-year strategic plan which I shall publish in the spring.

I and ministerial colleagues in other Departments with responsibility for land and property markets will monitor the delivery of the programme closely. We will also review the arrangements for consultation across and between Government and those involved in these markets.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Palestinian Territories

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of the money her Department spends multilaterally in the Palestinian territories goes towards furthering peace and security in the region. [21873]

Clare Short: Our multilateral contributions comprise: £25 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA) for Palestinian refugees; 5 per cent. of the World bank's resources; and approximately 19 per cent. of the European Commission's aid budget. All of these efforts are designed to contribute to the peace process by helping to build capacity in the Palestinian Authority and to help meet the basic needs of the local population.

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the work of her Department in the Palestinian territories. [21875]

Clare Short: Our overall aim is to help promote peace, stability and economic and social development. The UK's bilateral inputs are designed in the broader context of the overall international effort. We work increasingly through World Bank and European Commission channels. The objectives for the UK programme are to support the middle east peace process through capacity building and institutional development for the Palestinian Authority; and to help meet basic human needs, through delivery of health and education services.

Poverty in the west bank and Gaza Strip has increased during the current crisis. Estimates suggest that the poverty rate has risen during this period from 21 per cent. to 35 per cent. The Palestinian economy shrank by 8.2 per cent. in 2000, while unemployment has risen sharply from a low of 10 per cent. in September 2000 to current levels of over 28 per cent. We have allocated additional resources to deal with the current emergency. We are targeting areas known to be major causes of poverty including unemployment, and lack of access to basic services and water and sanitation.

In 2001–02, we have increased our bilateral allocation from £8 million to £14 million. In addition, we have contributed £25 million this calendar year to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA) for education, health, relief and social services to Palestinian refugees in the west bank and Gaza Strip, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

Congo

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial assistance her Department is providing to revive the Inter-Congolese dialogue aimed at ending the civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [22473]

Clare Short: We have provided £525,000 this year in financial support for the Inter-Congolese Dialogue. This consists of a contribution to the costs of staging the Dialogue and support to the Facilitator's Office. The Dialogue is due to reconvene in South Africa early next year. We will actively consider the possibility of any further assistance as needs become clearer closer to the time.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department is taking, in co-operation with other Departments to promote the peace effort in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [22446]

Clare Short: HMG continue to press all parties to honour their commitments which they have made under the Lusaka Peace Accord. Progress on Lusaka is the key to making progress towards peace in DRC. We are providing support to the Facilitator's Office of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue and has been quick to offer support to take forward opportunities on Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) activities in DRC. These are both key elements of the Lusaka Accord. We are also supporting gross roots peace-building initiatives in the east of the country and a nationwide radio infrastructure project to assist the Congolese people in keeping up-to-date with developments in the peace process.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the measures taken by her Department to encourage free and fair elections in Zimbabwe. [21874]

Clare Short: DFID has provided support for civic education programmes and for the training of independent national electoral monitors through local non-governmental organisations. However, recent Zimbabwe Government proposals to exclude civil society from supporting election processes may restrict this work and further undermine international confidence. The EU and Commonwealth are continuing to urge an early invitation to international election observers to create a climate conducive to free and fair elections.

Departmental Staff (Home Working)

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to encourage staff to work from home; and how many staff do so on a regular basis. [21827]

Clare Short: We are currently preparing a guide for staff and their managers on the range of flexible working options available in DFID, including working from home. My Department has approved medium and long-term plans to introduce worldwide remote access for all staff that need it. Our records show that over 500 staff worldwide are currently able to dial into our information technology systems from home. We are currently gathering information on how many of these staff work from home regularly.

Child Soldiers

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when the Government will ratify the Optional Protocol on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of Children in Armed Conflict; and if she will make a statement. [22263]

Mr. Hoon: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 6 December 2001, *Official Report,* columns 458–59W, to my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown).

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Post-16 Education (Rural Areas)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of young people living in rural areas in the United Kingdom went into post-16 education compared to the national average in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999, *(e)* 2000 and *(f)* 2001. [16535]

Alun Michael: The DfES, which is responsible for the publication of statistics on participation in education, does not produce figures on the basis of an urban/rural breakdown. Figures for individual local education authorities and local skills councils are available in their statistical bulletin "Participation in Education and Training by Young People Aged 16 and 17 in each Local Area and Region, England, 1994–95 to 1998–99", available on their website.

Castle Cement Plant, Ribblesdale

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many tests have been carried out by the Environment Agency on dioxin emissions at the Ribblesdale plant of Castle Cement in the past 12 months; and if she will publish the findings. [18543]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 27 November 2001]:* Since November 2000 the Environment Agency has conducted three sets of dioxin tests on the kilns at Castle Cement's Ribblesdale plant. The individual sample results are shown in the table. The dioxin limit in the site's Integrated Pollution Control (IPC) permit is 0.8 ng/m^3.

Sample point	*Date sample taken*	*Results ng/m^3 dioxin*
Stack from kilns 5 and 6	14–15 February 2001	2.887 and 1.628
Kiln 7	1–2 May 2001	0.001 and 0.001
Stack from kilns 5 and 6	16–17 August 2001	0.212 and 0.295
Kiln 5a	16 August 2001	0.053
Kiln 5b	16 August 2001	0.216
Kiln 6	17 August 2001	0.200

Full details of these results are available on the agency's public registers, at the local Environment Agency office (Richard Fairclough House, 50 Knutsford Road, Warrington, WA4 1HG) and at the Ribble Valley borough council's offices.

The agency, in accordance with its enforcement policy, has investigated the breach of the emissions limit that occurred at the stack from kilns 5 and 6 on 14–15 February 2001 and a warning letter has been issued to Castle Cement. Over the period to August 2001, I understand that the company undertook its own exploration of emissions from the stack, including sampling. Following the February breach, the agency commissioned work modelling the likely fate of dioxins in the environment and the human food chain. This concluded that even under the worst conditions, individuals in the community exposed to the levels found during the breach of the limit would be most unlikely to exceed the World Health Organisation guideline intake. However, the agency will not accept any re-occurrence of the elevated levels found in February 2001.

Agricultural Development Scheme

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether funding from round three of the Agricultural Development Scheme will support projects outside areas directly affected by foot and mouth disease. [18872]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 28 November 2001]:* Yes, projects from all areas of England are eligible provided that they meet the eligibility criteria for the scheme, including the requirement that they are directed at sectors affected directly or indirectly by foot and mouth disease or address structural or other weaknesses highlighted by foot and mouth disease.

Environmental Management Systems

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the standard for environmental management systems 1SO 14001 is one of the measures of environmental management standards recognised by her Department as demonstrating a commitment to responsible environmental performance; and if she will make a statement. [20512]

Mr. Meacher: The Department acknowledges the important role of the international standard for environmental management systems, ISO 14001 at the global level. It provides organisations with a sound mechanism for demonstrating publicly their commitment to pollution prevention, to responsible management of environmental risks and impacts and to continual improvements in performance. Having an independent third party certify that the organisation has implemented the management system in accordance with the requirements of the standard is something that is increasingly valued by various stakeholders.

Carbofuran/Chlorfenvinphos

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with her EU counterparts regarding the revocation of licences for the use of *(a)* carbofuran and *(b)* chlorfenvinphos; and if she will make a statement. [20663]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 4 December 2001]:* Under EU rules the UK is not obliged to inform other member states of any national review programme of pesticide products undertaken to address national issues. However, all member states and the Commission were informed of the UK programme to review organophosphate compounds which included carbofuran and chlorfenvinphos. In addition, all are automatically informed of any new product approvals and revocations. The separate European programme intends to review all active substances used in plant protection products within the community and all member states and the Commission are involved in this decision-making process.

The approval holders for carbofuran and chlorfenvinphos chose not to submit supporting data for their products under the UK review and therefore these products will not be available in the UK after 31 December 2001. Under the European review programme carbofuran has been supported so far although its continued use will depend upon the assessment of the data submitted. Chlorfenvinphos has not been supported. The impact of the European regime will not be felt until 2003 when all the compounds not supported by companies anticipating extensive data requirements will be withdrawn.

Member states, can however, carry out their own review exercises and carry them out at different times to the European review. In this case, the UK organophosphate review was introduced to address public concerns about the safety of these compounds and we have acted in a consistent manner to revoke their use where appropriate. However, the impact of the loss of these products is not underestimated and officials will continue to do everything possible to help the trade and user groups.

Animal Health Bill

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received on the compatibility of the Animal Health Bill with the European Convention on Human Rights. [21103]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* As at 4 December the Department has received four pieces of correspondence from interested organisations and individuals which, among other issues relating to the Animal Health Bill, commented on its compatibility with human rights legislation.

Waterways

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received concerning the management of Britain's waterways, with particular reference to those in the north-east. [19993]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has received a number of representations recently on the review of the Environment Agency's navigation responsibilities, but none related specifically to the management of waterways in the north-east.

Rural Reports

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will respond to the reports by the Rural Task Force and by Lord Haskins. [23123]

Alun Michael: I will be publishing the Government's response to the report of the Rural Task Force tomorrow. The published document will also be a response to the report of Lord Haskins, also published on 18 October, and will also take stock on the progress on delivering the Rural White Paper.

Biosecurity

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what further steps she plans to take to assist farmers to meet appropriate biosecurity measures. [18023]

Mr. Morley: Many farmers are operating high biosecurity standards as a result of the foot and mouth disease outbreak and it is in their interest to maintain high standards into the future. I have therefore asked my officials to prepare a Code of Practice that will recommend best biosecurity practice to be available to all those engaged in livestock farming. The code will draw on the advice that has been given by the local Biosecurity Units of the State Veterinary Service during the foot and mouth disease outbreak.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Parliamentary Ombudsman

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 330W, on the Parliamentary Ombudsman, on which date each of the seven new statutory statements of complaint was received; and on which dates the responses were made. [22372]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 11 December 2001]*: The information requested is shown in the table.

PCA case	*Date received by Home Office*	*Date answered by Home Office*
No. 1	21 May 2001	2 July 2001
No. 2	6 August 2001	31 August 2001
No. 3	5 September 2001	17 October 2001
No. 4	7 September 2001	24 October 2001
No. 5	11 September 2001	22 October 2001
No. 6	18 September 2001	25 October 2001
No. 7	5 November 2001	[1]—

[1] Outstanding

Immigration

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of applicants seeking an extension of an existing leave to remain there are; how many of these cases have been awaiting decision *(a)* more than 12 months and *(b)* six to 12 months; how many such cases have lost entitlement to disability related benefits; and whether a protocol has been agreed with the Department of Social Security to backdate benefits when the claim for extension is decided. [20902]

Angela Eagle: Statistics on the number of applicants seeking an extension of an existing leave to remain and the length of time they have been awaiting a decision are not available.

I understand from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions that payment of disability living allowance or attendance allowance can continue where a recipient has applied for an extension of leave to remain.

Deportation

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to detain a person whose name has been communicated to him and to deport him. [20262]

Angela Eagle: I wrote to the hon. Member on 11 December 2001.

Custody

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of people arrested remained in custody for longer than two hours in the last 12 months. [20929]

Beverley Hughes: Available data on arrests for notifiable offences are based on aggregated returns made by the police. The information collected is by sex, age group, ethnicity and offence category. Information is not collected on the time people were held in custody.

The authority for police power of arrest is set out in sections 24 and 25 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Reviews of the detention of each person in police detention in connection with the investigation of an offence shall be carried out periodically in accordance with the provisions of section 40 of the same Act.

Languages (Detainees and Translators)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers speak *(a)* Arabic, *(b)* Hindi, *(c)* Urdu, *(d)* Farsi or Dari and *(e)* Pashto as a first language; how many officers, and at what grades, are trained to speak each language; and how many translators are available for work in detention camps in each region of England and Wales. [21308]

Beverley Hughes: Information on the languages spoken by prison officers is not held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost. Translation arrangements in Immigration Detention Centres are provided primarily by external translators and on occasion by Immigration Service staff.

Correspondence

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter of 2 November from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire on the state of roads and pathways under the control of the Prison Service relating to the Sudbury Park estate, Ashbourne in Derbyshire. [21470]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to the hon. Member on 12 December 2001.

Forced Marriage

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the practice of forced marriage among British Muslims. [21618]

Angela Eagle: The practice of forced marriage is wrong. Forced marriage occurs where a marriage is conducted without the valid consent of both parties, and where duress is a factor. It can affect many communities from a variety of cultural backgrounds and continents, not just Muslims. All major world religions condemn forced marriage.

On 6 November, the Government announced their action plan to tackle the problem, including measures to support victims, in response to the report of the Working Group on forced Marriage "A Choice by Right" published last year. Copies of this report, the joint Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office action plan and the progress report on the latter are available in the Library and on the Home Office website.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many British Muslims have complained to the Department about being forced into marriage against their will in the last five years. [21614]

Angela Eagle: We do not have figures covering the past five years. During the past two years, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has had over 300 inquiries on forced marriage. These include people who have:

(i) already been forced into a marriage and are back in the United Kingdom and have contacted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO);

(ii) people who have made telephone calls to the FCO prior to leaving the United Kingdom, stating they fear they may be forced into a marriage;

(iii) people who have escaped a forced marriage and have been repatriated back to the UK with the help of the Consulates; and

(iv) people who are still in the countries where they have been taken to by their families to be forced into a marriage but are unable to escape because they are being held against their will.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures there are to ensure that British Muslims are able to choose their marriage partner freely. [21615]

Angela Eagle: Under United Kingdom law, any marriage requires the valid consent of both parties. We are seeking to raise awareness of the legal position in the communities affected by forced marriage, particularly community leaders and potential or actual victims.

Prison Diets

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the diet of prisoners. [20959]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* Public sector prisons provide three meals a day for prisoners. Catering departments prepare multi-choice menus, which meet the needs of the establishment's population and enable pre-selection to take place. All prisons must comply with all food safety legislation and must have regard to particular dietary and religious needs. The Prison Service Catering Manual, which is published as a Prison Service Order, provides full guidance for catering staff on hygiene and food safety, nutritional requirements, diets for special groups, food quality and quality control, and customer surveys. Its requirements apply to both Prison Service and contractually managed establishments.

Homicides

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many homicides were committed in each year from 1997 to 2001 by criminals who were on early release from prison at the time of the attack. [18418]

Beverley Hughes: Records held centrally are not in a form as to permit routine analyses of the re-offending of all those on early release.

However, figures are available for homicides by persons who had previously been convicted of homicide in England and Wales, and are as follows:

1997: 2—One offender committed suicide after the second offence.

1998: 2

1999: 5—One offender committed suicide and one offender died following the second offence.

2000: 0

2001: 0.

Data for suspects convicted of homicides by previous homicide convictions are published annually in tables 4.10 and 4.11 of Criminal Statistics England and Wales.

Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list his reasons for excluding the police from awards of the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal. [18507]

Mr. Caborn: I have been asked to reply.

As I announced on Tuesday 4 December, the Government have decided that eligibility for the Golden Jubilee medal should be extended to include members of the emergency services: the police, fire and ambulance services, the Coastguard, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, and the Mountain Rescue service. As is the case for the armed forces and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, the medal will be issued to serving members who have completed a minimum of five years' reckonable service on 6 February 2002.

A copy of the announcement has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Internet Proof

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is taking to *(a)* identify and *(b)* remove barriers to the take-up of internet proof of (i) age and (ii) identity authentication services by (A) individuals and (B) business users. [21940]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The Office of the e-Envoy in the Cabinet Office will shortly publish consultation papers that identify, and propose policies to remove, barriers to the take up of authentication services based on the use of digital signatures.

Some of the approaches to authentication proposed in these consultation papers could be extended to provide proof of age.

The Government continue to support tScheme; an industry-led voluntary co-regulatory approval body for Trusted Service Providers (TSP). tScheme or equivalent approval will be required for authentication services used to support electronic transactions with Government.

HEALTH

Chorley and South Ribble Hospital

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will ensure that Chorley and South Ribble accident and emergency department plays a central role in achieving the improvements to services planned by the Government; [8414]

(2) how many ambulance emergency cases were taken to Chorley accident and emergency ward in each of the last five years; and how many of these were then taken to Royal Preston hospital; [8440]

(3) what plans he has to extend services at Chorley casualty department; [8412]

(4) what change in service levels has taken place at the accident and emergency department at Chorley hospital in each of the last five years; [8442]

(5) if he will support a casualty department at Chorley and South Ribble hospital; [8411]

(6) what assistance he provides to recruit extra staff to work on the accident and emergency department at Chorley and South Ribble hospital; [8415]

(7) how many people have been treated at Chorley accident and emergency department in each of the last five years; [8441]

(8) if he will ensure that emergency and orthopaedic services continue to be dealt with at Chorley and South Ribble hospital; [8413]

(9) if he will make a statement on the merits of operating a full accident and emergency department at Chorley hospital. [8443]

Jacqui Smith: Chorley and South Ribble accident and emergency department plays a central role in the current services and will continue to do so. Figures for the number of accident and emergency cases taken to Chorley and Preston are based on the accident and emergency information system, which was introduced in 1997–98. Comparable earlier data are not available:

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
All ambulance patients	4,046	5,840	6,491	7,097
All ambulance patients admitted to Chorley	1,544	2,576	2,812	3,303
All Chorley ambulance patients admitted to Preston	169	239	277	291
Total A&E patients transferred to Preston	760	1,339	1,415	1,472

The unification of the accident and emergency department for Chorley and Preston has brought many enhancements to service levels and an increase in activity, as shown in the tables. The rotation of consultants and their junior colleagues between the two sites has enabled medical staff to gain the relevant experience at both locations to provide comprehensive, quality health care. This has led, specifically at Chorley, to more consultants working on the hospital site and, at the same time, to an increase in the number of middle grade doctors working over the 24-hour period.The accident and emergency service for Central Lancashire, which is provided on both sites, already has an excellent record of recruiting staff for the department. It is, for example, one of the few units in the north-west with a full complement of nursing staff.

Chorley and South Ribble accident and emergency department was redeveloped and expanded in August 1996. The link with Preston has secured the future of this service, so that the population of Chorley and South Ribble will continue to enjoy access to two accident and emergency departments, at Chorley and Preston. Based on existing guidelines, and through its partnership arrangements, Chorley and South Ribble district general hospital has the capacity to provide 24-hour A&E cover in all clinical situations.

Total attendances at Chorley accident and emergency in each of the last five years were as follows:

	Number
1996–97	42,600
1997–98	45,620
1998–99	46,670
1999–2000	48,481
2000–01	48,504

The Boards of Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust and Preston acute hospitals national health service trust made it clear that Chorley will continue to provide 24-hour emergency services. The Chorley and South Ribble primary care trust supports that plan. In addition, Chorley and South Ribble district general hospital will continue to play a major role in the provision of orthopaedic services for Central Lancashire.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* digital and *(b)* analogue hearing aids have been fitted under the NHS as part of the modernising NHS hearing aid services project. [15598]

Jacqui Smith: By the end of November 2001, 18,227 adults had been assessed for digital aids and 16,628 digital hearing aids had been fitted by the 20 national health service trusts involved in the pilot project. Additionally, another 1,146 analogue hearing aids were fitted at those centres.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 948, on digital hearing aids, if the funding decisions for 2002–03 for the sites already providing digital hearing aids will be based on maintaining annual levels of service in the provision of digital hearing aids at each site. [22375]

Jacqui Smith [holding answer 11 December 2001]: Funding decisions for 2002–03 will be made in time to allow sites to make plans for delivering services for that financial year.

Therapy

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the projects that his Department funds that provide medically approved therapy through leisure and sporting outlets; and if he will make a statement. [17735]

Ms Blears: The Department does not fund any projects to provide therapy through leisure and sporting outlets, although there are exercise referral schemes whereby primary care staff can refer patients to leisure centres for advice and assistance in increasing physical activity. However, I understand my hon. Friend is particularly concerned about the provision of hydrotherapy services. Hydrotherapy can be provided by the national health service and patients in the first instance should discuss their condition with their general practitioner or consultant, who can advise and refer appropriately.

Furthermore, I am informed that there are local hydrotherapy services in the North-East at Middlesbrough General Hospital, Hartlepool University Hospital and University Hospital of North Tees. In addition, there are special schools with hydrotherapy pools, which may be available when not being used by the children. These are:

High Tunstall Comprehensive School in Hartlepool

Bishopsgarth Comprehensive School in North Tees

Whitehouse Farm School in Stocton

New Ormesby School or Tennyman Junior School in Middlesborough have special units and possibly have pools.

Diabetes

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the reasons for the delay in delivering a Diabetes National Service Framework. [17887]

Jacqui Smith: The Diabetes National Service Framework standards will be published shortly and the delivery strategy in summer 2002. Publishing in this way will enable us to engage the national health service, partner agencies and people with diabetes more closely in planning and managing the implementation of the Framework. It will also enable us to take account of the resources that will be available in future to support implementation, and the changing roles and responsibilities of NHS organisations and staff. We are also responding to the current pressures on the NHS, particularly in primary care.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the level of capacity required before the development of a National Service Framework for Diabetes. [20858]

Jacqui Smith: We will be publishing the Diabetes National Service Framework in two stages, with the standards this year to be followed by the delivery strategy in summer 2002. Publishing in this way will enable us to engage the national health service, partner agencies and people with diabetes more closely in planning and managing the implementation of the Framework. It will also enable us to take account of the resources that will be available in future to support implementation, and the changing roles and responsibilities of NHS organisations and staff.

Child Abuse

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children's homes in England and Wales that *(a)* are open and *(b)* have closed are now under investigation for possible child abuse; and if he will make a statement. [17886]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not collected centrally on the number of children's homes in England that are under investigation for possible child abuse.

Although the number of children's homes in Wales that are involved in such investigations is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales, a survey carried out in 1998–99 on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Crime Committee established that 32 forces in England and Wales had been investigating claims of institutional child abuse or were doing so during the period covered by the questionnaire (1 January 1998 to 30 June 1999). Many of the remaining forces stated that they had been engaged in such inquiries at other times.

A similar survey was carried out by ACPO earlier this year to which 32 forces responded. During the period covered by this survey (1997 to 2000) those 32 forces detailed 96 investigations (some of which may have involved more than one institution).

In-patient Treatment

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting *(a)* more than six months and *(b)* more than 12 months for in patient treatment in the Newcastle and North Tyneside Health Authority area in (i) March 1997, (ii) September 2001 and (iii) each reporting period in between. [17993]

Jacqui Smith: Information relating to in-patient waiting times in the Newcastle and North Tyneside health authority is shown in the table.

Patients waiting for elective admission, Newcastle and North Tyneside HA, March 1997 to September 2001: Ordinary and day case admissions combined

Quarter	*Total waiting*	*Over 6 months*	*Over 12 months*
March 1997	8,932	1,949	47
June 1997	9,253	2,157	207
September 1997	8,983	2,305	320
December 1997	9,315	2,364	357
March 1998	9,427	1,993	47
June 1998	9,191	1,851	60
September 1998	8,847	1,890	121
December 1998	9,033	1,790	108
March 1999	8,252	1,565	93
June 1999	8,598	1,561	108
September 1999	8,420	1,639	133
December 1999	8,789	1,765	101
March 2000	7,891	1,407	85
June 2000	8,175	1,639	141
September 2000	7,714	1,722	169
December 2000	7,649	1,664	162
March 2001	7,275	1,363	71
June 2001	7,253	1,384	120
September 2001	6,945	1,422	55

Source:

Department of Health form QF01

External Auditing

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total cost of external auditing for the NHS has been in each of the years from 1990–91 to 2000–01. [18068]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Cost of external auditing for the national health service (England)

£000

	Cost of external audit	*Other audit remuneration*
1990–91[1]	81	0
1991–92	16,260	0
1992–93	17,097	0
1993–94	28,834	8,284
1994–95	31,105	11,841
1995–96	30,559	13,937
1996–97	28,656	14,647

Cost of external auditing for the national health service (England)

£000

	Cost of external audit	*Other audit remuneration*
1997–98	28,279	16,182
1998–99	29,346	16,018
1999–2000	29,105	16,030
2000–01[2]	35,244	13,176

[1] The limited information shown for 1990–91 covers only the few organisations which included previous year figures in their 1991–92 accounts.

[2] Data for 2000–01 remain provisional and are subject to continuing audit by the National Audit Office.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the maximum outside night-time noise event target of 60 dBu in the World Health Organisation Charter on Environment and Transport includes noise from aircraft. [18439]

Ms Blears: The World Health Organisation guidelines on community noise express maximum noise events as dBA Lmax. The outside night-time noise event target is 60dBA Lmax and does include noise from aircraft.

Haemoglobinopathies

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessments he has made of the effectiveness of *(a)* genetic, *(b)* pre-conceptual and *(c)* ante-natal counselling offered by the NHS in relation to (i) sickle cell, (ii) thalassaemia and (iii) other haemoglobinopathies. [18893]

Jacqui Smith: The report of the survey of haemoglobinopathy screening policy and practice in England www-phm.umds/haemscreening/publications published in October this year indicates that few national health service trusts outside high haemoglobinopathy prevalence areas currently use specialist counsellors.

No assessment of the effectiveness of genetic, pre-conceptual and ante-natal counselling in the NHS has been made. However, the NHS Plan makes a commitment to implement effective and appropriate screening programmes for women and children. This commitment includes a new national linked ante-natal and neo-natal screening programme for haemoglobinopathies (sickle cell and thalassaemia) by 2004. The screening programme will look at the issue of counselling as part of its overall remit.

Patient Safety

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the work of the National Patient Safety Agency; [19057]

(2) which health authorities are participating in the pilot study areas investigating systems to report failures and near misses. [19059]

Jacqui Smith: The National Patient Safety Agency was established on 2 July 2001 to improve the safety of national health service patients by promoting a culture of reporting and learning from adverse healthcare events. It will establish and operate a national system for reporting, analysing and learning lessons from adverse events and near misses involving national health service patients. The National Patient Safety Agency will also provide advice and guidance to assist in the promotion of patient safety in the NHS.

The new reporting system is currently being tested at pilot sites in the following health authorities:

England

Birmingham
Bradford
Cambridge and Huntington
Camden and Islington
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly
Dudley
East London and the City
East Riding
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster
Leicestershire
Merton, Southwark and Wandsworth
Newcastle and North Tyneside
North and East Devon
Oxfordshire
Southampton and South West Hampshire
Tees
Wakefield
Wiltshire

Wales

Dyfed Powys
Iechyd Morgannwg.

Aluminium

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is being carried out into the medical impact of aluminium on the human body *(a)* via its use as a food packaging material and *(b)* in terms of its presence in drinking water. [19077]

Ms Blears: The most recently published study by the Food Standards Agency showed that exposures of United Kingdom consumers to aluminium from the typical diet in the UK were well within the provisional tolerable weekly intake (PTWI) established for aluminium in 1989 by the Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives, even for those eating above-average amounts of food. Although general exposures from the diet are low, the Food Standards Agency currently has four research projects to test if there is migration of aluminium into food from, respectively, glazed ceramic ware, paper and board, kitchen ware and glass.

Aluminium in drinking-water is a minor contributor to oral intakes of aluminium in UK consumers.

A wide range of types of research contributes to scientific understanding of the effects of aluminium in humans. There is no comprehensive national or international database of current research on aluminium. The most relevant studies listed in the National Research Register concern the role of aluminium in dementia, clinico-pathological correlates of dementia in Down's syndrome (including aluminium absorption), possible protective effects of selenium and magnesium on the toxicity of aluminium, and a clinical trial of immunotherapy with aluminium hydroxide. The National Research Register is a database of on-going and recently completed research projects funded by, or of interest to, the United Kingdom's national health service, and is available at http://www.doh.gov.uk/research/nrr.htm.

In addition, the Department and the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly health authority are funding continuing studies of health outcomes in relation to the Lowermoor water pollution incident of 1988, in which the principal pollutant was aluminium sulphate at very high concentrations.

Macular Degeneration

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS trusts provide treatment and which health authorities have purchased treatment for individual patients *(a)* inside and *(b)* outside their own area, for macular degeneration. [19416]

Jacqui Smith: In 2000–01, there were 3,317 in-patient episodes in England with a primary diagnosis concerning age-related macular degeneration (AMD). The hospital trusts that provided the treatment are given in list 1, the health authorities that purchased treatment from within their own area in list 2, and those that purchased treatment from outside their area in list 3. An appraisal of the use of photodynamic therapy in the treatment of AMD, which is being conducted by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE), should be completed in July 2002 provided there are no appeals. NICE's guidance will provide for a consistent approach to the purchasing of the treatment.

List 1—Finished consultant episodes (FCEs) for primary diagnosis "Degeneration of macula and posterior pole" (ICD10 code H35.3), by hospital trust, NHS trusts in England, 2000–01

List 1—Finished consultant episodes (FCEs) for primary diagnosis "Degeneration of macula and posterior pole" (ICD10 code H35.3), by hospital trust, NHS trusts in England, 2000–01

		Number
RP6	Moorfields Eye hospital	329
RL4	Royal Wolverhampton hospital	293
RQ6	Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen hospitals	153
RR8	Leeds Teaching hospitals	130
RBU	Central Manchester healthcare	120
REU	Burnley healthcare	115
RLZ	Royal Shrewsbury hospitals	106
RTX	Morecambe Bay hospitals	92
RLW	City hospital	90
RJY	Wigan and Leigh health	84
RHM	Southampton University hospitals	79
RGU	Brighton healthcare	74
REF	Royal Cornwall hospitals and west Cornwall	72
RKC	Warrington hospital	70
RLN	City hospitals Sunderland	64
RJ5	St. Mary's hospital	63
REZ	Rochdale healthcare	52
RDZ	Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch	50
RVY	Southport and Ormskirk hospital	48
RA5	East Gloucestershire NHS trust	47
RFK	Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham University	45
RA7	United Bristol healthcare	44
RE7	West Cumbria healthcare	44
RM1	Norfolk and Norwich healthcare	44
RMR	Blackpool Victoria	44
RCB	York health services	42
RTH	Oxford Radcliffe hospital	41
RMF	Preston Acute hospitals	34
RJE	North Staffordshire hospital centre	33
RCX	Kings Lynn and Wisbech hospitals	32
RTG	Southern Derbyshire Acute hospitals	31
RDF	Forest healthcare	30
RPL	Worthing and Southlands hospitals	30
RWE	University hospitals of Leicester	30
RGT	Addenbrookes	29
RMB	Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	27
RNT	Stoke Mandeville hospital	27
RCC	Scarborough and north-east Yorkshire	26
REM	Aintree hospitals	26
RBN	St. Helens and Knowsley hospital	25
RTD	Newcastle upon Tyne hospitals	25
RTK	Ashford and St. Peters	25
RGQ	Ipswich hospital	23
RD1	Royal United hospitals Bath	22
RA9	South Devon healthcare	21
RJ1	Guy's and St. Thomas' hospital	21
RCV	Central Sheffield University hospitals	19
RCJ	South Tees Acute hospitals	18
RWA	Hull and east Yorkshire hospitals	18
RWP	Worcestershire Acute hospitals	18
RJZ	King's healthcare	16
RAE	Bradford Hospitals NHS trust	15
RMC	Bolton hospitals	15
RJ7	St. George's healthcare	14
RTA	South Durham healthcare	14
RWJ	Stockport	13
RDE	Essex Rivers healthcare	11
RN3	Swindon and Marlborough	11
RWF	Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells	11
RAJ	Southend hospital	10
RBA	Taunton and Somerset NHS trust	10
RH8	Royal Devon and Exeter	10
RKB	Walsgrave hospitals	10
RDU	Frimley Park hospital	9
RTP	Surrey and Sussex healthcare	9
RAG	Doncaster Royal Infirmary and Montagu hospital	7
RBL	Wirral hospital	7
REX	Oldham	7
RGB	Huddersfield healthcare services	7
RGN	Peterborough hospitals	7
RK9	Plymouth hospitals	6
	Other trusts (inc. unknown and foreign)	73
		3,317

Of the 3,317 cases with this diagnosis, 1,907 (57 per cent.) were treated within the health authority of residence.

List 2—the following HAs have purchased treatment from trusts within their own area; the majority of these have also purchased treatment from outside their area:

QEM: Wolverhampton

QEF: Shropshire

QC4: Morecambe Bay

QDH: Leeds

QDA: Wigan and Bolton

QDV: Cornwall and Isles of Scilly

QCY: North-west Lancashire

QET: Norfolk

QAM: East Sussex, Brighton and Hove

QDR: North Yorkshire

QCV: North Cheshire

QC7: Sefton

QDW: Dorset

QDK: North Cumbria

QCT: Bury and Rochdale

QDY: Gloucestershire

QD8: Avon

QAN: West Sussex

QEH: North Staffordshire

QCJ: Southern Derbyshire

QD9: Birmingham
QCL: Leicestershire
QC2: Liverpool
QCX: East Lancashire
QD3: Southampton and south-west Hampshire
QD6: South and west Devon
QC5: St. Helens and Knowsley
QA3: Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster
QCF: Suffolk
QCE: Oxfordshire
QA8: Buckinghamshire
QAH: Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham
QER: Cambridge
QEN: Worcestershire
QDF: East Riding
QDP: Tees
QCP: Nottingham
QC3: Manchester
QDN: Sunderland
QAL: West Surrey
QDD: Bradford
QAT: Camden and Islington
QAX: North Essex
QD5: Somerset
QDJ: Newcastle and north Tyneside
QDE: County Durham
QC8: Stockport
QA5: Redbridge and Waltham Forest
QDX: North and east Devon
QD7: Wiltshire
QAY: South Essex
QAF: West Kent
QDT: Calderdale and Kirklees
QDC: Wirral
QC9: West Pennine
QCR: Sheffield
QC1: South Lancashire
QAJ: Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth
QCC: Northamptonshire
QD1: North and mid Hampshire

List 3—the following HAs have purchased treatment from outside their area:

QAQ: Barnet
QAP: Barking and Havering
QAR: Brent and Harrow
QEC: Dudley
QCM: Lincolnshire
QCN: North Nottinghamshire
QEP: East and north Hertfordshire
QCW: South Cheshire
QEE: Sandwell
QA4: Enfield and Haringey
QA7: Berkshire
QAK: East Surrey
QAW: East London and the City
QAG: Kingston and Richmond
QEQ: West Hertfordshire
QA2: Hillingdon
QDG: Gateshead and south Tyneside
QA6: Bedfordshire
QAD: Croydon
QEK: Walsall
QEJ: South Staffordshire
QAV: Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow
QC6: Salford and Trafford
QD2: Portsmouth and south-east Hampshire
QDQ: Wakefield
QAA: Bexley and Greenwich
QEL: Warwickshire
QEG: Solihull
QCH: North Derbyshire
QDL: South Humber
QAE: East Kent
QED: Herefordshire
QCQ: Rotherham
QCK: Doncaster.

University of Leicester Hospitals Trust

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accidents were reported by patients while they were on the premises of hospitals in the University of Leicester Hospitals Trust in the last 12 months. [20260]

Jacqui Smith: The number of statutory reportable "incidents" is collected under Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 1995. This covers reportable infectious diseases, and accidents that result in more than three days absence from work, deaths in the workplace for example.

The number of RIDDOR incidents recorded at University Hospitals of Leicester National Health Service Trust (UHL) in 2000–01 was 89—the latest year for which figures are available. This figure includes both patient and staff incidents.

In terms of public liability claims against UHL, under the NHS Litigation Authority's "Non-Clinical Pooling Scheme", the total number of accidents reported by patients and visitors over the last 12 months was 20.

Delayed Discharges

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average delay for patients with delayed discharges has been in each quarter since 1996. [20862]

Jacqui Smith: No information was collected centrally about the length of delay for patients with delayed discharge until the first quarter of 2001–02. In the first two quarters of 2001–02, the breakdown of lengths of delay is shown in the table.

Percentage

Delay	
Less than eight days	26
Between eight and 14 days	18
Between 14 and 28 days	20
More than 28 days	36

Renal National Service Framework

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measurements of capacity he used when deciding on the feasibility of introducing a Renal National Service Framework. [20864]

Jacqui Smith: The Renal National Service Framework was announced on 27 February 2001. An external reference group led by Professor Robert Wilkinson and announced on 14 September 2001, will develop proposals for modernising services and improving patient care over a 10 year period in planned stages. The programme will build on the already agreed and funded targets for expanding kidney dialysis set out in the NHS Plan, and increased transplantation rates agreed with, and funded through, United Kingdom Transplant.

Transsexual People

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 978W, on transsexual people, (1) if he will make it his policy to issue guidance on the protocols of care for transsexual people, irrespective of the issue of funding for gender reassignment surgery for particular individuals; [20845]

(2) if he will make it his policy to issue guidance on the provision of health care for transsexual people, including care for conditions other than that of transsexualism. [20846]

Jacqui Smith: The provision of services for transsexuals has to be very comprehensive as most will require specialist counselling and psychotherapy before surgery takes place, and appropriate care afterwards. The Department does not produce care protocols for treatments, as these are clinical issues and are best left to the professional bodies. The Royal College of Psychiatry has already produced guidelines on child and adolescent gender identity services, and is planning to produce clinical guidelines for adults in 2002.

Decisions on the types of services that should be delivered to meet the needs of a population have to be taken on the front line by the local heath commissioners. It is their responsibility to be aware of the needs of the population and in deciding what services to provide they should take account of resources. However, there should be no blanket ban on the provision of any service and each case should be considered on its merits. Whatever care is being given, all patients are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect for their individual needs.

Surplus Hospital Sites

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where the money raised from the sale of surplus hospital sites has been spent; and what plans he has for the use of future proceeds. [21000]

Mr. Hutton: Receipts from the sale of surplus hospital sites are distributed equitably across the national health service to be reinvested in land, buildings and equipment. Future proceeds from sales of surplus estate will be distributed this way, and used for new investment.

Vocational Rehabilitation

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has discussed with the Department of Work and Pensions to develop a National Service Framework for vocational rehabilitation. [20814]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The Department is already working with the Department of Work and Pensions on pilot schemes to use health and employment services to get people back to work, or remain in work, following illness or injury. We shall be exploring ways in which NHS Plus can contribute to this as well.

Wheelchairs

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accidents have been caused by *(a)* powered wheelchairs and *(b)* electric two seater scooters in each of the last two years. [R] [21793]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The Medical Devices Agency received a total of 7,222 adverse incident reports concerning medical devices between 1 December 1999 and 30 November 2000. Completed investigations so far from these reports show that 424 related to electric-powered wheelchairs. The causes of 317 of these completed investigations had some link to the wheelchair itself or its accessories or its instructions for use.

The MDA received a total of 7,886 adverse incident reports concerning medical devices between 1 December 2000 and 30 November 2001. Completed investigations so far from these reports show that 322 related to electric-powered wheelchairs. The causes of 208 of these completed investigations had some link to the wheelchair itself or its accessories or its instructions for use.

The MDA has no recorded incidents concerning electric two-seater scooters.

Neonatal Staffing Study

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place a copy of the 1999 UK Neonatal Staffing Study in the Library. [21700]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* Yes.

Fish and Chip Shops

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason fish and chip shops may be classified under health and safety regulations as dangerous premises for the employment of young people under 16. [22304]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* The Children and Young Persons Act 1933, as amended, allows local authorities to introduce byelaws with respect to the employment of children. Such byelaws may prohibit the employment of children in any specified occupation. Local authority byelaws do prohibit children below the minimum school leaving age from working in commercial kitchens and may deem fish and chip shops to come into this category. It would be for individual local authorities to provide a definition of a commercial kitchen in relation to their own byelaws.

Social Exclusion

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the competitive grant schemes, administered by his Department and its agencies, open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion in this country; and, for each scheme in each year *(a)* the number of applicants, *(b)* the number of successful applicants, *(c)* the total of grants awarded, *(d)* the number of pages in the application form and *(e)* if the grant can be used to fund the core costs of the applicant organisation; [22382]

(2) if he will publish a list of the grants made under the competitive grants schemes, administered by his Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22384]

(3) how many competitive grant schemes, administered by his Department and its agencies were open in each of the last 10 years to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22381]

(4) what estimate has been made of the administrative cost to *(a)* the state, *(b)* unsuccessful applicants and *(c)* successful applicants of the competitive grant schemes, provided by his Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22385]

(5) if he will place in the Library, a copy of the application form for each of the competitive grant schemes, administered by his Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion. [22383]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not run any competitive grant schemes aimed specifically at tackling social exclusion. However, most of what the Department does has great potential to tackle social exclusion by improving health and wellbeing. The Department, through the section 64 general scheme, makes grants to voluntary organisations working in health and social care to tackle health issues which in, for example, reducing health inequalities and reaching disadvantaged groups, assist in tackling social exclusion.

The section 64 general scheme is primarily aimed at national voluntary organisations although local projects of national significance can be funded. The degree to which individual section 64 grants tackle social exclusion would be impossible to calculate. Project, core and capital funding is available. Information is not available on the administrative costs of the scheme. A copy of the latest section 64 application form has been placed in the Library. Information on the number of applications received, approved and their total value for 1996–97 to 2000–01 was in the reply given by the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) to the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) on 25 July 2000, *Official Report,* columns 501–02W. Information on individual grants in payment is routinely displayed on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/sect64/grants. Information on grants in payment for 2000–01 is currently being amended and will shortly be displayed on the website.

The Department also funds the Opportunities for Volunteering Scheme. Under this scheme we make funds available to 17 national agents (voluntary organisations) to enable them to support local projects involving volunteers in health and social care related activities. A number of these national agents deal with vulnerable groups and a particular focus of the scheme is to provide opportunities for unemployed people to undertake voluntary work.

The 17 national agents deal with applications direct from local projects. Administration costs for applicants are not known but the national agents receive approximately £530,000 per annum to cover administration and project support costs.

In 2000–01 some 487 projects were funded. A copy of the scheme's general notes of guidance 2000–03, which sets out the basic principles of the scheme and the types of applications considered by the 17 national agents, and the Annual Review 2000–01, which provides details of the funded projects, have been placed in the Library.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Government Cars

Mr. Watson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many, and what make and model of cars have been purchased by each Government Department since 1997. [21988]

Mr. Leslie: There is no centrally held record of all cars that have been purchased by all Government Departments since 1997. The Government Car Service has purchased the following cars since 1997, including cars purchased on behalf of the Cabinet Office:

Make and model	*Number purchased*
Ford Mondeo	76
Ford Galaxy	3
Vauxhall Omega	59
Vauxhall Vectra	78
Vauxhall Astra	15
Rover 400	7
Rover 45	9
Rover 800	9
Rover 75	5
Land Rover Discovery	1
Jaguar/Daimler	10
Nissan Primera	9
Peugeot 607	1
Toyota Prius	1

Mr. Watson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance is given to Government Departments on the purchase of car fleets. [21986]

Mr. Leslie: There is no specific central guidance issued on the purchase of car fleets. However, Government Departments have to be satisfied that they are achieving value for money and that they comply with European Union regulations on public procurement.

The purchase or hire of cars and other vehicles is subject to the Suppliers Directive (93/36/EC as last amended by Directive 97/52/EC). Together with the relevant Remedies Directive (89/665/EEC) the Suppliers Directive has been given effect in the UK by the Public Supply Contract Regulations (SI.1995/201, last amended by SI.2000/2009). Compliance with these Regulations will also fulfil the purchaser's obligations towards suppliers from third countries pursuant to the EEA Treaty, various Europe Agreements and the WTO Government Procurement Agreement. The current threshold is £93,896 and there are rules that require recurrent purchasers to be considered in aggregate over a governed period for the purpose of applying the threshold. Government Departments and other public bodies are responsible for complying with the regulations. The commission will follow up complaints of non-compliance with the member state concerned and may initiate proceedings under Article 226/EC. In the UK interested suppliers harmed or at risk of harm from the breach of the rules can seek interim or final remedies in the High Court (Court of Session in Scotland) which may lead to an interim or final injunction or the award of damages.

Departmental Promotions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much his Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in the financial years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 *(e)* 1999–2000 and *(f)* 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [12256]

Mr. Leslie: Expenditure on information literature, advertising and campaign material—which includes the cost of employment recruitment—over those years is as follows: *(a)* £1,347,820; *(b)* £2,172,064; *(c)* £1,511,039; *(d)* £2,565,074; *(e)* £4,032,479; *(f)* £3,449,218.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people are employed by the Department under the new deal for young people; and at what cost to public funds. [21316]

Mr. Leslie: There are at present three new deal placements between the ages of 18 and 24 within the Cabinet Office costing an average of £17,833 (which is made up of basic salary, Employers National Insurance and Pensions Contributions). Taking into account available subsidies this figures reduces to £15,523 per placement.

The Cabinet Office has subsequently employed three new deal placements over the age of 24 on a permanent contract through open and fair competition.

Performance Targets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if the Department broke even on an accruals basis in 2000–01; [21464]

(2) if he will make a statement on the performance of his Department in meeting its *(a)* break-even and *(b)* other public service agreement targets this year. [21329]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office does not have a specific break-even performance target, as it does not on the whole charge for its services apart from the administration and management of civil service pensions and for some of the activities delivered by Centre for Management and Policy Studies.

However the Government Car and Despatch Agency (GCDA), which is an executive agency of the Cabinet Office, and the Central Office of Information (COI), which is an executive agency and separate Government Department reporting to the Deputy Prime Minister, both have a key performance target to break-even on an accruals basis.

The GCDA met its break-even target for the financial year 2000–01. This was reported in the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts for the financial year 2000–01, which were laid before Parliament on 17 July 2001. At this stage, it is on course to meet its target in 2001–02.

Central Office of Information (COI) met its break-even target for the financial year 2000–01. This was reported in the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts for the financial year 2000–01, which were laid before Parliament on 20 July 2001. It is on course to meet its target for 2001–02.

The Department is on course to deliver its agreed public service agreement targets, as detailed in the Cabinet Office's Departmental Report 2001, copies of which are in the Libraries of the House.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 13 December 2001

NORTHERN IRELAND

Political Developments

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on political developments in Northern Ireland since 1 December. [23080]

Dr. John Reid: We believe the time is now right to extend to hon. Members who have not taken their seats at Westminster—that is, at present, four Sinn Fein members from Northern Ireland—access to certain facilities and accompanying allowances here. We believe that, as well as enabling their constituents' interests to be better represented, this would be consistent with the progress made in implementing the Belfast Agreement, including recent steps to establish on a more stable footing the political institutions provided for in the Agreement, in which Sinn Fein participate fully. This is however entirely a matter for the House, and we shall therefore be tabling a motion on the subject for debate next week.

Police Service

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will publish a timetable for the implementation of lateral entry, secondments and other north/south co-operation issues between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Garda Siochana. [23250]

Jane Kennedy: I have today published a timetable, which has been agreed with the Irish Government, identifying how both Governments intend to implement the Patten recommendations on co-operation between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Garda Siochana, including lateral entry and secondments to the two police services on a reciprocal basis. Copies of the timetable have been placed in the Library of the House.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Trade Unions (Buckingham)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the level of trade union membership among firms in the Buckingham constituency. [22642]

Alan Johnson: None. A reliable estimate cannot be made using the data held by central Government.

Homeworking

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to increase employment opportunities for those who rely on schemes providing home-based work. [21253]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There are no specific plans to increase employment opportunities for those who rely on schemes providing home-based work at present, although such opportunities may be available in companies that are developing work-life balance initiatives for the benefit of their business, employees and customers.

Adult Education (Financial Impact)

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact on *(a)* women's and *(b)* men's wages of years spent outside the labour market for educational reasons. [21778]

Ms Hewitt: The Women and Equality Unit published a report on the Gender Pay Gap on 5 December. This included an analysis of available research on the impact of qualifications on women's and men's wages and found that the evidence varies across studies. None the less, although it is difficult to identify the precise size of the impact, acquiring qualifications has a positive impact on wages and labour market participation for both men and women. Estimates of the relative impact also vary by qualification. Research commissioned by the skills taskforce suggests that private returns to A-levels are slightly higher for women, while returns to first degrees are broadly equivalent by gender.

Near Earth Object Task Force

Ann Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Government's response on 24 February to the recommendations contained in the report of the Near Earth Object Task Force. [23492]

Ms Hewitt: An updated response is nearing completion and will be published shortly. Copies will be put with the report and the Government response which were placed in the Libraries of both Houses. A copy of this response and press release will also be found at www.neare[illegible]jects.co.uk

Equal Treatment Directives

Mr. Lammy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Government will consult on its plans for implementing the Equal Treatment Directives 2000/43/EC and 2000/78/EC. [23491]

Ms Hewitt: Yes. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, the Minister responsible for equality co-ordination, has today published a consultation document about our proposals to take forward implementation of the Employment and Race Directives in Great Britain.

I have arranged for copies of the document to be placed in the Libraries of the House. We have asked for responses by the end of March 2002. The proposals build on our current arrangements for tackling discrimination. They will involve: introducing new legislation prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, age and sexual orientation in the areas of employment, occupation and training; and making some adjustments to the Race Relations Act 1976 and Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA).

We intend to have the new provisions on race, religion or belief and sexual orientation in place in 2003; on disability in October 2004 to coincide with the planned implementation of other aspects of the DDA; and on age by the end of 2006, taking full advantage of time allowed in order to assist sensible implementation.

These proposals provide a practical and sensible way forward which will benefit both business and individuals by promoting best use of people's talents and potential.

Oil and Gas Infrastructure

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made on the preparation of guidance on the use of legal powers to settle disputes over third party access to upstream oil and gas infrastructure. [23490]

Mr. Wilson: I have, today, placed in the Library of the House a copy of a consultation document from my Department which seeks industry's views on proposed guidance on how, if asked to intervene, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry would use longstanding powers, now in the Petroleum Act 1998 and other legislation, to settle disputes over access to infrastructure.

Access to infrastructure is a key element in the process of extracting the UK's petroleum resources. The proposed guidance builds on consideration of the results of an earlier consultation. It is intended to reduce industry uncertainty about the operation of the regulatory regime and is one element of the Government's policy aimed at addressing barriers to exploration and development on the UK continental shelf.

Fireworks

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further measures she will take to enforce the age restrictions on the sale of fireworks at *(a)* new year and *(b)* fireworks night 2002. [22663]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Enforcement of the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 is the responsibility of local authority trading standards departments. I have sought feedback from trading standards departments on levels of compliance and enforcement issues following this year's fireworks season.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what recent representations she has had regarding the inappropriate use of fireworks; [18155]

(2) what action the police and local councils can take to control the inappropriate use of fireworks; [18153]

(3) what action she plans to control the inappropriate use of fireworks; and if she will make a statement. [18154]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department has received representations from the public concerning the impact of noise, the misuse of fireworks in public places and issues of safety.

Under current legislation it is an offence under section 80 of the Explosives Act 1875 to throw or set off fireworks in any highway, street or thoroughfare or public place. The power to enforce this section of the Act rests with the police.

All fireworks sold to the public must also comply with the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997. The regulations, among other things, ban certain types of larger and more powerful products from retail sale, set the minimum age for purchasing fireworks at 18 years and require that all fireworks for sale must comply with the British Standard (BS7114). Local authority trading standards officers enforce the regulations.

In addition the Department runs an annual fireworks safety campaign, working closely with police, fire brigades and local authorities to promote safety messages during the firework season. This year over 25,000 safety toolkits were distributed to schools for use in the classroom to heighten awareness of the dangers of fireworks and to promote considerate behaviour.

We believe that the current restrictions on the sale of fireworks and rules on their use, backed up by an active safety campaign, provide the right level of control over the sale of fireworks. We have no present plans to introduce further controls but will continue to keep the position under review.

Tesco *v.* Levi Strauss Case

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the decision of the European Court of Justice in the Tesco *v.* Levi Strauss case; and if she will make a statement. [18045]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The judgment by the European Court of Justice in the Tesco *v.* Levi Strauss case confirmed that the European trade mark directive (89/104/EEC) means that branded goods cannot be imported into the European Economic Area without the trade mark owner's consent.

Many people will have been disappointed by this judgment. We believe that liberalisation of trade mark law will be good for consumers, good for business, and good for the economy.

We are working hard in Europe to achieve the necessary consensus for change to the directive. We are looking to the European Commission to help us to work through the issue of parallel trading.

Office of Fair Trading

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions since May 1997 *(a)* she and *(b)* her predecessors have overruled the advice of the Director-General of the Office of Fair Trading. [10135]

Miss Melanie Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has overruled the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading regarding mergers of enterprises on eight occasions and on monopoly reports on three occasions since May 1997.

Vehicle Price Fixing

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the nature of the assistance her Department has provided to the European Commission over allegations of price fixing in the United Kingdom vehicle market. [14829]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department supports the European Commission in its application and enforcement of the EC competition rules.

Money Laundering

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals she has for amending the regulation of accountancy to ensure that accountants *(a)* report all money laundering which comes to their attention and *(b)* play no part in (i) opening accounts and (ii) setting up and closing down shell companies to carry it on. [15249]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Home Office has policy responsibility for primary legislation on money laundering offences, while HM Treasury is responsible for regulating the financial services industry, including policy responsibility for secondary legislation such as the 1993 Money Laundering Regulations (which are shortly to be amended).

The Proceeds of Crime Bill, which is currently before Parliament, will consolidate and strengthen existing anti-money-laundering legislation. It will also provide new power for the investigation of money laundering. It is currently an offence for any person to fail to report knowledge or suspicion of drug or terrorist money laundering which comes to their attention in the course of their trade, business or profession. The Bill replaces that offence with an offence for a person working in a sector covered by the Money Laundering Regulations to fail to make a report to the authorities if he knows, suspects or has reasonable grounds to know or suspect that another person is laundering the proceeds of any criminal activity.

At present, not all accountants are regulated under the 1993 Money Laundering Regulations (although all are subject to the general obligation to report knowledge or suspicions of drugs or terrorist money laundering arising in the course of one's trade, business or profession). However, under the second European money laundering directive, which is expected to be formally adopted after Christmas, accountants will be brought within the regulated sector. When this directive is implemented in UK law, accounts will be subject to both the provisions of the Proceeds of Crime Bill, and the requirements of the Money Laundering Regulations as regards identification of customers, record keeping and reporting of suspect financial transactions.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is responsible for the statutory oversight of the arrangements for the regulation of company auditors and, in that respect, of the adequacy of the procedures of recognised accountancy bodies for investigating and disciplining auditors. This Department also has a wider interest in the regulatory arrangements of the main accountancy bodies for investigating and disciplining their members, including those who may have engaged in or facilitated money laundering, or who may have failed in their duties to report suspicious transactions to the appropriate authorities. Members of these bodies are subject to byelaws and regulations which make them liable to disciplinary action and penalties. Under reforms previously agreed between the bodies and the Government, a new Investigation and Discipline Board, under the aegis of the Accountancy Foundation, will take over responsibility for disciplinary cases which raise significant public interest issues.

PRIME MINISTER

NHS Spending

Mr. Swire: To ask the Prime Minister if his target for Government spending on the NHS is *(a)* a fixed percentage of gross domestic product and *(b)* a specific sum of money. [22244]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the right hon. Members for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) and for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 325–30.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Volunteering

12. **Mr. Anthony D. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to work with the voluntary sector and to encourage volunteering. [20567]

Margaret Beckett: The impact of foot and mouth disease showed the need for a healthy rural voluntary sector, and the creation of the new Department, with an explicit focus on rural affairs for the first time, enables us to enhance the Government's capacity to work with the voluntary sector in rural affairs.

I am holding a series of meetings with rural voluntary and community bodies to discuss their contribution to the well-being of rural communities and this work is being developed by officials in the new Rural Affairs Directorate.

Timber

14. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to ensure that the Government purchases timber and wood products only from legal and sustainable sources. [20569]

Mr. Meacher: We have set a policy for central Government Departments and their agencies to actively seek to procure their timber and timber products from sustainable and legal sources and to report their purchases annually.

Air Quality

15. **Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on air quality in the UK. [20571]

Mr. Meacher: Air quality in the UK is improving year on year, thanks in large part to the actions we have taken to reduce emissions from road transport and industry. Last year saw the lowest number of days of poor air quality in urban areas since our detailed records began. But we still need to do more if we are to achieve all of the objectives in our Air Quality Strategy.

25. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set up a commission to consider the impact of traffic congestion on air quality. [20581]

Mr. Meacher: We have no plans at present to set up such a commission.

Ash Moor, Petrockstow

16. **Mr. Burnett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will withdraw the consent to use the site at Ash Moor, Petrockstow for the disposal of animal carcases. [R] [20572]

Mr. Morley: The Government currently have no plans to use the Ash Moor site for the disposal of animal carcases.

Flooding (West Country)

17. **Sir Michael Spicer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on flooding in the West Country in the last year. [20573]

Mr. Morley: Following record levels of rainfall, the West Country suffered serious flooding last autumn and winter. The full extent of the flooding was set out in the Environment Agency's Lessons Learned reports. Since then flood defences have been repaired and where necessary strengthened so residents have at least as much protection as they did before the floods, and often are better defended. Longer term improvements in flood defence are in hand in many areas.

GM Crops

18. **Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it a condition of licensing GM crop trials, that the licensee take out insurance against being held liable for crop contamination; what financial provision she has made against being held liable for crop contamination; and if she will make a statement. [20574]

Mr. Meacher: The European Commission is preparing a proposal for a directive on environmental liability, including in respect of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). This initiative is expected to cover liability for damage to biodiversity and serious harm to human health, leaving to member states the issue of liability for economic loss. The Commission intend that the contained use, deliberate release and transport of GMOs should fall within a strict liability regime for significant environmental hazards. I am considering whether liability rules are needed for GM crop releases to complement the Commission's wider proposal, but am not in a position to provide any further details at present. The Government have not made any specific provision against liability for GM crop trials.

23. **Mr. Randall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on genetically modified crop trials. [20579]

Mr. Meacher: The Farm Scale Evaluations are a three-year trial programme involving four GM herbicide-tolerant crops. These trials are studying the impact of the herbicide use associated with the GM plants on a range of biodiversity indicators. This can only be done by testing under normal farm conditions. The plants in the trials have passed all regulatory safety standards relating to their release into the environment.

BSE

19. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her oral answer of 15 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 962, on BSE, when the chairman of SEAC wrote to Professor Ebringer; and what the outcome was. [20575]

Mr. Morley: The chairman of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee wrote to Professor Ebringer in September inviting him to attend a future meeting of the committee. The SEAC secretariat has subsequently written to Professor Ebringer inviting him to attend the next SEAC meeting in February 2002.

Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority

20. **Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Greater Manchester waste disposal authority. [20576]

Mr. Meacher: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no recent discussions with the Greater Manchester waste disposal authority.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act

21. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the progress made with implementation of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. [20577]

Alun Michael: We are making good progress. Consultation began last month on the first draft maps showing where the new right of access to open country and registered common land might apply. We shall shortly publish the first of a series of consultation papers on the Act's rights of way provisions and we are working closely with English Nature to improve the condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest. We expect to lay regulations on vehicular access over common land early in the new year.

Combined Heat and Power

22. **Mrs. Helen Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her strategy for the combined heat and power industry. [20578]

Mr. Meacher: The Government fully recognise the difficult circumstances facing the UK CHP industry at present, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made clear in his pre-Budget report. The Department is developing a draft CHP Strategy in close collaboration with other Government Departments, which we will issue for consultation early in the new year. It will set out the measures needed to achieve the Government's CHP target of at least 10,000 megawatts of Good Quality CHP by 2010.

36. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she is taking to increase the contribution of combined heat and power to Britain's energy supplies. [20592]

Mr. Meacher: The Department is developing a draft CHP Strategy in close collaboration with other Government Departments, which we will issue for consultation early in the new year. It will set out the measures needed to achieve the Government's CHP target of at least 10,000 MW of Good Quality CHP by 2010. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made clear in his pre-Budget report, the DTI has consulted on the impact of the first few months of the New Electricity Trading Arrangements on smaller generators and Government are considering the means by which any concerns could be addressed. Subject to legal and other constraints, the Government will also consider the environmental case for providing more favourable treatment for CHP within the CCL, taking account of the role which CHP might play in meeting the UK's climate change targets.

Meat Imports

24. **Matthew Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to reduce illegal imports of meat products and improve the Government's inspection activities. [20580]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA officials are co-ordinating a number of initiatives, involving interested Government Departments and local authority enforcement bodies, aimed at ensuring that rules for importing animal products are enforced effectively and efficiently. We have already taken action to improve publicity to travellers about import rules, to improve the collection and analysis of information about illegal imports and to use that information better to target enforcement activity. We are keeping these measures under constant review and we are looking at a wide range of other options for improvements, including, for example, the use of sniffer dogs, X-ray machines, on-the-spot-fines and changes to administrative structures.

Landfill

26. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received concerning her policy on landfill. [20582]

Mr. Meacher: Government policy on landfill was set out in the Second Consultation Paper on Implementation of the EC Landfill Directive. Consultation has now closed and we received over 100 responses from the waste management industry, waste producers, local government, environmental groups and members of the public. The representations received have informed our drafting of the regulations that will implement the directive and that we hope to lay before Parliament shortly.

Livestock Industry

27. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for the regeneration of the British livestock industry following the foot and mouth epidemic. [R] [20583]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA's objectives are to create a livestock production sector which is sustainable, competitive, responsive to consumer demands and founded on high animal health and welfare standards.

To ensure sustainability we need to have regard to environmental limitations and market limitations. We continue to argue the case for decoupling EC beef and sheep payments from production to enable producers to align their livestock numbers to the carrying capacity of their land and to the likely markets for their produce.

Better marketing is needed to shorten the supply chain between producer and consumer. This should enable producers to be both more competitive and to respond to consumer tastes.

DEFRA is determined to develop a coherent strategy for the identification and tracing of animals to enable diseases to be tackled more effectively and to ensure consumer confidence in animal products. We are also launching the National Scrapie Plan, which is a long-term programme for breeding genetic resistance to scrapie and BSE into the national sheep flock.

Fridge Recycling

28. **Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the recycling of fridges. [20584]

Mr. Meacher: Although EC Regulation No. 2037/2000 now requires the recovery of CFCs and HCFCs from foam, this had not been the original intention under the proposal for a regulation published by the European Commission in August 1998. The text prepared by the commission only required the recovery of ozone depleting substances from foam "if practicable". The language in the relevant article was changed during negotiations shortly before the draft regulation was agreed by the Environment Council in February 1999. The UK raised this issue at a number of meetings with the commission and other member states in order to seek clarification. However, it was not until June this year that the commission finally clarified that the regulation requires the CFCs and HCFCs to be removed from foams found in waste refrigerators for destruction.

From 1 January 2002, the EC Regulation on Ozone Depleting Substances will require 'controlled substances' (including CFCs) in coolants and in insulating foam to be removed before recycling or reclamation of domestic refrigerators units. Waste refrigeration units will need to be stored until suitable domestic processing facilities come on-line. The Department has issued guidance on CFC extraction plant and guidance on the storage of waste refrigeration equipment, prior to CFC extraction. The Department's website http://www.defra.gov.uk. also contains information on the requirements of the regulation.

We have recently announced an extra £6 million in the local government finance settlement to help local authorities with the extra costs of dealing with fridges to the end of this financial year. We are urgently assessing the impacts of the regulation and will determine what further action will be necessary beyond that.

34. **Mrs. Brooke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to ensure that local authorities are able to deal with recycling of refrigerators in accordance with EC Regulation 2037/2000. [20590]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has written to all English local authorities to inform them of the requirements of the regulation. More recently we have written again to issue guidance on the storage of waste refrigeration equipment, prior to CFC extraction, and to provide information for householders disposing of fridges and freezers.

We have recently announced an extra £6 million in the local government finance settlement to help local authorities with the extra costs of dealing with fridges to the end of this financial year. We are urgently assessing the impacts of the regulation and will determine what further action will be necessary beyond that.

Livestock Scheme (Welsh Language Forms)

29. **Hywel Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason her Department does not provide Welsh medium forms in Wales to be used in connection with the autumn movement of livestock scheme. [20585]

Mr. Morley: Application forms for movement licences are available in Welsh from every local authority in Wales. Movement licences in Welsh are available from some local authorities. The Department will make these forms fully available as soon as possible.

Sugar Beet Industry

30. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to promote the viability of the British sugar beet industry. [20586]

Mr. Morley: Support for the sugar beet industry is regulated under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). A revised sugar regime under the CAP was agreed at the May 2001 Agriculture Council and runs for five years until 1 July 2006, with a review in the early part of 2003. We continue to believe that further substantive reform is needed to take account of trade liberalisation resulting from the "Everything But Arms" agreement and to put the industry on a more sustainable basis for the future.

Aggregates Tax

31. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what impact the aggregates tax will have on the work of her Department. [20587]

Mr. Meacher: The main impact of the tax on DEFRA's work is in creating an aggregates levy sustainability fund. We have recently consulted on how the scheme might work and we are now considering responses to the consultation. We expect the fund to:

Minimise the demand for primary aggregates;

Promote environmentally friendly extraction and transport; and

Reduce the local effects of aggregates extraction

The range of activities the Fund proposes to support is broad. It includes promoting conservation and increased biodiversity, restoring natural landscapes and local community projects.

Environmentally Friendly Lorries

32. **Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's plans for encouraging the environmentally friendly use of lorries. [20588]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's overarching plans for encouraging the environmentally friendly use of lorries were set out in the Sustainable Distribution Strategy, published in March 1999. The Strategy includes a package of measures to promote best environmental practice in the distribution industry. This includes encouraging more efficient freight logistics with the aim of minimising environmental impacts, and improving business efficiency. The Strategy is being supported through various initiatives including the DTLR-sponsored PowerShift and CleanUp programmes which provide grants towards the cost of purchasing vehicles—including lorries—running on cleaner fuels such as gas and fitting them with emission reduction technologies such as particulate traps.

Livestock Markets

33. **Charlotte Atkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the future of livestock markets. [20589]

Mr. Morley: Livestock markets have an important role to play in the marketing of farm animals between the various stages of production and some are developing a broadened range of services to farmers. I look forward to the recommendations from the Policy Commission on future developments in livestock marketing.

Over-30-months Scheme

35. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the losses incurred by farmers through the OTMS due to being unable to move cattle; and if she will make a statement. [20591]

Mr. Morley: The Over-30-months Scheme (OTMS) delivers some £240 million per annum in payments to beef and dairy farmers. As a result of foot and mouth disease movement restrictions and suspension of the OTMS farmers will have incurred losses arising from additional costs of keeping cattle, delays in sales receipts and any differences between prices actually received and those which would otherwise have been obtained. It is not possible to quantify these losses.

Noise Pollution

37. **Mr. Salter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for tackling noise pollution in the United Kingdom. [20593]

Mr. Meacher: Much has been done to address noise from transport and industry including: reducing the level of noise generated by individual vehicles and aircraft; traffic management schemes; and addressing noise at the planning stage of new noise generation or noise sensitive developments. Such action has considerably reduced the output of noise from individual sources but has often failed to reduce the overall ambient noise because of other factors, such as the growth in the number of vehicles on our roads. A consultation seeking views on the first steps towards an Ambient Noise strategy will be launched later this month. A significant part of this strategic approach will be an exercise to build on the noise mapping already carried out of the major transport and industrial noise sources across England. The first stage of this exercise, for which £13 million has been set aside, will start in the new year.

Hunting with Dogs

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what permit conditions will apply when hunting with dogs resumes in foot and mouth disease-free counties. [23532]

Alun Michael: On 15 November I announced the Government's intention of relaxing the ban on hunting with dogs imposed in February 2001 to control foot and mouth disease, to allow hunting in FMD free counties from 17 December under a temporary system of disease control permits. Interested parties were invited to comment on the proposed permit conditions by 7 December.

As a result, a small number of changes and clarifications have been made to the permit conditions published on 15 November. I have placed copies of the final version of the permit conditions in the Library of the House. This material has also been published on the DEFRA FMD website. Permits will be available from DEFRA Animal Health Divisional Offices from 17 December onwards to applicants who can demonstrate compliance with the disease control conditions required.

Farming and Rural Conservation Agency

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish the 2000–01 annual report for the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency. [23346]

Margaret Beckett: The 2000–01 annual report and accounts for the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency were laid before Parliament today. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Chemical Weapons Dumps

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures are in place to manage deteriorating chemical weapon and munition dumps in coastal waters of the United Kingdom. [21854]

Dr. Moonie: I have been asked to reply.

There are no specific measures in place to manage chemical weapons and munition dumps on the seabed in the coastal waters of the United Kingdom, as the consensus of international scientific opinion is that munitions on the seabed present no significant risk to safety, human health or the marine environment, provided they remain undisturbed.

I am aware, however, that there are two range danger areas, D306 (formerly RAF Cowden) D307 (RAF Donna Nook), which are near my hon. Friend's constituency. D306 was closed as a range a few years ago, but D307 continues to be used by the RAF for practice bombing runs. Coastal erosion of the range danger area D306 has caused much of the explosive ordnance previously used for practice bombing to re-emerge. A quantity of unexploded iron bombs are lodged in the cliffs at this range, and, periodically, these fall on to the beach area as a result of the three metres of erosion which occurs each year. To ensure that any danger to the public is kept to a minimum, Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) personnel from the Ministry of Defence are carrying out clearance and disposal of this ordnance. It is expected that this will take up to 15 years to complete.

On the D307 range, explosive ordnance from World War Two was buried offshore under the sand, which is covered daily by the tides. An EOD team from RAF Coningsby carry out an inspection, either daily or weekly depending on tides and the programme of activities at the range, to determine if any ordnance has emerged through the sand. If any munitions or other hazardous items are discovered during the regular inspections, action is taken to remove or destroy the offending article. This is an important activity, which is intended to minimise any risks to the public from exposed ordnance on the range. A risk assessment was conducted three years ago, which endorsed the acceptability of the procedure for handling exposed munitions.

IACS Payments

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the delays in making Integrated Control and Administration System (IACS) payments. [21106]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* Several thousand man days of effort on the processing of CAP payments have been lost by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) as a result of industrial action. This action comes on top of the diversion of significant numbers of staff to deal with the foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak. In addition the need to develop computer software upgrades for the bovines schemes to reflect regulatory changes has meant that the start of advance payments has been delayed. Moreover, because of the need to perform FMD cross-checks in order to establish entitlement to aid progress with processing is slower than normal.

As a result of these factors advance payments on the livestock schemes are expected to be made within the advertised payment windows but later than would have been the case in a normal year.

The Arable Area Payments Scheme (AAPS) under which payments are made in a regulatory payment window running from 16 November to 31 January is the scheme mainly affected by industrial action. In a normal year approximately 60–70 per cent. of the aid would be paid in the first two to three weeks of the window. This year the figure will be a little over 50 per cent. The Rural Payments Agency is taking all reasonable steps to mitigate the impact of the industrial action to ensure that payments delays are kept to the absolute minimum.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

English Language Schools

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which regulations cover schools which specialise in teaching English as a foreign language. [20834]

John Healey: There are no specific regulations applying to private English language schools but such schools must comply with general regulations applying to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and, if appropriate, legislation relating to children.

Internet Access

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of schools in England and Northern Ireland have internet access. [21268]

John Healey: The information requested is shown in the table.

Schools connected to the internet: 2001

England

	Percentage
Primary	96
Secondary[1]	more than 99
Special	97
All schools[2]	97

[1] Results from a sample survey indicated that nearly all secondary schools were connected to the internet.

[2] An estimate for all maintained primary, secondary and special schools. Other types of schools excluded.

These figures are based on a sample survey. Responses were received from 785 primary, 753 secondary and 330 special schools: response rates of 67 per cent., 64 per cent., and 66 per cent. respectively of the chosen sample.

For information on schools connected to the internet in Northern ireland, I refer the hon. Member to the Northern Ireland Department of Education.

British Educational Communications and Technology Agency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the administration costs of the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency were in 2000–01; and what she expects them to be in 2001–02. [21296]

John Healey: In 2000–01 the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency's overall income from grant, project and contract funding was £19.8 million. Of this, core grant funding from this Department was £4,725,000 and administration costs were £1.2 million. In 2001–02 administration costs are expected to be of a similar level to the previous year.

Pupil Exclusions

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research her Department has commissioned into the underlying causes of school exclusions. [22294]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department is funding a study tracking 200 pupils from point of permanent exclusion from mainstream school in years 9–11 over a two year period. This will report in september 2002. My Department is funding jointly with the Home Office an evaluation examining the Crime Reduction in Secondary Schools Programme and Alternative Education Initiatives. This will report in May 2002.

I refer my hon. Friend to two recently completed research projects: Outcomes in Secondary Education for Children Excluded from Primary School (DfES Research Report 271) and Reasons for Exclusions from School (DfES Research Report 244). Both can be accessed at http://www.dfee.gov.uk/research/pubs.cfm

Information and Communications Technology

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to increase awareness of information and communications technology in schools and further education colleges. [21811]

John Healey: 97 per cent. of all schools are now connected to the internet. The National Grid for Learning (NGfL) is the main vehicle for promoting and facilitating the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in schools. The Government's £1.8 billion investment in the NGfL programme has developed the ICT infrastructure, effective links to the internet and access to educationally valuable content for schools.

The Prime Minister announced on 10 December £50 million to fund 'Curriculum Online'; which is the world's first partnership between the Government, leading public/private broadcasters and innovative software producers to provide ICT based materials for every curriculum subject to transform learning in schools.

£230 million has been made available by the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) to fund a programme to give serving teachers in the maintained sector the opportunity to receive ICT training.

The National Learning Network (NLN) is embedding ICT into further education. Investment of £158 million in the NLN is improving the ICT infrastructure, developing staff skills, providing learning materials and guiding effective learning, teaching and management within colleges.

Trade Unions (Skills Development)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps her Department is taking to support the role of unions in developing skills. [21810]

John Healey: Trade unions have a key role to play in promoting the development of learning and skills in the workplace. To help them do this our Department has provided financial support through the Union Learning Fund since 1998. The ULF budget is £7 million this year. This source of funding is helping trade unions use their influence with employers, employees and others to encourage greater take up of learning at work and boost their capacity as learning organisations. It has so far benefited over 25,000 people in the workplace through a wide variety of projects ranging from tackling basic skill needs to advanced professional development. It has also led to the development of a new breed of activist, the union learning representative, and helped to establish a network of over 3,000 learning representatives nationwide.

Union learning representatives are ideally placed to help and encourage workers to improve their skills, particularly among low skilled workers and those with literacy and numeracy problems. That is why we have included a clause in the new Employment Bill that will give statutory backing to union learning representatives. This will reinforce the invaluable role that union learning representatives are currently playing in the workplace to promote work force development and open up new training opportunities for their colleagues.

Regulations

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many regulations her Department has proposed to Parliament since June; what regulatory impact assessments have been made for those regulations her Department has implemented in 2001; and what plans her Department has to reduce the number of regulations affecting small businesses. [21974]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department has laid 89 regulations before Parliament since June; during the same period, no regulatory impact assessments have been made for those regulations, but a total of four regulatory impact assessments have been made for 2001 so far, and these were for the following regulations:

The Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 2001

The Industrial training Levy (Engineering Construction Board) Order 2001

The Day Care and Childminding (National Standards) (England) Regulations 2001

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.

Following the machinery of Government changes in June, policies for which the Department is responsible only impact directly on the private sector (including small businesses) within a limited number of discrete areas. Consequently, the Department's Regulatory Reform Action Plan, which will form part of the forthcoming Government-wide Plan, focuses mainly on measures to remove and simplify existing burdens on front-line delivery services within the public sector.

OECD Survey

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in which years the pupils researched for the recent OECD survey of educational achievement *(a)* began their education, *(b)* reached Key Stage 1 and *(c)* reached Key Stage 2. [22042]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The pupils in England who participated in the OECD survey were born during 1984 and, depending on the month in which they were born, *(a)* would have begun statutory education in 1988 or 1989, *(b)* reached the end of Key Stage 1 in 1990 or 1991 and *(c)* reached the end of Key Stage 2 in 1995 or 1996.

Post-16 Learning

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made (1) of the need for an early introduction of a level playing field for the funding of work-based learning to help meet Level 2 targets; [21768]

(2) of the Learning and Skills Council's proposed timetable for an integrated funding system for post-16 learning. [21784]

John Healey: We consulted extensively about funding arrangements for post-16 education and training. Planning and implementing these new systems to meet the Government's learning targets is the responsibility of the Learning and Skills Council which has published its corporate plan for the period to 2004 and its plans for developing post-16 funding systems for 2003–04 onwards. The Council plans to introduce a common funding approach for 2003–04 in line with our consultations in 1999, 2000 and 2001. Progress to date has been good with development of a consistent national funding system this year for Work Based Learning. Progress in 2002–03 will continue with the development of new funding arrangements for further education and the council's assumption of responsibility for school sixth form funding. We are committed to work with the council further to develop funding systems, to ensure that funding follows the learner and facilitating the development of a rational and coherent approach to funding different forms of post-16 provision.

Family Learning

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she is taking to promote family learning. [21809]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Family learning, which is one strand of our strategy for involving parents in children's education, can strengthen families, help children to achieve and give adults the confidence to go on learning. That is why we have commended it to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and, in 2002–03, are making £7.5 million available to local education authorities (LEAs), through the Adult Learning Plans they will agree with local LSCs. One specific type of provision—family literacy and numeracy—is part of 'Skills for Life', our national strategy for adult literacy, language and numeracy. In 2001–02, £17 million will be spent to help parents and children improve their literacy and numeracy skills together.

Family learning is part of a wider drive to support families through our education and skills policies. We are providing a range of materials enabling parents to help their children learn, including "Learning Journey" guides to the curriculum, our free "Parents + Schools" magazine and our "Parent Centre" website. We are encouraging schools to offer a range of family and community services, which might include learning opportunities and child care. Study support initiatives can offer parents the change to get involved in school life. Our Sure Start programme works with parents and young children to combat disadvantage; and the Children's Fund is being used to develop family support services, including family learning, in a number of deprived areas.

Individual Learning Accounts

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she has been informed of the conclusions of the police investigations in Durham into alleged fraud in the operation of the Individual Learning Account Scheme; and if she will make a statement. [22157]

John Healey *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The Department has been in discussion with Durham Constabulary's Fraud Squad. The investigations into alleged fraud in the operation of the Individual Learning Accounts programme that Durham Constabulary were conducting are now being taken forward by Cheshire Constabulary's Computer Crime Unit.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects to come forward with a new scheme to replace the Individual Learning Account Scheme; and if she will make a statement. [22155]

John Healey *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 449W.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* criminal charges and *(b)* arrests have been made in relation to allegations of fraud in the operation of the Individual Learning Account Scheme; at what (i) times and (ii) locations; and if she will make a statement. [22162]

John Healey *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* One person has been charged out of the 39 arrested in relation to allegations of fraud in connection with the operation of the Individual Learning Account programme.

Details of the arrests are a matter for the police.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of students who would have taken advantage of the individual learning account scheme in 2002 but who will not now owing to its closure. [22154]

John Healey *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The take-up of learning has been affected by changes in the programme's rules and, we believe, by mis-selling and potential fraud. Therefore it is not possible to make reliable estimates of future take-up.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many local investigations in relation to alleged fraud in the operation of the individual learning account schemes are proceeding, and where; how many such investigations have been concluded, and where and when; and if she will make a statement on the outcomes of such investigations. [22156]

John Healey *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The Department has referred a total of 27 cases involving alleged fraud in the operation of the Individual Learning Accounts programme to six different police forces: the city of London, Dorset, Leicester, the Metropolitan police force, the National Crime Squad and West Midlands. The Department's Special Investigations Unit is continuing to work with the police on these 27 cases. These cases arise from investigations that had started before 23 November 2001. None of the 27 cases have been concluded. To avoid the risk of compromising police investigations the Department is unable to give any further details at this stage.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how she will inform learning providers of her decision to shut down the ILA programme early. [19550]

John Healey: We issued a press statement on 23 November and provided notification of the shut-down on both the Department and Capita websites, which we updated as new information became available. On 29 and 30 November I sent a letter and e-mail to ILA registered learning providers about the shut-down of the ILA programme on 23 November. We have also been able to resume operation, on a limited basis, of the provider helpline from 29 November.

New Schools

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answers of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 773W, and 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 257W, on schools, for what reason her Department *(a)* holds information on the number of schools which have been allocated money for repairs and *(b)* does not hold information on the number of new schools which have been built. [22363]

John Healey *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* We hold information on the numbers of schools benefiting from the new deal for schools programme funded from the windfall tax, since it was a specific programme for repairs where funding was allocated in response to bids. It was aimed at addressing the worst of the condition backlog in schools in 1997. It has now been replaced by programmes that are allocated to local education authorities and schools by needs-related formulae, so that decisions on which repairs to undertake are made locally. One such formulaic programme is new deal for schools devolved formula capital grant, which is made available principally to fund capital repairs to school buildings. Since this is allocated to all schools, we can be assured that, for the first time, every school has a budget to support high priority repair work.

It is for local education authorities to determine the need for additional schools places in the maintained sector and, where necessary, build new schools. The Department maintains a record of all currently open schools. For the Department, in addition, to collect and hold detailed information on capital investment at individual school level would be overly bureaucratic for the Department, local authorities and for schools.

Basic Credit Approvals (Hampshire)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what basic credit approvals her Department granted between 1997 and 2001 for Hampshire. [22215]

John Healey *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* The figures show basic credit approvals for Hampshire local education authority from 1997–98 to 2001–02.

	£ million
1997–98	10.1
1998–99	8.9
1999–2000	11.2
2000–01	10.8
2001–02	10.6
Total	51.6

Means Testing

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the educational purposes for which a financial means test is required. [22795]

Margaret Hodge: We apply a variety of means tests when providing funding for students in order to target funds sensibly while increasing participation and achievement in education. Examples where means tests are used include higher education loans and grants, educational maintenance allowances, and financial support for students in further education.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils there are with SEN statements at each of the secondary schools in Cheshire. [18442]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Maintained secondary schools: Pupils with a statement of special educational needs (SEN)—Cheshire local education authority

School name	*Number of pupils with statements*
Kingsway High School	28
Blacon High School	37
Queen's Park High School	45
Neston High School	69
Frodsham School (a Science and Technology College)	18
Tytherington High School	20
Ryles Park High School	91
Alsager School	5
Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College	9
Rudheath High School	78
Middlewich High School	19
Woodford Lodge High School	41
The Verdin High School	23
Coppenhall High School	76
Weaverham High School	17
The County High School Leftwich	16
Tarporley Community High School	13
The Ruskin School	7
Victoria Community Technology School	28
Malbank School and Sixth Form Centre	9
Shavington High School	27
Christleton High School	13
Upton-by-Chester High School	13
Stanney High School	87
Bishop Heber High School	39
Sutton High School	24
Knutsford High School	59
Holmes Chapel Comprehensive School	13
The Whitby High School	21
Poynton High School	26
Brine Leas High School	16
Helsby High School	11
Hartford High School	23
Kings Grove School	8
Wilmslow High School	24
Congleton High School	7
Eaton Bank School	11
The Catholic High School, Chester	31
St. Nicholas Catholic High School	16
Ellesmere Port Catholic High School	11
St. Thomas More Catholic High School	3
The Bishop's Blue Coat Church of England High School	22
All Hallows Catholic High School	16
Fallibroome High School	19
Henbury High School	26

Source:

DfES 2001 Secondary School Performance Tables. Website address: www.dfes.gov.uk/performancetables

Vice-Chancellors

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will review the process by which universities appoint their vice-chancellors and make a statement on best practice. [19457]

Margaret Hodge: Vice-chancellors are appointed by the governing body of their individual university and my right hon. Friend has no plans to alter current arrangements. We do, however, keep such matters under review and support the efforts of Universities UK, the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England to enhance strategic leadership and management in higher education institutions and look to them to disseminate best practice.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid Britain is providing to the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and what assessment she has made of the obstacles to delivering aid to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with particular reference to British support for Ugandan and Ethiopian forces. [22311]

Clare Short: The UK gave over £3.3 in humanitarian assistance to the DRC last financial year. We expect this figure to be more than doubled in the current year. In addition, the UK has contributed more than £4.3 million in 2001 through the EU. There have been few recent ceasefire violations and humanitarian access has improved considerably, though difficulties remain in certain areas of the country. The UK provides no military support for either the Ugandan or Ethiopian forces and Ethiopia has no forces in the DRC. Assistance is being provided on security sector reform in Uganda.

British Geological Survey Report (Bangladesh)

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what were the *(a)* terms of reference, *(b)* scope and *(c)* conclusions of the British geological survey technical report WD/92/43R prepared for the ODA and dated 1992, the short-term BGS pilot project to assess the hydrochemical character of the main aquifer units of central and north-eastern Bangladesh and the possible toxicity of groundwater to fish and humans; and if she will make a statement. [21430]

Clare Short: The report referred to in this question is the subject of a potential legal case on behalf of sufferers from arsenicosis in Bangladesh by a UK legal firm against British Geological Survey.

My Department has responded in writing to requests for relevant information from the parties to this case in accordance with legal advice.

While legal action is pending, I regret I am unable to provide a statement for fear of prejudicing the outcome of the legal action as according to section 4 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Afghanistan

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what has been the daily average of food aid being transported into Afghanistan in each of the last six weeks; and what is her estimate of the rate of transport needed to ensure sufficient food stocks for the winter. [21685]

Clare Short: The table shows the daily average of food aid that has been transported into Afghanistan by week for the past six weeks. Graphs recording daily and weekly delivery of food into Afghanistan since 19 September are available in the Library.

metric tonnes

Week ending	*Daily average over the week*
31 October	1,279
7 November	2,384
14 November	1,962
21 November	1,246
28 November	2,287
6 December	2,985

The World Food programme aims to deliver 100,000 tonnes of food aid in the month of December to meet on-going needs and build up necessary winter stockpiles. It is prioritising deliveries to areas where access may become more difficult over the winter.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many tonnes of humanitarian aid have been deployed in Afghanistan since 11 September; what impact the military advances in Afghanistan have had on humanitarian missions; if the military campaign has opened up supply routes into Afghanistan; what steps she is taking to ensure that the public is informed of humanitarian advances in Afghanistan; and if she will make a statement. [22355]

Clare Short: Over 115,000 metric tonnes of food aid were dispatched to Afghanistan from 11 September to 9 December (the latest date for which information is currently available from the World Food Programme (WFP), the lead UN agency for food aid).

Initial hopes of improved humanitarian access following the change in the political balance have been tempered by concerns over security. Although much of the internal delivery and distribution system is holding up, continued uncertainty over security in the north, around Mazar-e-Sharif, and the south-eastern province of Kandahar means that agencies are unable to reach many of the most vulnerable people.

Improved security is key to enhancing the ability of humanitarian agencies to deliver assistance to those in need. We, and the rest of the international community, will continue to urge the authorities in Afghanistan to assist with the relief effort, and to help stabilise the environment in which the humanitarian community are trying to operate.

Bilateral Debts

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the value of all bilateral debts owed to the UK by developing countries; and if she will make a statement. [17949]

Clare Short: The total figure for ECGD-covered debt owed by developing countries is £8.0 billion. Of this, £1.9 billion is owed by countries eligible for relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative.

Bilateral aid debts are limited to those countries which have not qualified for relief under the Commonwealth Debt Initiative. Excluding debts, which are being written off as they fall due, the outstanding balances at the end of March 2001 were £170 million.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the need for additional warm weather clothing and footwear of soldiers on standby for deployment in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [18224]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 November 2001]:* We continue carefully to monitor the weather in Afghanistan and will make appropriate judgments on the equipment required by any UK service personnel deploying to the region. Until a decision to deploy troops is taken, and the precise timelines have been agreed, we cannot judge in detail what winter clothing will be required.

However, we will as always do everything possible to ensure the safety and welfare of our personnel while deployed on operations, and plans are already in place to ensure that in the event of a further deployment to the region over the winter period, they will be properly equipped for the conditions they are likely to face.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what British forces participated in the military action at Qala-I-Jhangi in Afghanistan on 25 to 27 November; and if he will make a statement. [20026]

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what advice his Department has given to Northern Alliance military personnel regarding adherence to the Geneva Convention; [20242]

(2) how many prisoners at Qala-I-Jhangi attempted to surrender during the prison revolt; [20240]

(3) what advice was given by British military personnel to Northern Alliance military personnel during the prison revolt at Qala-I-Jhangi; [20236]

(4) how many British military personnel were involved in the prison revolt in Qala-I-Jhangi; what regiments they belonged to; and what role they played. [20237]

Mr. Hoon: The Northern Alliance have been informed that we expect them to respect the rights of prisoners in accordance with applicable international standards. I understand that a number of Taliban fighters at Qala-I-Jhangi are reported to have surrendered on Saturday 1 December. Prior to this, I am not aware that any of the Taliban fighters who took up arms after their purported surrender to the Northern Alliance sought to give themselves up.

British troops are operating in Afghanistan, and their tasks include liaison with the Northern Alliance. They are also supporting US troops in these activities. After Taliban fighters held at Qala-I-Jhangi fort overpowered their captors and seized the armoury, British troops went to the aid of their US colleagues and attempted to recover, under heavy fire, two US personnel apparently captured by the Taliban fighters.

I am withholding further details under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Absence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many days were lost due to sickness absence in the Department in each of the last four years. [21298]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence sick absence rates for civilian non-industrial staff in the last four years for which data are available, measured in working days absence per staff year, are as follows:

Year	*Days*
1996	7.9
1997	7.9
1998	8.0
1999	8.8

The MOD is committed to improving the health of its staff and managing sick absence more effectively. A programme of measures is being implemented to help meet the target in MOD's Service Delivery Agreement to reduce sickness absence from the 1998 level of 8 days per staff year to 6.6 days by the end of 2003.

Military Testing Programmes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to agree *(a)* common military testing programmes and *(b)* common use of testing sites with other European nations. [20904]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The UK is a signatory to the four nations Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (with the United States, France and German) relating to the Mutual Acceptance of Test and Evaluation for the Reciprocal Procurement of Defence Equipment under which we jointly agree testing standards known as ITOPs (International Test Operating Procedures). These permit us to test defence equipment to a fixed standard. The results of testing equipment using these standards are accepted by the signatories to the MOU thus saving the costs of multiple tests. A number of ITOPs have been used as the basis for NATO standards.

The UK is one of the leading members of the Western European Armaments Group Sub Group on Test Facilities (SGTF). To assist the common use of testing sites, this group has developed a detailed database describing all the Government-owned defence test and evaluation facilities covering 15 European nations. Further additions to this database are expected in the coming year from new member nations. In addition, SGTF has developed an umbrella MOU to facilitate, on a payment basis, the use of other nations' facilities.

Separately, the group is tasked by Defence Ministers, through the national armaments directors of the nations, to produce a European strategy for meeting future test requirements. This strategy may also include the possibilities for the rationalisation of test facilities.

Skynet 5

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will choose the contractor who will deliver the Skynet 5 project; and when he expects it to be operational. [21932]

Dr. Moonie: We currently plan to announce the preferred bidder for the Skynet 5 in the early part of 2002. Initial services are expected to commence in 2005 with full capability being delivered some three years later.

Royal Marines Headquarters

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to move the Commandant General's headquarters for the Royal Marines from HMS Excellence on Whale Island; what the time scale for this move is; how much the move will cost; and if he will make a statement. [22197]

Mr. Ingram: The functions of the Commandant General Royal Marines (CGRM), currently based on Whale Island, will be absorbed into the new, fully integrated fleet headquarters which will be formed in the Portsmouth area in April 2002. £27 million has been allocated to the overall fleet reorganisation programme of which the CGRM restructuring element is a part. The fleet headquarters reorganisation is expected to realise cost savings of approximately £160 million over 25 years. It is planned to occupy purpose-built accommodation on Whale Island from the end of 2003.

RAF Menwith Hill

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 114W, on RAF Menwith Hill, when the additional confidential arrangements were signed; how many there are; who the parties to these arrangements are; who has been informed of them; and when Parliament was first informed about the existence of these arrangements. [22148]

Mr. Ingram: The confidential arrangements relating to the presence of US forces in the UK are of long-standing, dating from 1950. The arrangements were concluded as part of normal bilateral business with the US Government, which is not routinely reported to Parliament.

Aircraft Carriers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to speed up the United Kingdom's future aircraft carrier programme; and if he will make a statement. [22442]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 1 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 763W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle).

MOD Housing, Portsmouth

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what sites around Portsmouth have applied for outline planning consent for MoD housing; which sites are being considered for the PFI building contract for 160 houses; what the cost will be of building these houses; and if he will make a statement. [22358]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is short of accommodation for officers and certain other ranks in the Portsmouth area. The Defence Housing Executive is considering a PFI solution to this problem.

In preparation for this new housing a number of potential sites are being considered in order to select the most suitable location. Consultations are currently under way with the appropriate local planning authorities.

The following sites are being considered.

Site	*Position*
HMS Daedalus	Consultation in progress
Eastney sports ground	Consultation in progress
HMS Sultan	Consultation in progress
RN Hospital Haslar	Consultation in progress
HMS Excellent (Whale Island)	Consultation in progress

Consideration of the Stamshaw (Matapan Road) and HMS Dryad sites have been withdrawn after consultation.

Bids have not been sought so the costs are not yet known.

Chemical and Munition Dumps

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* locations and *(b)* inventories of chemical and munition dumps in the coastal waters of the United Kingdom. [21855]

Dr. Moonie: The list of dumpsites of chemical and other munitions located in the coastal waters of the United Kingdom has been placed in the Library of the House. Primarily, the list contains information compiled by the Hydrographic Office from that published in Admiralty Charts for known dumpsites in UK waters.

In addition, the list contains the locations of the deepwater sites in the Atlantic used for the disposal of chemical weapons after World War Two and details of some, although not all, of the service range danger areas in the coastal water of the United Kingdom. The D307 range danger area, which is near to my hon. Friend's constituency, is not shown as a designed sea dumpsite on the list of dumpsites, as explosive ordnance was buried on the site rather than being dumped at sea.

Detailed information of the inventories of chemical weapons and other munitions disposed of to those dumpsites is no longer available, as may records were destroyed after the disposal as a matter of routine custom and practice. As a signatory to the Oslo-Paris (OSPAR) Convention, the United Kingdom ceased all dumping of munitions at sea in 1992 and continues to honour that commitment.

Locally Engaged Staff

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 145W, on locally engaged staff, what reference is made in setting pay levels of locally engaged civilian staff to the local poverty datum line; whether the pay levels can fall below local poverty datum lines; and if he will make a statement. [22775]

Dr. Moonie: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The pay and terms of service of locally engaged staff are determined by processes which involve surveys of local employers. The employers used in such surveys are reputable and are chosen as representative of responsible local employment practice. Such employers include, for example, the Brunei Government for pay surveys in Brunei and the US embassy for pay surveys in Nepal. In Germany, where the largest proportion of locally engaged civilians are employed, pay and terms of service are negotiated centrally by the Germany Federal Ministry of Finance and the national Trade Unions in accordance with the Collective Tariff Agreement applicable to the NATO Sending States. Terms and conditions of service also reflect the requirements of local employment law.

There is no reason to believe, therefore, that locally engaged civilians employed by the Ministry of Defence are disadvantaged in any way.

Warships

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Review of Warship Maintenance and Support; what discussions are being held on privatisation; and what assessment has been made of potential job losses. [22076]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* The Warship Support Modernisation initiative is looking at ways to modernise support arrangements across all UK Naval Bases and Dockyards, and, by reducing national spare capacity, to achieve savings for the defence budget. We have received proposals from the Dockyard Companies for the provision of certain Naval Base outputs in partnering arrangements with the Naval Base Commanders. These are now being assessed alongside alternative proposals received from our joint Trade Unions. All options are being evaluated fully and without prejudice. Decisions on the way ahead are expected early next year.

Privatisation is not being considered—if partnering with private companies is decided on as the way ahead, the Naval Bases would continue to be run by the Naval Base Commander, with the commercial partner helping to provide part of the service.

Assessments are being undertaken of the potential, should partnering go ahead, for a number of civil staff employed at the Naval Bases to be transferred to the companies. It is too early to say what impact each of the options would have on employment at the Naval Bases.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names and locations of the shipyards that provide maintenance and support to RN warships and auxiliaries; and how many people are employed at them. [22082]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* Currently, maintenance and support of the Royal Navy Fleet is principally provided by the three Naval Bases and by the privately owned dockyard companies at Rosyth and Devonport and the commercial managers of the Fleet Maintenance and Repair Organisation at Portsmouth. The number of people employed at the Naval Bases and by the commercial companies (derived from our negotiations on overhead rates) are as follows.

Location	Numbers of civilian employees
Babcock BES Rosyth	2,360
Devonport Management Ltd.	4,000
Fleet Support Ltd. Portsmouth	1,070
Naval Base Clyde	2,840
Naval Base Devonport	1,450
Naval Base Portsmouth	1,200

Work on minor warships and auxiliaries and also on Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels is generally completed. In addition to Babcock BES, DML and FSL, a varying number of commercial shipyards tender for such work, including Forth Esturary Engineering (Leith), Garvel Clyde Ltd. (Greenock), Buckie Shipyard (Buchan), Timbacraft Ltd. (Faslane), Swansea Drydock (South Wales), Milford Haven Shiprepairers (South Wales), Specialist Heavy Engineers Ltd. (Cardiff), Holyhead Marine (Anglesey), John Kearney (Belfast), A & P Holdings (Wallsend and Falmouth), Richards Drydock (Great Yarmouth), Small & Co. (Lowestoft), Camper and Nicholson (Gosport), Hythe Marine Services (Southampton), Manor Marine Ltd. (Portland), Mashford Bros. Ltd. (Plymouth), Penzance Drydock (Penzance) and Appledore Shipbuilders (North Devon). Details of the employment levels within these companies are not held.

Queen's Jubilee

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers, sailors and airmen participated in the London celebrations of the Silver Jubilee in 1977. [22670]

Mr. Ingram: From the records accessible within the timescale available, it has been determined that approximately 3,050 soldiers, sailors and airmen participated in the London celebrations of the Silver Jubilee in 1977 on street lining duties, stair lining at St. Paul's Cathedral and two Guards of Honour. In addition, about 340 armed forces personnel were in the procession and there were 10 military bands which consisted of about 450 people.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure that the numbers of armed service personnel participating in the London celebrations of the Golden Jubilee match those for celebrations relating to the Silver Jubilee in 1977. [22672]

Mr. Ingram: The armed forces personnel participating in the London celebrations of the Golden Jubilee will be in sufficient numbers to meet the requirements for the Golden Jubilee celebrations in accordance with the wishes of Her Majesty the Queen. The size and scope of any previous Jubilee celebrations have no bearing on the Golden Jubilee.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military bands participated in the Silver Jubilee celebrations in 1977; and how many will be available and eligible to participate in the London celebrations of the Golden Jubilee. [22671]

Mr. Ingram: Ten military bands participated in the London celebrations for the Silver Jubilee. Detailed planning for the Golden Jubilee is still on-going. However, I can confirm that a number of military bands will participate in the celebrations.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 536W, how many soldiers, sailors and airmen will be available to participate in the London celebrations of the Golden Jubilee. [22673]

Mr. Ingram: I have nothing further to add at this stage.

Battle of Britain Memorial Flight

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the annual running cost of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight is; and if he will make a statement. [22269]

Mr. Ingram: The cost of running the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight in financial year 2000–01 was approximately £1.6 million. The flight performs a valuable role in promoting a positive image of the RAF and in reminding current generations of the sacrifices and achievements of those who fought in the Second World War.

Military Equipment

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on reducing the number of (1) fixed wing fighter and ground attack aircraft in operational use by the Royal Air Force; and if he will make a statement; [22388]

(2) tanks and armoured fighting vehicles in service with the armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [22318]

Mr. Ingram: We keep the numbers and types of platforms in use with all three Services under regular review, to ensure that we have the correct mix of capabilities for the range of tasks we are likely to be called upon to undertake.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* tanks, *(b)* armoured personnel carriers and *(c)* armoured fighting vehicles have been owned by the Army in each year from 1985 to 2000; and if he will make a statement. [22271]

Mr. Ingram: Army Equipment Holdings are published within the scope of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. Since 1997 these have been set out in an annex to the annual Ministry of Defence Performance Report. For the period 1991 to 1996 this information was published in the Statement of the Defence Estimates (SDE) for each year. Prior to 1991, this information was provided in the SDE but in a different format, based on the force structures at that time. These documents are held in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the *(a)* number and *(b)* purpose of the Challenger 2 main battle tanks based in Germany. [22273]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 356–57W. Challenger 2 Main Battle Tanks provide the backbone of the armoured capability of the Army. Their purpose is the destruction of enemy armour in the contact battle, but they also have a wider utility across the spectrum of conflict, as has been demonstrated in the Balkans.

Submarines

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the annual running cost of the Royal Navy's non-Trident submarines; and if he will make a statement. [22270]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* UK military personnel and *(b)* UK defence industry employees have been (i) confirmed as suffering from and (ii) suspected of suffering from depleted uranium poisoning, in each year from 1980 to 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [22317]

Dr. Moonie: Although a number of people may suspect that they are suffering from ill health as a result of exposure to depleted uranium, including personnel in the Gulf and Balkans campaign, I am unaware of any individual who has been confirmed as suffering from ill health arising from exposure to DU over the period 1980 to 2001–02.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the health risks associated with material containing depleted uranium in the last 10 years; if he will publish the results; and if he will make a statement. [22315]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 25 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 653W, by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), in which the Ministry of Defence published a paper that explained the MOD's position on the risks posed by depleted uranium (DU). This paper included reference to the MOD's earlier paper published on 19 March 1999, entitled: "Testing for the Presence of Depleted Uranium in UK Veterans of the Gulf Conflict: the Current Position". Copies of both papers are available in the Library of the House and on the MOD's website at www.gulfwar.mod.uk.

I also refer the hon. Member to my letter of 24 March (reference: D/US of S/LM 0291L/01/I) to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), which includes the review paper: "Depleted Uranium—Safety Guidance to UK Armed Forces and MOD Civilians"; and my letter of 17 April (reference: D/US of S/LM PQ 0346L/01/M), to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley), which discusses and lists risk assessments associated with DU. I also refer the hon. Member to my letter of 7 June 2001 (reference: D/US of S/LM PQ 0679L/01/Y) to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith), which lists reports on depleted uranium commissioned by the MOD from DERA and contains some additional relevant material. All three letters are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what investigations his Department has made in the last 10 years into whether *(a)* UK military personnel and *(b)* employees within the defence industries of the United Kingdom, have suffered from (i) depleted uranium poisoning and (ii) other medical conditions caused by exposure to depleted uranium; and if he will make a statement. [22316]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is funding a programme designed to establish whether a scientifically rigorous test can be developed to determine historical exposures to depleted uranium (DU). Given such a test is developed, epidemiological studies will be undertaken to establish whether there is any correlation between ill-health and exposure to DU. As part of the MOD's Gulf Veterans' Medical Assessment Programme, which has so far seen over 3,000 service personnel and a small number of defence industry employees who served in the Gulf, a very small number of tests for total uranium have been carried out in cases where physicians believed that such tests would assist in treatment of their patients. All these tests showed that the signs and symptoms displayed by these patients were not due to any form of uranium exposure. In the early 1990s, a small number of UK troops concerned they had inhaled DU dust while conducting work in the Gulf conflict had their lungs monitored—no detectable DU contamination was found.

There are established systems within the United Kingdom for monitoring the health and safety of those who are exposed to depleted uranium as part of their work activities. These systems are, and always have been, employed throughout the MOD and involve monitoring of personnel and the working environment. Some individuals also receive annual health reviews. These measures ensure that exposures to depleted uranium are as low as reasonably practicable and do not exceed statutory limits. Therefore there is no reason for investigations of the type mentioned for these employees.

Other than those mentioned above, the health of those employed within defence industries is a matter for the employers concerned and for the Health and Safety Executive.

Compensation Scheme (Civilians)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the compensation scheme is for civilians who are *(a)* killed, *(b)* injured and *(c)* maimed by unexploded munitions on military training grounds. [23132]

Mr. Ingram: When compensation claims are submitted, they are considered on the basis of whether or not the Ministry of Defence has a legal liability to pay compensation. Where there is a legal liability to pay compensation we do so.

Ms Kay Coleman

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the appointment to the Armed Forces Pay Review Body of a replacement for Ms Kay Coleman. [23345]

Mr. Hoon: I am pleased to announce that I have appointed Dr. Anne Wright CBE to a three-year term. This appointment has been conducted in accordance with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointment's guidance on appointments to public bodies.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Entry Clearance

Roger Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will lay before the House the report by Mr. Rabinder Singh, the independent monitor of entry clearance refusals. [23347]

Mr. Bradshaw: Mr. Singh's report on entry clearance refusals was laid before the House today. I very much welcome the report which acknowledges the high standards of our entry clearance operation overseas and the Government's commitment to ensuring that it continues to operate fairly and professionally. Mr. Singh's comments and suggestions will receive careful consideration.

Sheikha Shamsa

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contact there has been between his Department and *(a)* Sheikh Mohammed Al Maktoum and *(b)* the Dubai authorities in relation to the allegation made by Sheikha Shamsa. [22606]

Mr. Bradshaw: Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum's London office have raised this matter with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. We have informed them that this is a matter for the police.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken to investigate the allegations of kidnapping made by Sheikha Shamsa. [22605]

Mr. Bradshaw: This is a matter for the police.

European Union (National Parliaments)

Roger Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to increase the role and influence of national parliaments in EU decision-making. [22081]

Peter Hain: In line with a November 1998 White Paper, the Government have already strengthened the arrangements for Westminster's scrutiny of EU business.

In Warsaw last year, the Prime Minister called for a greater role for national parliaments in EU decision-making. Subsequently, the Nice European Council agreed that this question would be one of the main agenda items for the next Intergovernmental Conference in 2004. The Laeken European Council on 14–15 December is expected to agree that the preparations for this IGC will be taken forward by a Convention consisting of, among others, national parliamentarians.

Middle East

Roger Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his European counterparts in preparation for the EU summit in Laeken with a view to strengthening the contribution of EU member states to international efforts to re-establish the middle east peace process. [22083]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has regular contact with his EU counterparts to discuss how the EU can help the parties establish a permanent ceasefire, implement the recommendations of the Mitchell report and resume political negotiations aimed at delivering security for Israel and allowing for the emergence of a Palestinian state.

He also met other EU Foreign Ministers at the General Affairs Council on 10 December. They agreed on the need for concerted international action. They reaffirmed their view that peace requires the recognition of Israel's irrevocable right to live in security and the emergence of a viable Palestinian state. The Palestinian Authority must dismantle the Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist networks and appeal in public for the end of the armed intifada. Israel must withdraw its forces, end the practice of extra-judicial killings, lift the closures and freeze all settlement activity. EU High Representative Javier Solana was mandated to go to the region and report back at Laeken.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the impact of British support for Ugandan and Ethiopian forces on diplomatic relationships. [22319]

Mr. Bradshaw: There has been considerable progress in resolving the conflict in the DRC during the last few months. There have been few ceasefire violations. There was a successful meeting of the major players in Abuja on 10 December, and all sides have committed themselves to the next meeting of the Inter-Congolese dialogue to be held in South Africa in January. But there is more to be done. We will continue to press all sides to ensure that they respect their commitments to the Lusaka agreement, and move the process forward.

The UK provides no military support for either the Ugandan or Ethiopian forces. Assistance is being provided on security sector reform in Uganda.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what impact the conflict over coltan is having in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [22320]

Mr. Bradshaw: The addendum to the UN Panel Report on the Illegal Exploitation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Natural Resources makes a clear link between the exploitation of natural resources, including coltan, and the continuation of the conflict. We are ready to work with all sides to put in place the necessary institutions and practices which will ensure that the funds raised from these resources are used to benefit the people of the DRC and not to fund the conflict.

Brussels Agreement

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a paper on what was discussed at the recent meeting in Barcelona under the auspices of the Brussels Agreement. [20452]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 187W. A copy of the joint press communiqué issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs when they met under the Brussels Process in Barcelona on 20 November has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Arms Exports

Roger Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what implications the terms of UN Security Council Resolution 1373 on terrorism have for the policy of Her Majesty's Government in respect of arms exports. [23348]

Mr. Straw: By United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1373(2001) the Security Council inter alia calls upon member states both to eliminate "the supply of weapons to terrorists" (paragraph 2(a)) and to

> "co-operate, particularly through bilateral and multilateral arrangements and agreements, to prevent and suppress terrorist attacks and take action against the perpetrators of such attacks" (paragraph 3(c)).

I have therefore reviewed the Government's policy in respect of arms exports in light of this resolution. In view of the Government's strong continued commitment to human rights, regional stability, and the campaign against terrorism, and taking account of the fact that our human rights obligations are not affected by the adoption of the resolution, I believe there is no need to amend the consolidated criteria in order for us to comply fully with the terms of the resolution. My detailed conclusions are as follows:

(1) Export licensing decisions are taken on a case by case basis against all of the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria, as set out on 26 October 2000, *Official Report*, column 200W, in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time. The last paragraph of the preamble to the consolidated criteria states that:

> "An export licence will not be issued if the arguments for doing so are outweighed by the need to comply with the UK's international obligations and commitments, by concern that the goods might be used for internal repression or international aggression, by risks to regional stability or by other considerations as described in these criteria".

(2) Criterion two of the consolidated criteria includes the statement that HMG:

> "considers that in some cases the use of force by a Government within its own borders, for example to preserve law and order against terrorists or other criminals, is legitimate and does not constitute internal repression, as long as force is used in accordance with the international human rights standards described above".

(3) In judging individual applications, the Government will take account of the terms of UNSCR 1373(2001) and will continue to pay attention to this passage in criterion two, within the discretion provided by the consolidated criteria.

(4) The consolidated criteria already state that, when considering export licence applications, the Government will take account of the record of the buyer country with regard to

> "its support or encouragement of terrorism and international organised crime"

(criterion six (a)) and that

> "the Government will pay particular attention to the need to avoid diversion of UK exports to terrorist organisations".

(criterion seven). This makes clear our commitment to preventing arms exported from the UK from falling into the hands of terrorists.

(5) We are taking additional steps to strengthen our export controls. The Export Control Bill currently going through Parliament gives the Government a number of new powers which will help to improve our ability to prohibit the transfer of arms or related technology to terrorists, including new powers to control the transfer of technology by intangible means and trafficking and brokering in arms. We are aiming to sign the UN Firearms Protocol soon and will encourage others to do so, and have proposed bringing forward analysis of the OSEC's information exchange on the marking of small arms. These steps will help us to keep small arms out of terrorists' hands by helping us to trace weapons flows and to combat the illicit manufacture and trafficking in firearms.

(6) Finally, the new Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill includes clauses to close the gaps in our present legislation relating to chemical, nuclear and biological weapons to prevent the use, production, possession or participation in unauthorised transfers of these materials.

Parliamentary Questions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by his Department were the subject of a holding answer in the last three Sessions of Parliament. [22026]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 10 December 2001]*: My Department issued the following number of holding replies during the last three parliamentary Sessions:

Session	*Number of holding replies*	*Percentage*
1998–99	192	34
1999–2000	216	15
2000–01	127	[1]n/a

[1] Due to a computer hardware problem figures in percentage form cannot be provided for parliamentary Session 2000–01

Afghanistan

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of relations between Russia and the Northern Alliance *(a)* before and *(b)* since 11 September. [22169]

Mr. Bradshaw: Russia has maintained close links with members of Afghanistan's Northern Alliance for some years. These have continued since 11 September.

HEALTH

Doctors and Nurses

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many foreign doctors and nurses have been recruited into the NHS in the last year; and how many British doctors and nurses are in training. [18678]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 28 November 2001]:* Data collected by the Department do not record how many foreign doctors and nurses were recruited into the national health service last year.

In order to work in the United Kingdom foreign doctors and nurses have to be registered with the appropriate regulatory body, the General Medical Council (GMC) for doctors and the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting (UKCC) for nurses. They do not necessarily work in the NHS.

In the year to 31 March 2001 there were 1,416 admissions to the UKCC register via European Community arrangements. In the same period there were 5,988 foreign entrants from outside the European Community.

GMC data do not distinguish between UK and European Economic Area (EEA) doctors. In 2000 there were 5,649 newly registered doctors from the UK/EEA. 3,054 new doctors with overseas qualifications (outside the EEA) registered with the GMC in 2000.

The Department does not collect data for Britain. In England in 2000–01 there were 49,090 nurses in training. We forecast that in 2001–02 this will rise to around 53,500.

In 2000 there were 34,660 doctors in training in the NHS. The table with data provided by the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) for England shows the number of students entering medical school in the UK since 1997–98.

Actual medical school intake 1997–98 to 2001–02

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
England	3,749	3,735	3,972	4,300	4,698
Scotland	934	956	925	897	914
Wales	200	200	226	233	288
Northern Ireland	179	178	179	180	188
UK total	5,062	5,069	5,302	5,610	6,088

[1] Provisional information awaiting confirmation of July 2002 figures from HEFCE in November 2002

Waiting Lists

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the way his Department compiles tables for hospital waiting list numbers and times. [19300]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The NHS Plan set out our objectives for reducing in-patient and out-patient waiting times by 2005. Information to monitor progress will continue to be collected and published by the Government Statistical Service.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many and what proportion of patients in each health authority on in-patient waiting lists have been waiting for over 15 months; [20863]

(2) how many and what proportion of patients in each health authority on in-patient waiting lists have been waiting for over six months. [20859]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is in the table.

The NHS Plan Implementation Programme set out targets relating to in-patients, to implement a maximum waiting time of 15 months by March 2002. In addition, the NHS plan set a target to reduce the maximum wait for in-patient treatment to six months by the end of 2005.

Patients waiting for elective admission, England, position at 30 September 2001

		Over 6 month waiters		*Over 15 month waiters*	
Health authority	*Total waiting*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Avon	21,492	6,934	32.3	400	1.9
Barking and Havering	10,804	3,380	31.3	158	1.5
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	15,076	4,807	31.9	236	1.6
Barnsley	4,243	641	15.1	1	0.0
Bedfordshire	10,304	3,221	31.3	295	2.9
Berkshire	14,495	3,864	26.7	126	0.9
Birmingham	15,197	2,752	18.1	55	0.4
Bradford	10,001	2,205	22.0	3	0.0
Brent and Harrow	8,224	2,439	29.6	141	1.7
Bromley, Bexley and Greenwich	13,817	4,558	33.0	217	1.6
Buckinghamshire	13,221	3,743	28.3	209	1.6
Bury and Rochdale	9,523	2,261	23.7	72	0.8
Calderdale and Kirklees	10,564	1,617	15.3	20	0.2
Cambridgeshire	14,616	3,689	25.2	160	1.1
Camden and Islington	6,083	1,317	21.7	31	0.5
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	12,004	3,814	31.8	93	0.8
County Durham and Darlington	11,508	2,631	22.9	0	0.0
Coventry	4,807	1,000	20.8	15	0.3
Croydon	6,561	2,089	31.8	200	3.0
Doncaster	4,111	561	13.6	1	0.0
Dorset	8,736	64	0.7	1	0.0
Dudley	4,792	836	17.4	20	0.4
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	13,734	3,453	25.1	135	1.0
East Kent	16,414	5,462	33.3	239	1.5
East Lancashire	12,441	3,125	25.1	26	0.2
East London and City	11,388	2,818	24.7	90	0.8
East Riding and Hull	11,637	3,518	30.2	0	0.0

Patients waiting for elective admission, England, position at 30 September 2001

Health authority	*Total waiting*	*Over 6 month waiters* *Number*	*Over 6 month waiters* *Percentage*	*Over 15 month waiters* *Number*	*Over 15 month waiters* *Percentage*
East Surrey	8,527	2,996	35.1	216	2.5
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	17,893	6,081	34.0	373	2.1
Gateshead and South Tyneside	7,671	1,540	20.1	1	0.0
Gloucestershire	8,205	1,496	18.2	48	0.6
Herefordshire	2,792	824	29.5	16	0.6
Hertfordshire	21,513	6,284	29.2	342	1.6
Hillingdon	4,167	1,100	26.4	72	1.7
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	14,876	4,106	27.6	202	1.4
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	4,477	863	19.3	17	0.4
Kingston and Richmond	7,122	2,020	28.4	126	1.8
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	15,914	5,120	32.2	406	2.6
Leeds	13,675	3,825	28.0	69	0.5
Leicestershire	16,056	3,378	21.0	50	0.3
Lincolnshire	15,717	4,038	25.7	132	0.8
Liverpool	10,596	2,580	24.3	86	0.8
Manchester	12,189	3,137	25.7	226	1.9
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	10,084	2,674	26.5	155	1.5
Morecambe Bay	6,789	1,783	26.3	19	0.3
Newcastle and North Tyneside	6,945	1,422	20.5	4	0.1
Norfolk	18,493	4,832	26.1	306	1.7
North and East Devon	10,991	3,277	29.8	127	1.2
North and Mid Hampshire	10,508	2,715	25.8	134	1.3
North Cheshire	8,747	2,894	33.1	147	1.7
North Cumbria	7,497	2,060	27.5	13	0.2
North Derbyshire	8,202	2,101	25.6	2	0.0
North Essex	20,872	6,466	31.0	221	1.1
North Nottinghamshire	7,976	1,963	24.6	13	0.2
North Staffordshire	6,473	1,373	21.2	10	0.2
North West Lancashire	11,350	2,296	20.2	31	0.3
North Yorkshire	13,795	3,406	24.7	14	0.1
Northamptonshire	13,728	3,916	28.5	120	0.9
Northumberland	5,177	1,046	20.2	0	0.0
Nottingham	11,365	2,564	22.6	50	0.4
Oxfordshire	10,942	2,982	27.3	74	0.7
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	10,349	3,666	35.4	231	2.2
Rotherham	3,819	535	14.0	1	0.0
Salford and Trafford	12,828	3,712	28.9	250	1.9
Sandwell	4,601	559	12.1	9	0.2
Sefton	7,430	1,850	24.9	57	0.8
Sheffield	11,287	3,020	26.8	5	0.0
Shropshire	7,012	1,586	22.6	40	0.6
Solihull	3,487	823	23.6	8	0.2
Somerset	11,623	3,065	26.4	80	0.7
South and West Devon	13,771	4,322	31.4	128	0.9
South Cheshire	14,148	4,222	29.8	158	1.1
South Essex	17,546	5,161	29.4	83	0.5
South Humber	7,848	2,080	26.5	2	0.0
South Lancashire	7,936	2,003	25.2	40	0.5
South Staffordshire	12,667	3,369	26.6	69	0.5
Southampton and South West Hampshire	13,564	3,628	26.7	247	1.8
Southern Derbyshire	12,470	2,951	23.7	48	0.4
St. Helens and Knowsley	9,514	1,972	20.7	57	0.6
Stockport	7,249	2,106	[illegible].1	35	0.5
Suffolk	15,255	4,776	31.3	147	1.0
Sunderland	6,095	1,352	22.2	0	0.0
Tees	10,952	2,721	24.8	0	0.0
Wakefield	6,721	1,813	27.0	5	0.1
Walsall	2,741	385	14.0	4	0.1
Warwickshire	10,345	2,249	21.7	9	0.1
West Kent	24,236	7,882	32.5	234	1.0
West Pennine	11,663	2,295	19.7	57	0.5
West Surrey	14,644	5,562	38.0	534	3.6
West Sussex	18,714	6,928	37.0	500	2.7
Wigan and Bolton	13,540	3,350	24.7	116	0.9
Wiltshire	12,397	3,678	29.7	193	1.6
Wirral	5,602	1,240	22.1	47	0.8
Wolverhampton	3,730	742	19.9	3	0.1
Worcestershire	9,517	2,635	27.7	109	1.1

Source:

Department of Health form QF01

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the increase in the departmental expenditure limit from 2001–02 to 2002–03 will be accounted for by wage costs. [20604]

Mr. Hutton: The planned expenditure for the national health service in 2001–02 is £48,832 million. The corresponding figure for 2002–03 is £53,478 million—an increase of 9.5 per cent. in cash terms.

Pay increases for NHS staff for 2002–03, including those subject to the recommendations of pay review bodies, have yet to be agreed.

Blood Products

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether products are derived from blood donations from outside *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* western Europe. [20295]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* No plasma from United Kingdom donors is used in the manufacture of fractionated blood products. All blood products manufactured by the national health service-owned Bio Products Laboratory are made from plasma sourced in the United States of America. Some commercially manufactured blood products used by the NHS are derived from blood donations collected in western Europe. However, all licensed blood products must comply with European Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products requirements on selection and testing of blood donors.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths have occurred as a result of the supply of contaminated blood products to haemophiliacs in the past 10 years; and how many of these deaths were from *(a)* AIDS alone, *(b)* hepatitis C alone and *(c)* from co-infection. [20294]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* All haemophilia patients registered with the Macfarlane Trust are co-infected with HIV and hepatitis C. 588 of these have died in the past 10 years.

Information from the United Kingdom Haemophilia Centre Doctor's Organisation shows that since 1969, 212 people with haemophilia have died from liver disease which may be related to hepatitis C infection (figures for the last 10 years are not available).

Patient Numbers

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients have been treated by the NHS for each six month reporting period since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [18883]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The number of admissions to national health service trusts since 1990–91 is given in the table. This does not represent the number of patients as a person may be admitted on more than one occasion.

Admissions to NHS hospitals 1990–91 to 2000–01

Year	April to September	October to March	Total
1990–91	4,245,512	3,942,575	8,188,087
1991–92	4,364,105	4,360,223	8,724,328
1992–93	4,570,565	4,508,298	9,078,863
1993–94	4,730,660	4,761,992	9,492,652
1994–95	4,909,917	4,947,403	9,857,320
1995–96	5,102,088	5,144,912	10,247,000
1996–97	5,152,980	5,037,709	10,190,689
1997–98	5,363,519	5,174,016	10,537,535
1998–99	5,248,399	5,460,573	10,708,972
1999–2000	5,521,349	5,504,595	11,025,944
2000–01	5,540,970	5,460,125	11,001,095

The following table shows the number of people seen as out-patients and the total attendance in out-patients—as some people will attend more than once—since 1990–91. It is not possible to provide a six monthly breakdown as data on all out-patient episodes are only collected annually.

Out-patient attendance at NHS hospitals 1990–91 to 2000–01

Year	Number of out-patients	Number of out-patient episodes
1990–91	8,501,760	36,111,304
1991–92	8,941,526	36,893,710
1992–93	9,342,280	37,527,038
1993–94	9,680,593	38,202,391
1994–95	10,362,877	39,305,800
1995–96	10,989,334	40,117,691
1996–97	11,294069	40,872,769
1997–98	11,529,432	41,635,269
1998–99	11,777,780	42,154,397
1999–2000	12,136,405	43,040,699
2000–01	12,466,233	43,569,340

These figures show a significant increase in the number of admissions to hospitals and the number of people seen as out-patients since 1990–91.

The NHS Plan commitment is that by 2005 the maximum waiting time for in-patient treatment will be cut from 18 months now to six months, the maximum waiting time for a routine out-patient appointment will be halved from over six months now to three months and traditional waiting lists will be replaced with booking systems. By the end of 2008 we aim to treat all out-patients and in-patients within three months, subject to recruitment and reform.

Expedited Out-patient Opinions

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is given to clinicians for the purposes of determining which patients receive expedited out-patient opinions within the NHS. [18241]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The decision on how quickly a patient should be referred to out-patients is a clinical matter and it is for general practitioners to decide this on a case by case basis. To assist GPs in referring, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is developing referral guidance for certain conditions including benign prostate disease, osteoarthritis of the hip, and lower back pain. The Department has issued guidance to the national health service that priority treatment should be given to war pensioners, both as in-patients and as out-patients, for examination or treatment relating to the condition for which the patient receives a pension, unless in emergencies or if another case demands clinical priority.

The process of booking appointments should be patient focused. The national booked admissions programme, launched in 1998, is putting in place systems that allow patients to pre-book appointments for a time that is convenient for them, and by the end of 2005 we are committed to all out-patient and in-patient elective admissions being pre-booked.

Ward Housekeepers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by date of publication, guidance he has given on the role and duties of the ward housekeeper *(a)* internally and *(b)* externally; and if he will place the guidance in the Library. [21789]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* Housekeeper information and guidance was first published and distributed as a leaflet in March 2001. More detailed draft guidance was made available to trusts from June 2001 with a request for comments and best practice examples suitable for inclusion in the completed guidance. The approved guidance on the role and duties of the ward housekeeper—"Housekeeping, a first guide to new, modern and dependable ward housekeeping services in the NHS"—was placed on the national health service estates website in November 2001 for public access. A short video film and complementing leaflet, "Ward Housekeepers, getting the basics right", showing how the housekeeper works within the ward team, were also produced and distributed in November 2001 to interested NHS trusts. Further copies of both the video and leaflet are available upon request.

Copies of the guidance and a copy of the video film have been placed in the Library.

Housekeeping guidance, best practice advice and information has also been given at a number of workshops held throughout the regions:

17 November 2000—London
31 January to 1 February 2001—Leeds
17 May—London
22 May—Leeds
6 June—Trent
8 June—North-west
12 June—West midlands
15 June—South-west
20 June—Eastern
21 June—Northern and Yorkshire
24 July—London
25 July—South-east
6 September—South-west
3 December—North-west.

Two further workshops are scheduled for January 2002 in London and Leeds.

Out-of-Area Treatment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out by NHS region, health authority and NHS trust the *(a)* number of out-of-area patients treated and *(b)* cost of out-of-area treatments in each of the last four years for which information is available. [21005]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* Information on the cost of out-of-area treatments has been placed in the Library. The information on patient numbers is not available centrally.

The out-of-area treatment adjustment was introduced in 1999–2000. Information is therefore available only for the three years 1999–2000 to 2001–02.

Nurses

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average *(a)* salary and *(b)* other related cost of a nurse, by region. [22212]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* The average annual salary and other earnings of a full time qualified nurse employed by the national health service, by region, are estimated to be:

£

	Basic salary	*Other earnings*
Northern and Yorkshire	20,100	3,100
Trent	20,200	2,700
West Midlands	20,100	3,000
North West	20,300	2,900
Eastern	20,400	2,900
London	20,200	5,300
South East	20,400	3,000
South West	20,300	3,100
England	20,200	3,300

Cannabis

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Government will publish their response to the Second Report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology on the Therapeutic Uses of Cannabis. [23251]

Ms Blears: The Government's response to the Second Report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology on the Therapeutic Uses of Cannabis has been published today and copies will be placed in the Library.

Diabetes

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the Diabetes National Service Framework standards document. [23388]

Jacqui Smith: We shall be publishing the Diabetes National Service Framework standards tomorrow. Copies will be placed in the Library.

Coronary Patients

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to health authorities and NHS healthcare trusts in respect of the provision of adequate post-discharge care for coronary patients; what budget has been allocated for this service in the current three year spending programme; and if he will make a statement. [21452]

Jacqui Smith: The National Service Framework for Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) was published on 6 March 2000 setting out national standards for the care of patients with CHD. This includes guidance on appropriate care on discharge from hospital following a heart attack, on secondary prevention of CHD to prevent further events, and on the provision of cardiac rehabilitation. In addition, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has produced a clinical guideline on secondary prevention for patients who have had a heart attack which covers appropriate drug treatment and the role of rehabilitation.

Spending on national health service services generally comes from a unified allocation to health authorities and it is not possible to identify the total spend on a particular area of care. We have provided substantial increased funding and by 2003 we will be investing an extra £230 million a year in heart services. Money has also been made available from Her Majesty's Treasury capital modernisation fund to provide equipment for rehabilitation (£10 million) and primary care services (£15 million).

Haemodialysis

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many haemodialysis units treating NHS patients within the United Kingdom there were for each year since 1999, broken down by regional health authority, indicating which are *(a)* privately managed and *(b)* NHS managed; [22674]

(2) if he will estimate the average annual full treatment cost of haemodialysis for haemodialysis NHS patients through *(a)* a privately managed and *(b)* an NHS managed unit. [22676]

Jacqui Smith: The United Kingdom renal survey, commissioned by the Department and using 1998 data, shows that there were 52 'main' renal haemodialysis units in England. Fifty of these were managed by the national health service and two by private sector providers. In the same year there were 73 satellite haemodialysis units.

A recent Departmental survey of regional commissioners suggests that in 2001 there are now 55 main renal units and 96 satellite units, 24 of which are managed by private sector providers.

A study by the Department in 1996 estimated the cost of main unit based haemodialysis as £31,520 per patient per year. The cost of haemodialysis treatment in satellite units, where most private sector involvement rests, is not available in published literature because of the variation in structure, process and patient case-mix in these units.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many haemodialysis patients' usual treatment was administered in haemodialysis units in a different health authority region to where they reside in each year since 1990, broken down by regional health authority. [22677]

Jacqui Smith: Data for the number of patients receiving haemodialysis in one of the eight national health service regions other than the one in which they reside are not readily available.

Where patients are treated outside of their 'home' health authority, service agreements are made between commissioners and providers in the respective health authorities. This may provide better access to geographically closer haemodialysis facilities.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many haemodialysis patients were receiving treatment at haemodialysis units for each year since 1990, broken down by regional health authority [22675]

Jacqui Smith: Figures for the number of patients receiving hospital and satellite unit based haemodialysis are available from United Kingdom renal survey data. However, these figures are collected on a unit centred basis and not on a regional basis. Surveys have been undertaken in 1993, 1995 and 1998.

Hospital haemodialysis patients in England

Year of UK renal survey	*Number*
1993	3,899
1995	5,383
1998	7,788

Tilt Report

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken to implement the Tilt report. [22088]

Jacqui Smith: The Tilt report was published on 22 May 2000. All 86 recommendations in the report were accepted by the Government and the implementation process is on-going. Some of the report's recommendations, for example the upgrading of the perimeter security of the hospitals, have a lengthy implementation time scale. Progress is being monitored by three of the Department's regional offices with a high security hospital in their area (North-West, London and Trent), and by the high security psychiatric services commissioning national oversight group.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the expenditure provided in 2001–02 to implement the Tilt report has been spent. [22087]

Jacqui Smith: £5 million of current expenditure funding and £38 million of capital expenditure funding has been provided centrally for 2001–02 to support the implementation of Tilt report recommendations.

The £5 million of current expenditure funding is to support the process of moving inappropriately placed patients out of the high security hospitals to more suitable accommodation. Agreement has been reached with the regional commissioners of high and medium secure psychiatric services about the split of the £5 million between regions, and an allocation will shortly be made to the lead commissioning health authority for each region.

The £38 million of capital expenditure relates to improvements to the physical security of the high security hospitals, particularly the upgrading of perimeter security that Sir Richard Tilt saw as being necessary in the interests of maintaining public safety. The funding was split, in line with estimated need, between the three Department of Health regional offices with performance management responsibility for a high security hospital.

Actual spend across the three hospitals as at the end of November 2001 was £8.4 million. It is estimated that financial year-end spending will be significantly greater than this amount but that there will be a carry over of spending planned for 2001–02 into 2002–03, particularly due to a delay in the perimeter security upgrading at Ashworth hospital arising from complications in obtaining planning permission.

Children's National Service Framework

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the timetable is of the planned Children's National Service Framework. [22090]

Jacqui Smith: The Children's National Service Framework will have a broad remit encompassing social care and maternity services as well as health services for children. The standards that will be developed first, in response to the Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry report, are those relating to acute/hospital care. These will be published in 2002. The timetable for the publication of the rest of NSF has not yet been finalised.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce exemption from prescription charges for those persons who suffer from severe mental illness. [22095]

Jacqui Smith: Our policy is to give priority to helping those who may have difficulty in paying charges, rather than extending the exemption arrangements to people with other medical conditions.

Podiatrists

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations took place with non-state registered podiatrists prior to appointment of the podiatry representative to the Shadow Health Professions Council. [22097]

Mr. Hutton: None. There is scope on the Health Professions Council for one registrant member and one alternate for each profession regulated by the Council. The registrant and alternate members of the Shadow Council were appointed on the nomination of the relevant professional bodies.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the time which it will take to process applications by non-state registered podiatrists for entry to the register of the Health Professions Council. [22098]

Mr. Hutton: This is a matter for the Health Professions Council. Decisions on applications must be given subject to the time limits mentioned for dealing with applications in Article 9(5) of the Draft Health Professions Order 2001.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what titles and descriptions non-state registered podiatrists will be able to practice after the transition period under the Health Professions Order has expired. [22096]

Mr. Hutton: Any title or titles which are not protected under the order.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 567W, if he will place in the Library the report from the Mental Health Act Commission and others on ethnic monitoring, racial harassment and training. [22100]

Jacqui Smith: Copies of the report, entitled "National Visit 2, Improving Care for Detained Patients from Black and Minority Ethnic Communities" are available in the Library.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when it is planned to launch the toolkit to support mental health services in promoting mental health for people of ethnic minority communities. [22084]

Jacqui Smith: We hope to make the toolkit available in autumn 2002.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to ensure equality of treatment for those who are *(a)* black and *(b)* of ethnic minority backgrounds who are suffering from severe mental illness and are detained in special hospitals. [22094]

Jacqui Smith: The principle of equality of treatment for all lies at the heart of our modernisation programme and we are taking steps to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusiveness is built into all national health service and social care service delivery.

In regard to high security (special) hospitals, each has undertaken a range of initiatives to improve the situation of black and minority ethnic patients. In the longer term the hospitals will be guided by a national strategy, currently being drafted, which will address issues surrounding black and minority ethnic mental health more widely.

Social Services

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his plans to progress towards a population-based distribution formula for social services expenditure by county councils. [22268]

Jacqui Smith: The distribution formula for personal social services already takes account of the population base by local authority, (for example the children's formula takes account of the resident population aged 0–17), as well as relative levels of need.

The formulae are currently being reviewed in time for 2003–04 allocations. Local government representatives are being actively involved in this process, and we will be consulting widely before making final decisions.

Wanless Report

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he first discussed *(a)* the interim Wanless report and *(b)* the conclusions of the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding the interim Wanless report, with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. [22245]

Mr. Milburn: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and I meet regularly and discuss a range of issues.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list per capita spending on the NHS for each region of England in the last 12 months. [22243]

Mr. Hutton: The expenditure by weighted head of population for each English region for 2000–01 is shown in the table.

Expenditure by health authorities and primary care trusts

Region	*Per capita spending (£)*
Northern and Yorkshire	803.52
Trent	810.12
Eastern	803.44
London	886.12
South East	810.94
South West	849.78
West Midlands	794.52
North Western	826.84
England	825.38

Notes:

1. Expenditure is taken from health authority and primary care trust summarisation forms which are prepared on a resource basis and therefore differ from cash allocations in the year. The expenditure is the total spent by the health authority and by the primary care trusts within each region. The majority of General Dental Services expenditure is not included in the health authority or primary care trust accounts and is separately accounted for by the Dental Practice Board.

2. Health authorities and primary care trusts should account for their expenditure on a gross basis. This results in an element of double counting where one body acts as the main commissioner and is then reimbursed by other bodies. The effect of this double counting within the answer cannot be identified.

3. Some health authorities act as lead commissioners for particular specialties which inflates their figures when compared with others and also causes differences between years. Other factors may also distort the figures so the results are therefore not all directly comparable with each other and with answers to similar questions for previous years.

Sources:

Health authority audited summarisation forms 2000–01
Primary care trust audited summarisation schedules 2000–01
Weighted population estimates for 2000–01

NHS University

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Microsoft software to supply the NHS University will be an open system which will allow other suppliers to participate. [22608]

Mr. Hutton: The operating systems for the national health service University, including software, are yet to be decided upon and no purchase has been made from any particular supplier. One of the main considerations for any e-learning component of the NHS University will be its ability to reach the largest number of staff in the widest range of organisations. This will enable the NHS to utilise investments in hardware and software, from a number of suppliers, to the full.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the tender document for the national health service University will be put into the public domain. [22607]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service University is at an early stage of development. Established tendering procedures will be followed when the NHS University is in a position to let contracts to suppliers.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will validate and check the new software system for the NHS University. [22609]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service University is a new initiative and is still in its early stages of development. Decisions about software systems have not yet been taken.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Ministerial Court Representation

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Solicitor-General on how many occasions she has appeared in court for the Government since her appointment; and if she will make a statement. [22283]

The Solicitor-General: I have not appeared in court for the Government on any occasion since my appointment.

The Attorney-General has since his appointment appeared for the Government on three occasions: once in the Court of Appeal; once at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg; and once at the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea in Hamburg. The last Attorney-General did not appear in court for the Government of any occasion. The last Solicitor-General appeared in court for the Government on eight occasions.

SCOTLAND

Tax Burden

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement about Scotland's share of the tax burden in the last financial year. [10380]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scottish Executive estimate tax receipts raised in Scotland in their publication "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland". The latest edition published by the Scottish Executive in December 2000 was for the financial year 1998–99, a copy of which is available in the House Library.

BAE Systems

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when *(a)* she and *(b)* the Minister of State next plan to visit BAE Systems shipyards on the Clyde. [10752]

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend the Minister of State participates on the Clyde Shipyards Task Force and therefore maintains strong links with the upper Clyde yards. He last visited the Goven yard on 19 November to co-sign the contract to award two alternative landing support logistics ships (ALSLs) to BAE Systems Marine and plans to visit Scotstoun in the near future. I hope to visit the yards soon.

Concessionary Coach Fares

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will bring forward measures to provide for half-price fares for older and disabled people on long-distance coach journeys between Scotland and England. [21876]

Mr. Foulkes: The Government, the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales are all consulting on proposals entitling coach operators to fuel duty rebates in return for them offering half-price fares to older and disabled passengers on scheduled long-distance coach journeys. The Government will hold discussions with the devolved Administrations on how best to co-ordinate arrangements across Britain.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claimants have been refused benefit under the habitual residence test, indicating what proportion of them were British citizens in each year of its operation. [8654]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the tables:

Claims for income support/jobseeker's allowance (income based) subject to the habitual residence test

Year	*Total claims*	*Total claims disallowed*	*Claims from UK citizens disallowed*	*Claims from UK citizens disallowed as a percentage of all claims disallowed*
1994–95	59,677	19,961	3,764	19
1995–96	103,828	19,614	6,006	31
1996–97	99,534	17,565	8,596	49
1997–98	117,653	18,131	9,857	54
1998–99	112,976	18,461	10,603	57
1999–2000	98,227	11,698	5,546	47
2000–01	84,147	9,601	4,246	44

Note:

The habitual residence test was introduced in August 1994

Source:

Income Support/Jobseeker's Allowance (Income Based) Management Information System Programme.

Claims for housing benefit and council tax benefit subject to the habitual residence test

Year	*Housing benefit claims disallowed*	*Council tax benefit claims disallowed*
1996	1,100	300
1997	1,300	540
1998	620	360
1999	930	470
2000	600	290

Notes:

1. The data refer to households, which may be a family, a single person or a couple.
2. The totals for Great Britain have been rated up to account for local authorities that have not responded. This is standard practice in reporting totals where there have been non-respondents.
3. The figures in the table will show some double counting as some households that have claimed one benefit will also have claimed the other.
4. The figures exclude cases where the household has claimed income support or jobseeker's allowance (income based).
5. Data are not collected separately on claims from UK citizens, so no proportionate figures can be given.
6. Data were not collected prior to 1996.

Source:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System Policy Monitoring Returns 1996 to 2000

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many suspected benefit frauds have been *(a)* investigated and *(b)* resulted in a successful prosecution as a result of (i) submissions to the Targeting Fraud website and (ii) calls to the National Benefit Fraud Hotline. [11257]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on the last financial year and this year to date is in the table:

Period	*Investigations completed*	*Fraud established/ corrective action taken*	*Successful prosecutions*
Targeting Fraud website[1]			
1 May 2000 to 31 March 2001	184	28	0
1 April 2001 to 30 September 2001	302	68	1
National Benefit Fraud Hotline			
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	33,318	7,917	492
1 April 2001 to 30 September 2001	15,977	4,061	344

[1] Launched May 2000

Benefits Agencies (Access)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what impact the heightened security measures in place in Government and civil service offices since 11 September have had on the operation and accessibility of benefits agencies for claimants; and if he will make a statement. [14298]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* This is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 12 December 2001:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has asked me to respond to your Parliamentary Question asking what impact the heightened security measures in place in Government and Civil Service offices since 11th September have had on the operation and accessibility of benefits agencies for claimants; and if he will make a statement.

Following the attacks of 11 September, security was heightened in Benefits Agency (BA) offices. Security guards were instructed to search all baggage when customers visited BA sites. There have been no formal or informal complaints from customers about this action.

There has been no disruption to service to customers in Employment Services offices.

There have been 12 incidents that have disrupted the operation of BA public caller areas. These have been for varying lengths of time, but on average the disruption lasted 2–3 hours. One of these incidents resulted in the public caller area being closed all day and customers were diverted to another nearby BA office. Feedback from Group 4, who provide security services for the BA, is that they have not been notified of any incidents or complaints, and generally BA customers have been very understanding and co-operative.

Although BA offices implemented the search process, customers should not have received any disruption to normal service because of this. This search process has now reduced with security guards now checking baggage on a random basis.

I hope this is helpful.

Household Incomes

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average household income was for the poorest 10 per cent. of the population *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* as percentage increase in each year of the last 15 years. [16101]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 19 November 2001]:* Such information as is available is in the table.

Money value of bottom decile median (£ per week) in December 2000 prices

Year	*Before housing costs*	*After housing costs*
Family expenditure survey (FES)		
1987	109	82
1988–89	107	79
1990–91	103	73
1991–92	104	70
1992–93	105	69
1993–94	110	74
1994–95	115	78
1995–96	117	77
Family resources survey (FRS)		
1994–95	112	67
1995–96	112	72
1996–97	115	74
1997–98	113	72
1998–99	116	79
1999–2000	118	79

Notes:

1. The derivation of year on year percentage change in income levels from the above data is not recommended due to the fact that sampling variation for any individual year is large in relation to year on year change.
2. All figures are estimates. There is evidence to suggest that the poorest 10 per cent. of the population as defined by their income may not be the poorest 10 per cent. in terms of living standards.
3. Data are not available for each year of the period requested—with the financial year 1999–2000 being the latest data available.
4. Results from the Family Resources Survey have been available only since 1994–95. Prior to that the Family Expenditure Survey was used as the data source for the Households Below Average Incomes (HBAI) series. Due to differences in the methodology employed in both the collection and analysis of data from both surveys, the figures presented above are not directly comparable across the two surveys.
5. FRS data are presented on a financial year basis. FES data for 1987 are presented on a single calendar year basis, that for 1988–89 to 1992–93 on a two-year combined calendar year basis and 1993–94 to 1995–96 on a two-year combined financial year basis where, for example, "1995–96" denotes the financial years 1995–96 and 1996–97 combined. The coverage of the FRS is Great Britain only, as it excludes Northern Ireland, while that of the FES is the whole of the United Kingdom.
6. The monetary values presented are rounded to the nearest pound and are equivalised. That is to say that incomes are adjusted to take into account both the size and composition of the household to allow fair comparisons between different family types. The incomes presented above relate to the actual incomes of a couple with no children, which is used as the benchmark for equivalisation in HBAI.
7. As is standard HBAI convention, figures are presented on both a Before and After Housing Costs basis, in order to take into account variations in housing costs between households that do not necessarily reflect equivalent variations in the quality of housing.

ONE Pilot

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions he has had regarding the introduction of a uniform housing benefit and council tax benefit form for the Basic Model ONE Pilot; and if he will make a statement. [18000]

Malcolm Wicks: The option of having a uniform housing and council tax benefit (HB/CTB) claim form has been available to local authorities (LAs) participating in the ONE pilots. None of the Basic Model Pilot LAs has chosen to do so, but the North Nottinghamshire Private and Voluntary Sector Pilot has introduced such a form.

The introduction of the new Customer Management System, being rolled out from 2002, will mean that working age HB/CTB applicants who are also claiming a benefit administered through this Department, will see a uniform, single claims process.

New Deal for Disabled People

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what *(a)* record is kept and *(b)* assessment is made of the destinations of people who leave the new deal for disabled people for employment. [18054]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The new deal for disabled people (NDDP) keeps records of the number of people moving into work. In the first three months operation of the NDDP extension, to the end of September, 492 people have found employment. An assessment of the destinations of people who leave the programme will be made through evaluation of the programme.

Child Support Agency

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many complaints about the work of the Child Support Agency have been made to the agency by hon. Members on behalf of constituents, in each of the past five years. [18175]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Norman Lamb, dated 12 December 2001:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency, promised a substantive reply from me.

You asked how many complaints about the work of the Child Support Agency have been made in each of the last five years by honourable Members on behalf of their constituents.

Unfortunately we have only counted this since July 2000. Since that date until 30th September 2001 we received 6,640 complaints from Members of Parliament on behalf of their constituents.

I hope this is helpful.

Working Age Agency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the cost in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 of work undertaken on the development of a new working age agency. [19006]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Departments of Social Security and for Education and Employment absorbed all development costs in 2000–01.

Our plans for introducing Jobcentre Plus are still developing. For this reason the information requested on costs for 2001–02 is not yet available.

Welfare to Work

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what was the capital budget welfare to work figure for 1998–99 that was not specified in Table 11 on page 102 of the 2001 departmental report. [18906]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The capital budget welfare to work figure for the 1998–99 financial year that was not specified in Table 11 on page 102 of the 2001 departmental report was £27,000.

Benefits Agency/Employment Service (Merger)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the expected saving from the proposed merger of the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service. [18978]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on 28 June 2001, *Official Report,* column 160W.

Departmental Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the costs and functions of the Model Office referred to on page 70 of the 2001 departmental report. [19122]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. John Bercow, dated 12 December 2001:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from me.

You asked for a statement on the costs and functions of the Model Office referred to on page 70 of the 2001 Departmental Report.

Since the Model Office was established and up to the end of October 2001 the running costs have been just over £700,000.

The main role of the Model Office is to support the introduction of the Child Support Reforms. Its functions include: the final testing from a user perspective of the new computer system, assessment of new and existing business processes, testing training material, examining organisational design and associated business products (i.e. procedures, customer materials).

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the costs and functions of the process learning centres referred to on page 70 of the 2001 departmental report. [19123]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. John Bercow, dated 12 December 2001:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from me.

You asked for a statement on the costs and functions of the process learning centres referred to on page 70 of the 2001 Departmental Report.

Two Process Learning Centres were put into operation. The cost was £1.2 million. Their aims were to:

Assist the design of the business process flowing from Child Support Reform and thereby inform the design of the new computer system required to support the reforms.

Permit us to evaluate the business changes to help us plan for national implementation.

Identify opportunities to implement some business improvements in advance of the legislative changes.

Demonstrate the new delivery model to key stakeholders.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a list of the sums which are not included in the 2001 Departmental report and are indicated by the symbol. [19419]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information has been placed in the Library.

Long-term Unemployed

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his statement of 28 November, what estimate he has made of the cost of (1) administering his proposals for the long-term unemployed; [20274]

(2) the implementation of his proposals for the long-term unemployed. [20276]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We estimate that our proposals for the long-term unemployed will cost £40 million to implement and administer in 2002–03 and 2003–04.

Post Office Charges

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the transaction charges agreed with the Post Office are for handling a benefit payment at a post office counter; and how these charges have changed since 1997. [20300]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 5 December 2001]:* The average transaction fee payable by this Department to the Post Office for order book foil encashment since 1997 are as follows:

Year	*Average encashment cost per foil*
1997–98	44p
1998–99	47p
1999–2000	53p
2000–01	60p

The Post Office have a contract with Girobank for girocheque encashment services at post office counters, and these transaction charges are not known to the Department.

Social Security Spending

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the level of social security spending for each year from 1996–97 to 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [20308]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* Social security spending is under control. The rate of growth under this Government is around half that under the previous Government. Indeed, without the extra spending of around £3 billion on families and £7.5 billion on pensioners, forecast spending in 2003–04 would be lower in real terms than it was in 1996–97. We can spend more on priority groups because we have reduced the costs of social and economic failure. For example, spending on benefits for unemployed people this year will be around £4 billion less than in 1996–97.

Expenditure on social security benefits in Great Britain is shown in the table[1].

Expenditure on social security benefits in Great Britain

£ billion

Year	*2001–02 prices*[2]
1996–97	104.5
1997–98	102.6
1998–99	102.2
1999–2000	103.5
2000–01	103.5
2001–02	107.2
2002–03	108.4
2003–04	110.9

[1] Figures show total expenditure on social security benefits. This includes all spending on housing and council tax benefits funded by central and local Government. The figures do not include spending on tax credits, which are the responsibility of Inland Revenue. Spending on family credit and disability working allowance, which are superseded by tax credits, is included: £2.4 billion in 1996–97, £2.6 billion in 1997–98, £2.6 billion in 1998–99 and £2.0 billion in 1999–2000 (2001–02 prices).

[2] Real terms figures in 2001–02 prices are calculated using the GDP deflator published by the Office for National Statistics on 24 September 2001.

New Deal

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 28 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 901W, on the new deal, to the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Mr. Shaw), if he will give a breakdown by year of the new deal starts in the Government Departments and agencies concerned and indicate what proportion of total recruitment was represented by New Deal starts *(a)* in each case and *(b)* for all Government Departments and agencies.

[21266]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The table sets out the number of new deal starts by Government Department (including their agencies) by financial year. Information on the proportion this represents of the total number of employees recruited by Departments over the relevant period is not held centrally. It could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001*[1]	*Total*
Cabinet Office	9	4	13	6	32
Privy Council Office	0	0	1	0	1
Charity Commission	5	13	13	7	38
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	1	1	2	0	4
Ministry of Defence	7	88	43	8	146
Department for Education and Skills[2,3]	12	77	51	6	146
Office for Standards in Education	1	0	0	0	1
Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs[4]	5	33	35	24	97
Intervention Board	2	1	1	0	4
Export Credits Guarantee Department	4	0	0	0	4
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	3	1	5	2	11
Government Communications Headquarters	0	0	2	0	2
Department of Health	8	19	30	15	72
Home Office[2]	1	72	26	21	120
Department for International Development	0	1	6	0	7
Law Officers' Departments	0	10	11	2	23
Lord Chancellor's Department	0	21	34	9	64
National Assembly for Wales	5	28	3	3	39
Northern Ireland Office	0	11	3	0	14
Scottish Executive (includes Scottish Office)	12	19	33	34	98
Registers of Scotland	1	0	0	0	1
Department of Trade and Industry	22	21	26	3	72
Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions[4]	6	5	57	44	112
Health and Safety Executive	0	6	12	10	28
Office of the Rail Regulator	0	0	0	1	1
Office of Water Services (OFWAT)	0	0	1	0	1
Ordnance Survey	0	1	0	0	1
Shadow Strategic Rail Authority (NDPB with effect from 1 February 2001)	0	0	1	0	1
HM Treasury	2	0	2	3	7
Office of Government Commerce	1	0	0	0	1
HM Customs and Excise	1	34	77	17	129
Inland Revenue (includes NICO and Valuation Office Agency)	4	252	145	62	463
Office for National Statistics	0	10	1	0	11
Royal Mint	3	0	0	0	3
Department for Work and Pensions[3]	356	1,758	1,177	397	3,688
Total	471	2,486	1,811	674	5,442

[1] To 1 October 2001

[2] One New Dealer transferred from DfES to the Home Office

[3] Five New Dealers transferred from DfES to DWP

[4] Four New Dealers transferred from DTLR to DEFRA

Note:

This table monitors the number of starts and does not reflect transfer of staff under recent machinery of government changes (see [2,3,4] above)

TREASURY

Child Poverty

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's strategy for tackling child poverty. [23530]

Mr. Gordon Brown: As I said at the Treasury Committee hearing on 11 December, I am today publishing a pre-Budget report document on child poverty, "Tackling Child Poverty—giving every child the best possible start in life", which will inform next year's Budget and Spending Review 2002.

The Government's strategy involves:

helping to ensuring a decent family income, with work for those who can and support for those who cannot;

delivering excellent public services for all neighbourhoods and targeted interventions for those with additional needs;

supporting parents so that they can provide better support for their children; and

harnessing the power and expertise of the voluntary and community sectors, providing support for innovation and good practice and building strategic partnerships with these sectors to fight child poverty.

Copies of the document have been deposited in the Library of the House and are also available in the Vote Office.

London Underground

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 54W, on London Underground, for what reason he is unable to state what involvement officials from HM Treasury have had in the value for money assessment of the London Underground PPP; and for what reason the Office of National Statistics has not made an assessment of the accounting treatment of the London Underground PPP; and if he will make a statement. [22288]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The value for money assessment of the London Underground PPP will be carried out by London Transport in line with the relevant guidance produced by HM Treasury and the Treasury Taskforce. Treasury, DTLR and London Underground officials are in regular contact about various aspects of the PPP.

The accounting treatment of the London Underground PPP is a matter for London Underground's own auditors.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what involvement members of the Council of Economic Advisers have had in the value for money assessment of the London Underground PPP; and if he will make a statement. [22255]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Council of Economic Advisers has had no involvement in the value for money assessment of the London Underground PPP. The value for money assessment of the London Underground PPP will be carried out by London Transport in line with the relevant guidance produced by HM Treasury and the Treasury Taskforce.

Departmental Budgets

Mrs. May: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what basis loans may be made for a departmental budget to a private company in administration; on how many occasions this has occurred in the last four years; and how such loans would be treated in the national accounts. [22062]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The basis on which loans may be made from a departmental budget to a private company in administration is as for any other expenditure. Departments must take account of the guidance in Government Accounting, in particular, Chapter 2, on the powers to incur expenditure.

Information on the number of occasions that such loans have been made in the last four years is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In national accounts such loans are treated as loans from the government sector to the private sector. There is no impact on the public sector current surplus, public sector net borrowing, or Total Managed Expenditure (TME).

Investment

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the real growth rate of net investment, as used to produce the estimates of future public borrowing set out in Table B2, page 165, of the pre-Budget report, November 2001. [20304]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 6 December 2001]:* The forecast for public sector net investment is set out in Table B5, page 171, of the pre-Budget report.

Diesel

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the duty points for diesel in the United Kingdom. [21764]

Mr. Boateng: In the UK, duty on hydrocarbon oils, including diesel, is payable upon removal from either:

1. A refinery (warehouse) for delivery to home use, or
2. An import warehouse for delivery to home use.

By "home use" we mean consumption in the UK, as opposed to export.

HM Customs and Excise must approve such warehouses. A full list of Mineral Oil Premises (the warehouses and producers' premises) is available to the public in notice 179B.

Barnett Formula

Mr. Swire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what account he will take of the 2001 census in Scotland in assessing funding under the Barnett formula. [22237]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Barnett formula uses the latest available mid-year population estimates. The outcome of the 2001 census will be taken into account when available.

Private Health Care

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase the percentage of GDP spent on private health care. [16994]

Mr. Andrew Smith: None.

Public Finance Forecasts

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason he does not assume recent changes in *(a)* equity prices, *(b)* oil prices and *(c)* financial corporation (i) profits and (ii) bonuses to be cyclical for the purposes of his public finance forecasts. [22190]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Treasury's methodology for estimating the impact of the economic cycle on the public finances is set out in the publication "Fiscal policy: public finances and the cycle", HM Treasury, March 1999. The impact of equity prices, oil prices and financial corporations on the forecast is described in detail in paragraphs B34-B49 of the pre-Budget report (pages 174–178).

Business Start-ups (Buckingham)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many business start-ups there were in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [22646]

Ruth Kelly: The information falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Bercow, dated 13 December 2001:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the number of business start-ups in the Buckinghamshire Constituency since 1997 (22646).

The information requested is given in the table:

Business start-ups (VAT registrations) in each year since 1997

Year	Number
2000	680
1999	690
1998	705
1997	655

Source:

Office for National Statistics Inter Departmental Business Register (IDBR)

Strikes (Buckingham)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many working days were lost through *(a)* official and *(b)* unofficial strike action in the constituency of Buckingham in each year since 1997. [22643]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Bercow, dated 13 December 2001:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question about the number of working days lost due to strike action in the Buckingham constituency since 1997. (22643)

The information requested is not available because Labour dispute statistics are not published below Government Office Region level.

Since 1981 the available figures have not distinguished between official and unofficial strikes due to the practical difficulties in deciding if a strike is official or otherwise.

Business (Buckingham)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many businesses there were in the Buckingham constituency with *(a)* 0 to five, *(b)* five to 20, *(c)* 20 to 49 and *(d)* more than 50 employees in each year since 1997. [22641]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Bercow, dated 13 December 2001:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question concerning the number of businesses in Buckingham parliamentary constituency by employee sizeband in each year since 1997. (22641)

The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of VAT based enterprises in Buckingham parliamentary constituency by employee sizebands by year (1996–2001)

	Employees sizebands				
Year	0–4	5–19	20–49	50+	Total
2001	3,720	465	45	35	4,265
2000	3,690	450	45	35	4,225
1999	3,585	440	50	35	4,110
1998	3,475	430	40	35	3,980
1997	3,245	400	35	25	3,710

Note:

All figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 to avoid disclosure

Source:

Office for National Statistics Inter Departmental Business Register

Financial Services Authority

Ian Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements are in place to ensure that the Financial Services Authority is held accountable following the implementation of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. [23531]

Ruth Kelly: The Financial Services and Markets Act set out a comprehensive new framework to ensure that the FSA and its board, while independent of Government, would be properly accountable to Ministers, Parliament and the wider public. The Chancellor has today written to Howard Davies, Chairman of the Financial Services Authority, setting out how the Government propose to use their powers under the new arrangements to ensure that the accountability process works as effectively as possible.

A copy of the letter, and the reply from the Chairman of the FSA, will today be deposited in the Library of the House and on the Treasury's website at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk.

Investment Capital Appraisal

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 55W, on Treasury investment capital appraisal, when he expects the review to conclude;

if he will place the terms of reference in the Library; what representations he has received; and if he will make a statement. [22264]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The review is on-going. It needs to cover a range of complex issues and will conclude once the necessary work has been done. Its terms of reference are as per the objectives set out in paragraph 61 of the HM Treasury document—"Planning Sustainable Spending—Lessons from Previous Policy Experience", published in November 2000.

Beer Duty

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations his Department has received on his proposals on progressive beer duty; and if the sliding scale of relief will apply to local brewers who produce up to 200,000 hectolitres per annum. [22611]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have announced that they are minded to introduce a reduced rate of duty on the beer produced by small breweries and has had a number of representations. A decision will be announced in Budget 2002.

Stamp Duty

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money HM Treasury has made from stamp duty on property sales in each of the past five years. [22610]

Mr. Boateng: Receipts from stamp duty charged on sales of land and property, for the last five financial years for which figures are available, from the Inland Revenue Statistics website http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police (Early Retirement)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he will take to assist *(a)* North Yorkshire police and *(b)* other forces to tackle the impact of early retirement on officer levels. [10185]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office has asked the Police Negotiating Board to explore and agree ways to deliver a fair and more consistent approach towards early retirement due to ill health, so that forces, including North Yorkshire police, can match the performance of the best quartile by 2005. We also hope to introduce a national Occupational Health strategy for the police service, which should assist forces to manage cases of ill-health more effectively at the outset.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders there have been in each magistrates court committee area since 1 June 2000. [20766]

Mr. Denham: Official statistics on the number of antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) issued are based on quarterly returns received from magistrates courts committees (MCC). A review identified an under-count and my Department therefore undertook an exercise with the police to obtain more reliable figures. As a result of this reconciliation exercise the total number of ASBOs issued up until the end of September this year was 466, 184 more than previously reported. A breakdown by MCC area is given in the table.

Number of antisocial behaviour orders[1] issued up to 30 September 2001 by magistrates court committee area

MCC area	*Up to 31 May 2000*	*1 June 2000 to 30 September 2001*	*Total*
Avon and Somerset	9	19	28
Bedfordshire	—	2	2
Cambridgeshire	5	3	8
Cheshire	—	—	—
Cleveland	1	9	10
Cumbria	1	1	2
Derbyshire	3	9	12
Devon and Cornwall	1	9	10
Dorset	—	4	4
Durham	—	10	10
Essex	—	—	—
Gloucestershire	—	4	4
GLMCA[2]	9	31	40
Great Manchester	10	14	24
Hampshire	1	3	4
Hertfordshire	1	8	9
Humberside	—	11	11
Kent	—	15	15
Lancashire	5	11	16
Leicestershire	1	4	5
Lincolnshire	—	1	1
Merseyside	8	9	17
Norfolk	6	11	17
Northamptonshire	—	3	3
Northumbria	8	7	15
North Yorkshire	4	6	10
Nottinghamshire	1	15	16
South Yorkshire	3	3	6
Staffordshire	—	10	10
Suffolk	3	2	5
Surrey	—	4	4
Sussex	3	4	7
Thames Valley	1	6	7
Warwickshire	—	3	3
West Mercia	5	42	47
West Midlands	11	54	65
West Yorkshire	4	11	15
Wiltshire	—	—	—
Dyfed Powys	—	—	—
Gwent	—	1	1
North Wales	—	1	1
South Wales	—	2	2
England and Wales	104	466	466

[1] Implemented from 1 April 1999 and data collected centrally from 1 June 2000 (including data from reconciliation exercise)

[2] Greater London Magistrates Courts Authority

National Black Police Association

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what legally privileged information has been seized or obtained by surveillance of Dr. Ali Dizaei. [13710]

Mr. Denham: I would refer the hon. Member to my letter to him of 9 November, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the standards of promptness and diligence he expects in the investigation of the National Black Police Association complaints against DAC Hayman and Superintendent Norman. [13712]

Mr. Denham: I am assured by the Chairman of the Metropolitan Police Authority and the Metropolitan Police Commissioner that both the authority and the Metropolitan police service have taken all necessary and appropriate action as outlined in the relevant police regulations and legislation to deal with matters with due promptness and diligence.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action will be taken in relation to the investigating officer who authorised the interception of legally privileged conversations of Dr. Ali Dizaei in his role as the legal adviser to the National Black Police Association. [13707]

Mr. Denham: I understand from the Chairman of the Metropolitan Police Authority that the authority has received a complaint into which it is making preliminary inquiries under the provisions of the Police (Conduct) (Senior Officers) Regulations 1999.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will assess the impact on black staff in the Police Service who sought legal advice from Dr. Ali Dizaei by the recording, transcription or use of privileged conversations of the legal adviser to the National Black Police Association. [13709]

Mr. Denham: I have no plans at present to institute a review. I would refer the hon. Member to my letter to him of 9 November, which clarifies the position regarding the telephone calls that Superintendent Dizaei made in connection with his National Black Police Association business. A copy of this letter is in the Library.

Speed Cameras

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the level of accuracy is, on average, of speed cameras over the calibrated distance marked on the road. [22229]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* There is no average figure for the accuracy of speed cameras. In order to ensure their accuracy and reliability all speed cameras have to be of a type approved by the Secretary of State, after rigorous testing, before evidence from them can be used in proceedings.

Measurements of vehicle speed are made by radar or by sensors in the road. Radar displays a primary speed using several hundred measurements taken during the passage of the vehicle through its beam. It requires most of these to be within two kilometres per hour. Devices using sensors on or in the road show a primary speed which is the lower of two measurements taken between different sensor pairs. The speed is only shown when they agree within two miles per hour.

The calibrated distance marked on the road is used only to provide an independent secondary check of the primary speed measurement. The two measurements should be within 10 per cent.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money has been raised by fines on drivers caught speeding by speed cameras; and how the money is apportioned between *(a)* local police forces, *(b)* local authorities and *(c)* the Home Office. [22230]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* The table gives information on the number of fixed penalties for speeding offences over the last five years where cameras have provided the evidence and the estimated revenue from fines. All the money has been paid to Her Majesty's (HM) Treasury.

	Fixed penalties	*Estimated revenue (£ million)*
1995	170,000	6.8
1996	212,600	8.8
1997	288,600	11.5
1998	338,800	13.6
1999	423,000	16.9

Notes:

1. Automatic cameras from 1995 until 1998, all camera types for 1999.
2. Estimate based on number of fixed penalty notices accepted for payment at £40 each from 1995 to 1999 for England and Wales.
3. Figures for 2000 not yet available.

From April 2000 eight partnerships, comprising local police forces, local authorities, highways authorities and magistrates courts have been piloting a new 'netting off' scheme. This allows the fixed penalty revenue from speed and red-light traffic cameras to be re-invested to fund additional camera enforcement.

Under the scheme, local magistrates courts within a partnership collect all fixed-penalty notice and fine revenue from offenders. The element to be netted off goes to the partnership's Local Authority, which acts as treasurer for the scheme, and distributes the funds to each of the partners on the basis of invoiced spend. Any revenue not used for camera enforcement goes to HM Treasury. The Home Office receives no money.

In August the Government announced the national roll-out of the netting off scheme, and a further seven partnership areas joined the scheme in October 2001.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what degree of tolerance to speed is allowed by the speed cameras; and whether this differs between counties. [22228]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* Speed cameras indicate whether or not a driver may be exceeding the speed limit. The enforcement of speed limits is an operational matter for chief officers of police. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) published guidelines on speed enforcement thresholds in February 2000 to support a transparent and consistent approach, while recognising that not all speeding offences are the same. The police retain discretion to take account of the particular circumstances of any individual speeding incident.

The thresholds guidelines are available on the ACPO website, at www.acpo.police.uk.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress towards the public service agreement target for the reduction in residential burglary. [17057]

Mr. Denham: Our target is that, by March 2005, there will be:

> a reduction in recorded domestic burglary of 25 per cent. (compared to the 12 months to March 1999)—ie down from 473,349 at least to 355,011;
>
> no local authority area having a domestic burglary rate (measured in burglaries per thousand households) more than three times the national average.

In the 12 months to March 2001, there were 402,984 recorded burglaries; a reduction of 14.9 per cent. compared to March 1999.

Firearms

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken since October 1997 to establish a central register of persons who have *(a)* applied for a licence and *(b)* to whom a licence to carry a firearm has been granted; what consideration he has given to extending the register (i) to Northern Ireland and (ii) to Scotland; and what information will be retained on this register. [21307]

Mr. Denham: The central register is being developed by the Police Information Technology Organisation as part of the PHOENIX database on the Police National Computer (PNC). Following receipt of an agreed user requirement, a detailed impact assessment was carried out of the work which needed to be done to link the PNC to existing firearms systems in forces. Work is planned for completion in November 2002.

Section 39 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 which requires the establishment of a register, does not apply to Northern Ireland, which has separate firearms controls.

Scottish forces already have a centralised database which is likely to meet the requirements of section 39, except that it is only accessible on-line to Scottish forces. Work is in hand to determine the detailed technical issues involved in making the necessary links with PNC.

The register will record full details of all persons whose applications for grant or renewal of a firearm or shot gun certificate have been accepted or refused; and also of those whose certificates have been revoked. It will also bring to notice the details of any certificate holder who is arrested/summonsed, together with details of any subsequent conviction or other disposal.

Police Response Vehicles

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police response vehicles are available in each London borough and to the British Transport police. [20614]

Mr. Denham: The number of police response vehicles available in each London borough is set out in the table. The three British Transport police operational areas covering London (which police an area larger than that covered by the London boroughs) have 25 response vehicles.

London borough	*Instant response vehicles*	*Area vehicles*
Barking and Dagenham	4	2
Barnet	17	4
Bexley	6	2
Brent	13	2
Bromley	10	3
Camden	9	4
Croydon	10	5
Ealing	9	3
Enfield	6	3
Greenwich	11	5
Hackney	10	2
Hammersmith and Fulham	8	2
Haringey	9	2
Harrow	6	2
Havering	8	2
Hillingdon	8	4
Hounslow	12	2
Islington	11	2
Kensington and Chelsea	4	2
Kingston	9	1
Lambeth	20	4
Lewisham	9	3
Merton	6	2
Newham	9	3
Redbridge	12	3
Richmond	7	2
Southwark	15	3
Sutton	4	2
Tower Hamlets	9	2
Waltham Forest	8	3
Wandsworth	14	2
Westminster	18	3
Total	311	86

Note:

The vehicles are classed by the Metropolitan police as 'response vehicles'. However, there are many other vehicles used in boroughs that respond to calls e.g. vans, panda cars, CID cars.

Police Corruption

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were charged with corruption in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999 and *(e)* 2000; and how many have been convicted of corruption offences. [20496]

Mr. Denham: The following numbers of officers were convicted of corruption in England and Wales:

Year	*Number*
1996–97	5
1997–98	1
1998–99	2
1999–2000	3
2000–01	3

The information required to provide the number of officers charged with corruption is not held centrally and to seek this information from all police forces would involve a disproportionate cost.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers in the Metropolitan police are allocated to the investigation of corruption within the police service. [20500]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that currently there are 376 police officers and 130 civilian support staff allocated to the investigation of corruption.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's strategy to tackle corruption in the police service. [20497]

Mr. Denham: Prevention and detection of corruption in the police is the responsibility of the chief officer of the police force concerned.

The Standards Unit and the refocused Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) will support the work of the Association of Chief Police Officers and the guidance it has issued on the prevention and detection of corruption in the police.

The Government will assist the police service in its fight against corruption by making changes to the complaints system. We will bring forward in the Police Bill proposals which will enable the Independent Police Complaints Commission (the replacement body for the Police Complaints Authority) to manage police investigations and to conduct its own independent investigations into alleged corruption.

Metropolitan Police

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the additional Metropolitan police officers pledged by the MPA last year were to be funded by resources from the crime fighting fund; and what was the *(a)* level of central Government funding and *(b)* amount that was left to be funded by the GLA precept. [20375]

Mr. Denham: In order to achieve a net increase in strength of 1,050 officers over the year to 31 March 2001, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) expects to have to recruit about 2,500 officers in 2001.

Of the total number of recruits, 807 will be funded through the crime fighting fund (CFF) for whom the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) will receive about £25.5 million of CFF funding. It will also receive about £17.5 million to meet the cost of 555 CFF officers appointed in 2000–01.

The cost of the remaining recruits will be met by the Metropolitan police authority from its budget. The budget provision for 2001–02 for the additional 1,050 officers was £23 million.

Home Office police grant to the Metropolitan police for 2001–02 is £1,007.5 million and the total of revenue support grant and national non domestic rates is £658.7 million. Specific grants, including the crime fighting fund, are expected to total £60 million giving a total for central Government funding of £1,726 million.

The total MPA precept for 2001–02 was £314 million.

Anti-terrorism Measures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason he has registered the Terrorism (UN Measures) (Channel Islands) Order 2001 of 9 October 2001 in advance of the provisions of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill being passed by Parliament. [22253]

Mr. Wills: I have been asked to reply.

The Terrorism (United Nations Measures) (Channel Islands) Order 2001 implemented, in the Channel Islands, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373/2001, which contains provisions to suppress terrorist financing. The Order was made under the United Nations Act 1946. Orders implementing the Resolution in the United Kingdom, the Isle of Man and the Overseas Territories were also made on 9 October.

Overseas Recruitment

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to enable highly skilled individuals to come to the United Kingdom to seek employment. [23252]

Angela Eagle: Currently, it is not possible for individuals, other than those with ancestral ties to the United Kingdom, to come to this country to seek and take up work in the absence of a job offer. This makes it difficult to attract highly mobile people with the special talents that are required in a modern economy. We are therefore introducing a programme specifically for highly skilled migrants which will enable them to come to the United Kingdom and seek work.

This programme is designed to allow highly skilled people to migrate to the United Kingdom in order to seek and take up work. It differs from the work permit scheme, as it does not require an employer to obtain a permit for the individual, and from the existing business routes (for example, the Innovators scheme or other business categories) in that it does not require a detailed business plan or investment in the United Kingdom. It will initially be run as a concession outside the current immigration rules.

In order to qualify, applicants will need to demonstrate that they score 75 points or more. Points can be scored in five areas: educational qualifications, work experience, past earnings, achievement in chosen field and "Highly Skilled Migrant Programme priority applications". This final area has been specifically designed to facilitate the recruitment and retention of suitably qualified overseas doctors who wish to work as general practitioners for the national health service.

I am today placing in the Library a draft version of the guidance to applicants. This includes full details on how an individual can score sufficient points to meet the standard required to qualify under this programme. Applicants will also have to demonstrate that they can continue their chosen careers and that they will be able to maintain and accommodate themselves and any family while in the United Kingdom.

Those already in the United Kingdom in a capacity leading to settlement may apply directly to the Home Office to obtain this status. We will also allow those graduating from a United Kingdom university, or completing their post-graduate medical studies, to apply while remaining in the United Kingdom, provided they have not been sponsored by their home governments.

The Highly Skilled Migrant Programme will run for an initial period of 12 months and will come into force in January 2002. Application forms will be available from the Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office websites at www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk and www.fco.gov.uk respectively. Applications will be accepted by diplomatic posts overseas from 28 January 2002.

This programme represents a further step in developing our immigration system to maximise the benefits to the United Kingdom of highly skilled workers who have the qualifications and skills required by United Kingdom businesses to compete in the global marketplace. It will allow eminent scientists to base their research projects here, should encourage the movement of business and financial experts to the City of London and give those at the top of their chosen profession the choice of making the United Kingdom their home.

Crime (Coventry)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the most frequent types of crime in Coventry are; what the level is of violent crime; and how many reports of these crimes there were *(a)* in 1998 and *(b)* at the last date for which figures are available. [20956]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* Over the West Midlands as a whole, the most common category of crime is theft (including handling of stolen goods), which comprises about 38 per cent. of crime recorded by the police. This category is also the most common over England and Wales as a whole. Figures for all theft are not collected centrally below police force area level.

Totals of offences of violence against the person, sexual offences, and robbery, which comprise violent crime, have been collected at the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) level since 1 April 1999. The total numbers of violent offences recorded in the Coventry CDRP area in the years ending March 2000 and March 2001 were 5,986 and 6,912 respectively.

It should be noted that recorded violent crime is subject to changes in reporting and recording. The 2001 British Crime Survey found that, over England and Wales as a whole, reporting to the police of violent offences comparable to those in recorded crime rose from 35 per cent. in 1999 to 45 per cent. in 2000.

Also, the British Crime Survey has shown that, in England and Wales as a whole, victimisation for the violent crime in the survey which is comparable to recorded crime decreased by 19 per cent. between the 1999 and 2000 calendar years, whereas comparable violent crime recorded by the police increased by nine per cent. Violent crime recorded by the police may therefore not necessarily be a reflection of real changes in the level of victimisation.

Police Retention

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the number of police officers *(a)* taking sustained sick leave and *(b)* who retire early on the grounds of ill health. [16880]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 22 November 2001]:* Information from forces collected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary shows that in 2000–01 2,591 officers in England and Wales (excluding the Metropolitan police and South Wales police, for which figures are not available) took long term sick leave (defined as continuous sick absence of 28 days or more).

The Home Office plans to introduce a national occupational health strategy for the police service in England and Wales. The strategy will identify positive steps that forces can take to help officers who suffer illness or injury to make the speediest possible return to duty.

The number of ill-health retirements has declined from 2,012 in 1996–97 (45 per cent. of retiring officers) to 1,209 in 2000–01 (31 per cent.). (The figures collected centrally do not distinguish whether ill-health retirement took place either before or after the officer concerned was eligible for a maximum 30-year pension.)

The downward trend is encouraging but more work needs to be done. The Home Office has therefore asked the Police Negotiating Board to explore and agree ways to deliver a fair and more consistent approach towards early retirement due to ill health, so that forces can achieve the best quartile baseline by 2005.

DI John Redgrave

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 230W, when the solicitor was changed; and for whom he was acting. [21748]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the solicitors previously referred to are from his Directorate of Legal Services and act on his behalf. The change of lawyers took place on 24 August 2001, as a consequence of the retirement of the original lawyer.

Resource Allocation

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the transfer of £22 million from the criminal justice system reserve to the Crown Prosecution Service set out in the Winter Supplementary Estimate 2001–02. [22137]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The transfer of £22 million from the Criminal Justice System Reserve to the Crown Prosecution Service represents a payment towards the cost of approved initiatives that have the joint agreement of the Home Secretary, Lord Chancellor and Attorney-General. The initiatives support joined-up criminal justice priorities.

Ministerial Meetings

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Chief Constable of Surrey. [20934]

Mr. Denham: The Home Secretary regularly meets Chief Constables on both formal and informal occasions, and most recently met Mr. Des O'Conner, in his capacity as Vice-President of the Association of Chief Police Officers, on 3 December.

Correspondence

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter of 11 September from Mr. John Slough, a constituent; and if he will make a statement. [21221]

Mr. Denham: Mr. Slough's letter of 11 September was one of several regarding his claim for compensation under the terms of the Firearms Compensation Scheme. An offer was made to him on 5 October and this formed the basis of a subsequent payment in respect of certain outstanding items. A letter was sent to him on 17 October in respect of all outstanding correspondence, explaining that since these letters had been written an offer had been made and an explanation given as to why remaining items were considered ineligible.

Flooding (Ilford)

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of the impact on civil defence procedures in Ilford, North of the flooding of the River Roding; and what improvements have been made in the last 12 months in the event of further flooding. [15530]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 16 November 2001]:* As part of its responsibility for servicing the Civil Contingencies Committee, which is chaired by the Home Secretary, the Cabinet Office makes grants to local authorities under regulations made under the Civil Defence Act 1948. These cover the costs of emergency planning, liaison, training and exercising. They do not cover risk mitigation, prevention or response and it has not therefore made an assessment of the impact of specific emergencies upon any local authority.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

British Airlines

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what Government support is being given to British airlines. [16728]

Mr. Byers: I have decided to provide up to £40 million of financial assistance to compensate airlines for losses arising directly from the 11 September terrorist attacks in the United States. Qualifying airlines will now be invited to submit claims under this scheme. I have placed a copy of the scheme conditions in the Library.

Compensation under the scheme will cover lost revenue over the period during which airspace was closed. It will also compensate for additional costs incurred during that period, such as (but not limited to) airport and airspace charges, costs incurred in transporting passengers from their diverted destination to their intended destination, additional operating costs of diverted aircraft and additional crew costs.

In making this decision I have had regard to the views of many hon. Members who have written to me, of their constituents, of the airlines and of the trade unions. I accept that the circumstances, which are consequent both on the terrorist attacks and on the subsequent decisions affecting airspace, are indeed exceptional and therefore merit exceptional assistance.

The Government have worked with their European partners to minimise distortions to the single market, and have therefore supported guidelines which limit airline compensation to cover these exceptional circumstances.

The assistance I am offering will help airlines at a time when passenger numbers on services between the UK and US, and therefore revenues, are still significantly below their pre-11 September levels, but without distorting competition or relieving airlines of the need to take appropriate measures to meet the changed conditions in the market. The UK is giving a lead in the EU in announcing a scheme of financial assistance in respect of the closure of US airspace, just as it was the first to provide third-party war risk insurance when the market failed.

Assistance under this package is in conformity with Commission guidelines on state aid, and I have notified the Commission of my intention accordingly.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what payments have been made to Railtrack in administration since 7 October by *(a)* the Treasury, *(b)* his Department, *(c)* the SRA and *(d)* the Rail Regulator; [18944]

(2) if he will make a statement on the payment of £162 million by the SRA to Railtrack in administration subsequent to the abandoning of Renewco. [18952]

Mr. Jamieson: Since 7 October 2001, no payments have been made to Railtrack in administration by the Treasury or the Rail Regulator. Up to 7 December 2001, the SRA had paid £162 million of network grant and some £5 million for project development. My Department had made repayable cash advances of £1,228 million to Railtrack in administration under the Loan Agreement, copies of which were placed in the House Library on 17 October. Those advances, most of which are being used to repay existing Railtrack debt, are to be recouped from the realisation of assets of the company (or new debt) when it is brought out of administration.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much Government money was paid to Railtrack plc *(a)* directly and *(b)* via the Strategic Rail Authority in 2001–02 before the Administration Order; and how much was planned for the rest of the financial year. [19427]

Mr. Spellar: Between 1 April and 5 October 2001, the SRA paid £360.2 million to Railtrack. Between 5 October 2001 and 31 March 2002, the SRA is scheduled to pay £162 million to Railtrack. Apart from repayable cash advances made since 7 October to Railtrack in administration under the loan agreement, no payments have been made, or are planned to be made, direct to Railtrack in 2001–02 by my Department. Details of those cash advances were set out in the reply given by the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 1014W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what dates requests for advances were received from the Railtrack administrator under section 5 of the commercial loan agreement; and if these were *(a)* trust and *(b)* working capital advances. [21480]

Mr. Jamieson: Requests for advances are received on a weekly basis. All such requests to date have been in respect of the trust accounts.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what variations in budget have been recorded in management accounts provided by the Railtrack administrator under section 8.1.6 *(a)* of the commercial loan agreement. [21486]

Mr. Jamieson: The management accounts are produced by Railtrack and not the administrator, who has no involvement in their computation.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what limitations will restrict the amount the Railtrack Administrator may borrow. [21497]

Mr. Jamieson: The amount that the Administrator may borrow is restricted by the terms of the commercial loan agreement.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future of the railways; what operations are under consideration for changes to their structure; and what funds will be allocated to Railtrack *(a)* during the period of its administration and *(b)* in the event that it is bought by a private company. [22080]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* The Government want Railtrack plc's role as Network Operator transferred to a robust successor company capable of delivering the quality of service its customers deserve as soon as possible. The structure of the successor company will depend on which bid is approved by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

As far as the Government's proposal for a private sector company limited by guarantee is concerned, the broad structure was outlined in the answer given by my right hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 195–97W. But it will be for the bid team, under the leadership of Ian McAllister, to present a detailed proposal to the Administrators.

All potential bidders will need to take account of the guidelines published by my right hon. Friend in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 669–71W. The guidelines require them to address very clearly the basis, extent and nature of support that will be required from the Government.

The amount the Administrator needs to borrow to support the company will depend on how long administration lasts. All borrowing from the Department will be repaid at the point the network transfers to a successful company, if not before. The rail regulator's October 2000 periodic review and the April 2001 agreement on the timing of direct grants from the SRA set the level of Railtrack's income for the current control period (2001–06).

Rail Regulator

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on intervening to give directions to the Rail Regulator; and if he will make a statement. [20270]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government have said that they wish to review the regulatory regime applying to the railways. The Government believe that any reviewed regime should contain an element of independent regulation.

Homelessness

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the estimated number of homeless people above the age of *(a)* 50, *(b)* 60 and *(c)* 70 years. [19361]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* This information is not collected centrally.

The Department collects summary information on the number of households accepted by local authorities in England under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Acts 1985 and 1996, as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need by main category of priority need. One of these categories is those households deemed vulnerable because of old age.

Some 4,000 households were accepted under this category in 2000–01, 4 per cent. of the total.

Age information on rough sleepers is not recorded in the format requested but information collected during counts of people sleeping rough and in homelessness agencies' client monitoring consistently shows that most rough sleepers are men, aged between 26 and 49.

In its 1998 report on rough sleeping, the Social Exclusion Unit reported that 6 per cent. of rough sleepers were over 60 years of age.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many homeless people there are in the Portsmouth, South constituency. [21796]

Ms Keeble: The latest available information reported to the Department by Portsmouth city council on the number of household accepted under the homelessness provisions of the Housing 1985 and 1996 Acts as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need, and the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation is as follows:

	Number of households
Accepted as eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need during July to September 2001	162
Resident in temporary accommodation on 31 September 2001	70

Source:

DTLR P1(E) housing activity return (quarterly)

Train Delays

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received on the delays on trains over the last two months; and if he will make a statement. [20748]

Mr. Jamieson: I am aware of 184 written representations received in the past two months by this Department and the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) about the performance of rail services.

External Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost was to his Department of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [21246]

Dr. Whitehead: Figures for the spend in 2000–01 is £98.7 million and in the year to date is £79.5 million. These figures include spend by the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Figures for the previous two years can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Stocking Farm Scheme

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions further to his answer of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 182W, on the Beaumont Leys Stocking Farm Scheme, if he will indicate *(a)* how many of the jobs were taken by residents of the area covered by the single regeneration budget (SRB) scheme and *(b)* how many of the jobs were sustained jobs; and if he will give a sectoral breakdown of the jobs. [21213]

Ms Keeble: Seven of the 29 jobs created in the Leicester North West SRB programme have been taken by residents from the SRB area. All seven jobs have been sustained for at least six months. Six of the jobs are in the education sector and one in the creative industries sector.

Rail Safety

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what steps have been taken to revise the railway safety group standard for crashworthiness with reference to *(a)* the design requirements for more realistic scenarios, *(b)* high speed accidents and *(c)* dynamic verification testing; [21172]

(2) whether the group standard on signal sighting requires that explicit consideration be given to the readability of a signal. [21097]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 568–93W.

Millennium Dome

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will state, on a monthly basis, from the date for which the most recent figures are available until December 2002, the *(a)* amount and *(b)* nature of any debts likely to be incurred by the Millennium Dome if by that time no arrangements have been made and put into effect for its lease or sale. [21211]

Ms Keeble: After assuming the ownership of the Dome from the New Millennium Experience Company, on 1 July 2001, English Partnerships has not incurred any debts and is not expecting to do so in future. However, it has been incurring costs in relation to the Dome, as reported to both Houses recently. All such costs are to be recovered from eventual sale proceeds.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish a full prospectus of sale for the Dome site; and if housing built on the Dome site will meet the Government's 10-year target for house building on brownfield sites in London. [22760]

Ms Keeble: At present, we do not intend to publish a prospectus of sale for the Dome site, given the continuation of market testing. As previously stated, and on the basis of professional advice, we are in discussion with a small number of serious contenders. Information on the Dome and associated land is made available to interested parties as necessary, in the course of confidential discussions.

The building of houses on the Dome site is not proposed.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many staff English Partnerships will have on duty at the Ministry of Sound's new year's eve party at the Millennium Dome, broken down by the nature and purpose of their duty; [22861]

(2) how many staff from the emergency services will be on duty at the Ministry of Sound's new year's eve party at the Millennium Dome; [22862]

Ms Keeble: Arrangements with the emergency services are a matter for the Ministry of Sound and the relevant services and authorities. I understand that discussions are on-going.

English Partnerships—as owner of the site—will have seven personnel on duty to supervise the Ministry of Sound's operations, including English Partnership's security in relation to those parts of the peninsula which will not be Ministry of Sound's responsibility. But prime responsibility for organisation of all aspects of the night's activities lies contractually with the Ministry of Sound.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 448W, on the Millennium Dome, for what reason the three holes in the internal lining of the roof of the Millennium Dome do not need repair; and if he will make a statement. [22798]

Ms Keeble: It is understood that the holes to the internal lining of the two skin roof were created during the construction and fitting out period for the Dome, and during the operational year of the Dome. These do not need repairing at present as they do not affect the operation and effectiveness of the roof and the inner lining.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff of English Partnerships are working *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time on the (i) sale, (ii) leasing and (iii) maintenance of the Millennium Dome. [22853]

Ms Keeble: The numbers of staff directly employed by English Partnerships in relation to the Dome are:

	Full-time	*Part-time*
Sale	1	8
Leasing	0	4
Maintenance	4	8

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff were employed at the Millennium Dome in each month of this year, indicating for each member of staff *(a)* the length of their contract and *(b)* their responsibilities. [22854]

Ms Keeble: The information is not available centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information is given to those people and undertakings who have expressed an interest in *(a)* bidding for and *(b)* leasing the Millennium Dome; and if he will place a copy of this information in the Library. [22859]

Ms Keeble: The information supplied has varied depending upon the nature of the inquiry.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Ministry of Sound's period of hire of the Millennium Dome for their New Year's Eve party will *(a)* start and *(b)* finish; and if he will make a statement. [22860]

Ms Keeble: The Ministry of Sound commences setting up for the event on 17 December 2001, and has planning consent for the event to run from 7.00 pm on 31 December 2001 until 9.00 am on 1 January 2002. They are due to have removed all their equipment by 9 January 2002.

Rate Relief (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* village pubs, *(b)* post offices and *(c)* petrol stations in the Buckingham constituency have received rate relief in (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02. [22033]

Dr. Whitehead: To qualify for village shop rate relief properties must be located in a qualifying settlement. That is one that is located in a designated rural area and has a population of less than 3,000. Although qualifying rural areas are designated centrally it is the responsibility of the local authorities to identify qualifying settlements of less than 3,000 persons in these rural areas. They are not required to notify us of these settlements. Therefore, we do not know where or how many properties in a particular area are in qualifying rural settlements.

Neither do we know how many properties have been granted relief. Although local authorities provide the Department with the amount of rate relief granted in any year this is not broken down into the different types of property that are eligible to receive it. Neither are they required to say how many properties have received relief. However, from next year we will be asking local authorities to provide such breakdowns in their returns.

In 2000–01 Aylesbury Vale district council granted £18,095 in mandatory rate relief to qualifying village premises and for 2001–02 they estimate the figure to be £20,535.

Railways

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Rail Regulator and *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority on redefining their roles. [21711]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* We are considering options for streamlining the regulatory regime. This has involved discussions with the Rail Regulator and the new Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the total number of timetabled rail services in the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 2001. [21945]

Mr. Jamieson: In 1993–94 217 million train miles were operated on the UK railway network, in 1997–98 240 million and in 2000–01 268 million. Information on the number of specific services timetabled in each year is dependent upon the definition of 'service' and would be available from the National Rail timetable for the particular year, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Rail Franchises

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received about the financial implications of delay to the completion of the new South West trains and South Central franchises. [21851]

Mr. Jamieson: Apart from comments made by hon. Members in recent Adjournment debates, I have received no such representations.

West Coast Main Line

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions his Department has had with Virgin trains since 7 October about the West Coast main line. [21849]

Mr. Jamieson: Officials from my Department and the Strategic Rail Authority have met with Virgin trains on a number of occasions since 7 October to discuss options for taking forward the West Coast Main Line upgrade. Discussions have also been held with Railtrack and other users and stakeholders.

London Underground

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the rate of *(a)* track and *(b)* signal failures has been on suburban routes into (i) Waterloo and (ii) London Victoria in each of the past six months. [21949]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not held centrally in the form requested. The Strategic Rail Authority publish performance statistics in their quarterly "On Track" publication. A new edition will be published shortly.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how the increased provision of money as set out on page 5 of the 2001–02 Winter Supplementary Estimates to the Supply Estimates for London Underground PPP advisers and rail consultants is to be spent. [22251]

Mr. Jamieson: The proposed increased provision is primarily for work related to Railtrack. The proposed provision for London Underground allows the Department to employ independent advisers where necessary, including Ernst and Young who are currently carrying out a review of London Underground's value for money evaluation of the tube modernisation plans.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the costs *(a)* incurred to date and *(b)* that will be incurred if he decides not to proceed with PPP for the London Underground. [22267]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) on 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 296W, for part *(a)* of this question. For part *(b)* I refer him to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) on 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 32W. It is not possible to estimate what cost might be involved.

Pneumoconiosis Compensation Grant

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people have received a contribution from the pneumoconiosis compensation grant each year since 1979. [22247]

Dr. Whitehead: Since the Act came into force in 1980 and up until 31 March 2001, 9,396 claimants have received a payment. The yearly breakdown of figures is as follows:

Year	*Claims paid*
1979–83	4,293
1983–84	133
1984–85	55
1985–86	75
1986–87	61
1987–88	67
1988–89	55
1989–90	105
1990–91	147
1991–92	149
1992–93	162
1993–94	202
1994–95	307
1995–96	363
1996–97	453
1997–98	391
1998–99	651
1999–2000	799
2000–01	928

Council Tax

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the arrangements for council tax benefit subsidy limitation for 2002–03 revenue support grant settlements. [21846]

Dr. Whitehead: We have announced the abolition of the council tax benefit subsidy limitation scheme with effect from 2002–03 in the White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services".

Business Rates

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the reason for the change in the seasonal pattern of business rates receipts in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2000–01. [22194]

Dr. Whitehead: No detailed assessment has been made of the reason for the change in the seasonal pattern of business rate receipts in England in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2000–01. However, a comparison of the overall business rates receipts for the first two quarters of 2000–01 compared with the same quarters in 2001–02 is given in the table:

Business rate receipts	*April to June*	*July to September*
2000–01 (£ million)	4,357	4,040
2001–02 (£ million)	5,023	4,407
Percentage increase	15	9

The figures cover both receipts from the central list (collected by central Government) and from local lists (collected by local authorities). There are several factors that can influence the amount of business rates received from one year to the next. Some of them are likely to have led to overall increases in amounts received between 2000–01 and 2001–02, and others are likely to have led to overall decreases. Factors that are known to have influenced the pattern of business rates received in 2000–01 compared with so far in 2001–02 are described as follows:

(a) The total rateable value increased from £39,169 million in April 2000 to £41,807 million in April 2001;

(b) The multiplier increased from 41.6p in 2000–01 and to 43.0p in 2001–02. This increase was in line with changes in the Retail Prices Index, as required by legislation;

(c) The transfer of Crown properties to local lists in 2000–01 caused some delay to the issue of bills in that year. Consequently, in 2001–02 there has been a change in the pattern of business rate receipts as result of some Crown properties paying their bill in full at the start of the financial year;

(d) Similarly, the transfer of power stations from the central list to local lists from 2000–01 caused some delay to the issue of bills in that year. Consequently, business rate receipts for power stations are spread more evenly across the financial year in 2001–02 than they were in 2000–01, with a higher proportion being received in the first half of the year;

(e) The effects of foot and mouth disease, resulting in an increase in the amount of hardship relief granted, deferment of payment by business rate payers to help overcome short-term cash-flow difficulties and, on a slightly longer timescale, a reduction in rateable values.

Other general factors that can influence business rate receipt levels in any year include:

(f) addition of new assessments to the rating list as a result, for example, of the opening of new large retail premises;

(g) other local difficulties, such as the closure of significant businesses in the area;

(h) late dispatch of bills; and difficulties faced by the introduction of new computer systems; and

(i) successful appeals on the rateable value, with refunds going back several years.

Emissions

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he next plans to meet motor industry leaders to discuss the Government's policy on fuel emissions. [20564]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* DTLR Ministers regularly meet motor industry leaders to discuss fuel emissions and have a number of upcoming meetings including a seminar on the Powering Future Vehicles consultation paper on 30 January 2002. The Department's officials are also in regular contact with representatives of both the motor and oil industries in developing policy in relation to motor vehicle emissions and fuel quality.

Abandoned Vehicles

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish an impact assessment of the Statutory Off Road Notification Scheme on the number of abandoned vehicles in England. [22469]

Mr. Jamieson: The reasons for the increase in abandoned vehicles are largely economic with the significant fall in the price of scrap metal, and the price of second-hand vehicles has been falling steadily. The SORN regulations are not the reason behind the increase in the number of abandoned vehicles and there are no plans to publish an impact assessment.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his oral statement of 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 167–70, what measures of price increases he took into account in assessing the real-terms increases to which he referred. [22748]

Dr. Whitehead: The gross domestic product (GDP) deflator was used to assess the real-terms increase in grant since the Government took office referred to in the statement on the proposals for the funding of local government revenue expenditure next year. A series for the GDP deflator in index form is produced by the Treasury from data provided by the Office for National Statistics. This series is extended to future years by applying Treasury forecasts of the inflation rate. The series allows for the effects of changes in price (inflation) to be removed from a time series.

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will announce details of the capital allocations to local authorities through the single capital pot for 2002–03. [23034]

Mr. Raynsford: I am today announcing the first all-purpose capital allocations to local authorities through the single capital pot for 2002–03. A total of £2.3 billion will be provided in this first year of the pot. This is more than double the amount authorities received last year in basic credit approvals (BCAs).

Today's announcement reflects the substantial increases in public resources provided for local government investment in Spending Review 2000 and demonstrates our real commitment to delivering first rate public services.

These funds will not be ring-fenced for any particular capital investment. While the pot is made up of allocations from housing, transport, education and health budgets, councils will be free to make their own decisions about investing their capital funds locally. This delivers to councils more autonomy and flexibility to invest according to the priorities of the local community.

The single capital pot also includes a new discretionary element. Five per cent. of the total resources available through the pot have been distributed to authorities on the basis of their performance in delivering the relevant services and the quality of their strategic asset management planning. Its purpose is to encourage and reward the effective use of a council's physical assets and new capital investment in supporting delivery of quality services and achieving better value for local people.

Detailed tables, showing the total service allocations and the discretionary allocations for each authority, have been placed in the Library of the House. These include allocations that form part of the local transport capital settlement announced today. In parallel, housing authorities will today receive details of their housing allocations and a copy of these has also been placed in the Library.

Regional Assembly (South-east)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many written representations he has received from people in the New Forest, East constituency expressing support for an elected regional assembly in the south-east of England in the past 12 months. [22801]

Dr. Whitehead: None.

Social Exclusion

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list the competitive grant scheme, administered by the Department and its agencies, open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion and, for each scheme in each year *(a)* the number of applicants, *(b)* the number of successful applicants, *(c)* the total of grants awarded, *(d)* the number of pages in the application form and *(e)* if the grant can be used to fund the core costs of the applicant organisation; [22426]

(2) what estimate has been made of the administrative cost to the *(a)* state, *(b)* unsuccessful applicants and *(c)* successful applicants of the competitive grant schemes, provided by his Department and its agencies

open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22405]

(3) if he will provide a list of the grants made under the competitive grant schemes administered by his Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22422]

(4) how many different competitive grant schemes administered by his Department and its agencies were open in each of the last 10 years to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion; [22432]

(5) if he will place in the Library a copy of the application form for each of the competitive grant schemes administered by his Department and its agencies open in each year since 1997 to organisations in the voluntary and community sector for the purposes of tackling social exclusion. [22411]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 12 December 2001]*: The information requested can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Local Transport Capital Settlement

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will announce details of the local transport capital settlement for 2002–03. [22869]

Mr. Spellar: Local Transport Plans (LTPs) are the cornerstone of our integrated transport policy at local level. They require authorities to take a longer term, more strategic view than was previously the case. In return we provide greater certainty over the funding authorities can expect for the next five years.

Last December we announced an £8.4 billion package over five years for schemes to help deliver integrated transport at the local level. As part of this, we gave authorities an indication of the funding they could expect to receive in 2002–03. The total funding available for 2002–03 is £1.58 billion, compared with the £1.36 billion available for 2001–02. As announced last year, annual funding is projected to rise further to reach £1.9 billion per year in 2004–05 and 2005–06.

Today we are announcing the firm allocations each authority will receive for 2002–03. We are providing more for each authority than we had previously indicated which will allow them to take forward more of the smaller scale improvements that can make a big difference at local level. These include improvements to public transport, schemes to make local roads safer, less congested and better maintained, and measures to encourage cycling and walking. In addition we are accepting for funding a further 23 major local transport schemes, to add to the 69 major schemes accepted last year.

Copies of the press notice incorporating a list of allocations for individual local transport plans have been placed in the Library of the House. Details have also been sent to hon. Members.

Transport (East England)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has considered the recommendations of the East of England Local Government Conference following completion of the Cambridge to Huntingdon multi-modal study; and if he will make a statement. [22870]

Ms Keeble: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport has today written to the Head of Planning and Transportation at the East of England Local Government Conference and has placed a copy of his letter in the House of Commons Library.

The multi-modal studies programme is a key element of our policies for integrated transport. It applies rigorously the principles which underpin our 10 Year Plan, matching solutions to severe transport problems by assessing all the options across different transport modes.

The Cambridge to Huntingdon multi-modal study has looked in depth at the problems caused by the congested A14. These include unreliable journey times, affecting freight and public transport, as well as motorists, and accidents and congestion on other unsuitable local roads.

The study, recommended in full by the East of England Local Government Conference, called for:

A guided bus system utilising the former Cambridge to St Ives rail corridor as its core;

Complementary measures to encourage public transport, cycling and walking;

The widening and partial realignment of the A14 in the corridor to form a three-lane carriageway, including a southern bypass of Huntingdon;

Associated junction and local road improvements, including parallel local roads between the M11 and east of Fenstanton.

We welcome the solutions proposed by the study. They present an integrated package of measures to improve conditions for travel in the corridor between Huntingdon and Cambridge. I am particularly encouraged that many local transport elements, such as a new guided bus system, park and ride, bus priority and improved walking and cycling facilities have been included in the recommendations. These offer the prospect of great benefits to the city of Cambridge and the surrounding area.

Some concerns have been expressed about the potential environmental impacts of the proposed road improvements. The provision of additional road capacity should only be considered after measures for making better use of existing capacity have been fully explored. In this case, however, we believe that public transport investment alone could not meet the objectives of the study. We are satisfied that a new alignment for the A14 south of Huntingdon would secure balancing environmental benefits by taking through traffic off the highly intrusive viaducts through Huntingdon.

The multi-modal study process does not pre-empt any of the other statutory processes. More detailed work is now required to develop and appraise individual proposals. We are inviting Cambridgeshire County Council to come forward with a full appraisal of the early phases of the guided bus project within six months and to explore further with the Strategic Rail Authority, Railtrack and the train operators the viability of the third phase alongside an existing railway line.

We have also asked the County Council to develop, in consultation with district councils and others, local transport proposals for measures to support public transport, cycling and walking. The proposals will need to be developed in consultation with local people whose commitment to reducing congestion and pollution in the area will be essential to the success of the Preferred Plan.

In addition, the Highways Agency will commence preparatory work on the trunk road elements in the Preferred Plan with a view to adding the scheme to the Targeted Programme of Improvements in the near future. I am also aware that the recently published Cambridge Implementation Study has set out ideas for substantial public and private investment in transport and other infrastructure and I envisage that the partnership which supports that study should be a good foundation for further co-ordinated working to implement CHUMMS.

Planning (North-West)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many planning applications were considered by planning authorities in the north-west region during 2000–01 in respect of land designated by the appropriate unitary development plan as green belt which were *(a)* approved and *(b)* refused by the local authority but subsequently approved at appeal. [20738]

Ms Keeble: The DTLR does not hold information on the number of planning applications in the green belt.

The number of planning applications in the green belt, which were refused by local planning authorities and subsequently approved on appeal in the north-west in the financial year 2000–01, was 41.

Formula Rents

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions after the introduction of formula rents in spring 2002, if vacant properties will be re-let at the full formula rent or at the lower figure then applying to similar property; and if he will make a statement. [22678]

Ms Keeble: Our approach to vacant properties is set out in "Guide to Social Rent Reforms" published at the same time as the December 2000 housing policy statement "Quality and Choice: A decent home for all—the way forward for housing". Social landlords will have discretion over whether to use re-lets as a means of moving more quickly towards the target rents given by the formula, or whether to keep the rents on re-lets in line with their general progress towards target rents for similar properties.

Waterloo to Exeter Railway Line

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the *(a)* total investment, *(b)* total passenger numbers and *(c)* average daily number of trains were in each of the last 10 years for the Waterloo to Exeter railway line. [22242]

Mr. Jamieson: Not all of the information is available in the form requested. The annual number of passenger journeys on the Waterloo-Exeter route were 4,297,000 in 1998–99; 4,468,000 in 1999–2000 and; 4,749,000 in 2000–01. Information on the number of services operated each year is available from the National Rail Timetable, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Speed Cameras

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many speed cameras are positioned on roads in the United Kingdom; and which county has the most. [22227]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 12 December 2001]:* This information is not collected centrally. It is for local highway authorities, in conjunction with the police, to decide where speed cameras are deployed. Guidance on deployment is available to local authorities in Circular Roads 1/92.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Picketts Lock

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 757W, on Picketts Lock, if she will place the letter from Ann Roberts and her reply in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [20611]

Mr. Caborn: Ann Roberts, chair of the Lee Valley regional park authority, wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 12 October. A copy of this letter and my right hon. Friend's reply is being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of the increase in the departmental expenditure limit from 2001–02 to 2002–03 will be accounted for by wage costs. [21240]

Dr. Howells: The level of wage costs within my departmental budget this year and in future years will be dependent upon negotiations. My Department's departmental report to be published next spring will give retrospective costs.

Millennium Dome

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is the *(a)* amount and *(b)* nature of debts incurred by the Millennium Dome; and what is the timetable for repayment. [21397]

Dr. Howells: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC), which built and operated the Dome, handed it over to English Partnerships on 30 June 2001. NMEC has no long-term debt. At the end of November 2001, NMEC held invoices totalling £297,000. NMEC intends to pay all these prior to or shortly after the appointment of a liquidator, expected to be by the end of the year.

New Opportunities Fund

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how much money has been allocated for each of the programmes provided by the New

Opportunities Fund *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each financial quarter since the date for which the first grant was awarded; [22262]

(2) how much money has been allocated for each of the programmes provided by the New Opportunities Fund broken down by local authority district, in rank order according to the index of multiple deprivation, in each financial quarter since the date for which the first grant was awarded until the most recent date for which details are available. [22339]

Mr. Caborn: It is not possible to provide the information on New Opportunities Fund spend by individual local authority district for each financial quarter. I have however placed the other information requested in the Libraries of both Houses.

Sports Clubs (Charity Status)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate he has made of the number of sports clubs likely to be eligible for charitable status following the Charity Commission's announcement of 27 November. [21715]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* I welcome the Charity Commission's announcement of 30 November which will benefit sport and local communities. The Central Council of Physical Recreation estimates that there are over 110,000 community amateur sports clubs across the UK. Any of these clubs that are concerned with encouraging the community to participate in active sports will be able to apply for charitable status once they have made suitable minor amendments to their club constitutions and membership rules.

The Government are currently consulting on their assessment that the Charity Commission's decision on charitability would appear to offer better prospects for community amateur sports clubs than a tax relief package the Government had been considering. Responses to that consultation are requested by the Treasury by 1 February 2002.

I intend to meet representatives of the Charity Commission early in the new year to discuss the extent of applications from sport for charitable status and the fuller guidance the Commission intends to issue on this subject in due course.

Bingo

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she will take to implement the recommendations by the Gaming Board for Great Britain to increase the monetary limits for prize bingo. [23389]

Mr. Caborn: I have considered the Board's recommendations and will shortly be laying before Parliament an Order under the Gaming Act 1968 to increase the maximum cash prize in a bingo game played in a bingo club from £15 to £25 and an Order under the Lotteries and Amusements Act 1976 which will increase the maximum cash prize that may be offered in a prize bingo game played in an amusement arcade from £15 to £25 and which will increase the maximum aggregate amount that may be taken by way of the sale of chances in any one prize bingo game played at an arcade from £60 to £90.

Holding Answers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of parliamentary questions replied to by her Department were the subject of a holding answer in the last three Sessions of Parliament. [22013]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* In the 1998–99 Parliamentary Session, the Department gave holding replies to 63 per cent. of the 512 named day questions received. In the 1999–2000 Session, holding replies were given to 69 per cent. of the 839 named day questions received and in the 2000–01 Session, 52 per cent. of the 289 named day questions tabled to the Department received holding replies.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts (Essex)

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates courts were operating in the *(a)* county of Essex and *(b)* unitary boroughs of Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea in (i) 1971, (ii) 1981, (iii) 1991, (iv) 1999 and (v) 2001. [R] [21753]

Mr. Wills: Responsibility for providing magistrates courthouses falls to local authorities in England and Wales. Neither the Home Office which had responsibility for the magistrates courts service up to 1992, nor the Lord Chancellor's Department which took responsibility over at that time has a central record of courthouses provided locally prior to 1995. I am informed that Essex magistrates courts committee has no records prior to 1995. In 1999 and 2001 there were 10 magistrates courts operating in Essex, with one in each of the unitary boroughs of Thurrock and Southend-on-Sea.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Capital Assets

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 270W, on capital assets, what guidelines the *(a)* National Audit Office and *(b)* Treasury issue on how to classify who bears the risks and rewards associated with an asset. [19189]

Mr. Alan Williams: I have been asked to reply in so far as the hon. Member's question refers to the National Audit Office.

As financial auditors, the National Audit Office do not themselves issue guidelines on how to classify who bears the risks and rewards associated with an asset. This is the job of HM Treasury, as described in the Chief Secretary's written answer of 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1122W.

The National Audit Office as part of its financial audit work would consider whether, for the purposes of the published annual accounts of the body in question, the body's assessment with regard to who bears the risk and rewards associated with an asset has been properly carried out in compliance with the standards and guidance set down by the Treasury.

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SIXTH SERIES

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Printed indexes to Hansard

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- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
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Indexes on the Parliamentary website

Fortnightly, volume and sessional indexes covering material from the beginning of the 1999/2000 session will also appear on the Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk with links to the full text of Hansard.

SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

HEADINGS

Choice of headings

- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
- *Name headings*—Specific entries are included for the names of people, places, institutions, organisations, committees, programmes, initiatives, publications and legislation when these constitute the overall subject of an item.
- *Organisations and subjects*—Organisation entries are preferred for material about the general performance, administration and staffing of an organisation (for example, United Kingdom Passports Agency, Standards). Subject entries are preferred for what organisations do as part of their duties (for example, Passports, Fees and charges).

Geographical coverage

- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
- *Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales*—Material relating to the whole of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is indexed under these headings.
- *Places within the UK*—Material about specific towns, areas and institutions is entered under the name of the specific town, area or institution.
- *Foreign countries*—Most material relating to foreign countries is collected under the name of that country. Some additional material may be found under the names of—groups of countries, areas within countries, geographical features, place names associated with particular issues, politicians and heads of state, international bodies, and institutions and companies operating in those countries.
- *EC/EU material*—General material about the European Communities and European institutions as bodies is entered under 'European Communities' and 'EC institutions'. Organisational material about specific communities and institutions is entered under the name of the body, for example 'European Coal and Steel Community' or 'European Parliament'. Material about what the Communities and institutions are doing or propose to do is entered under various subject headings beginning 'EC' such as 'EC environmental policy'.

Parliamentary material and business

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'Select committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
- *Parliamentary proceedings/procedures*—Material discussing these is indexed under the specific type of proceeding (such as 'Parliamentary questions' or 'Oral questions'), procedure (such as 'Calling of Members') or issue (such as 'Unparliamentary expressions').
- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered under their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indication of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For example debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'Social security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
- *Members' names*—These are given in the form by which the Member prefers to be known.
- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the index, is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, House of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

REFERENCES

- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
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- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting or is a written question.
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  - *Debates etc.* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  - *Sittings in Westminster Hall* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
  - *Questions* (which includes written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

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